

## WHY THE DISAGREEMENT OVER THE BIBLICAL WITNESS ON HOMOSEXUAL PRACTICE?

A Response to Myers and Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together?*

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Why is the debate in the church about homosexual practice so difficult to talk about, to do scholarship about, and, for some, to decide about? Why have we reached a seeming impasse? Although the answer to how the church might resolve these difficulties is, practically speaking, hard to discern, the *why* question is relatively easy to figure out. It boils down to this: Christians come at the issue from different angles. What it does *not* boil down to is this: the biblical witness and its hermeneutical (i.e. interpretive) application are ambiguous.

The bulk of this article will be devoted to explaining this latter point; namely, why there really are no substantive exegetical and hermeneutical arguments for claiming that Scripture does not give us a decisive witness against homosexual practice *per se*. To make this point, we will examine the attempt to circumvent the biblical witness in the 2005 book by David G. Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together? A Christian Case for Gay Marriage*.<sup>1</sup> Before we do that, however, we will explore how proponents and opponents of homosexual unions have different hermeneutical "graduated scales," or ranked interests, for their views.

### I. Inverted Hermeneutical Scales<sup>2</sup>

Christians find it difficult to resolve their disagreements about homosexual practice because they have different starting points and so come at the issue from different angles.

Essentially, the anti-"homosex,"<sup>3</sup> pro-complementarity, or pro-structuralist side of the homosexuality debate in the church is best served when it formulates the following arguments, in this order of significance:

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<sup>1</sup> Published by HarperSanFrancisco (HarperCollins).

<sup>2</sup> I am unaware of any other scholar who has constructed the "graduated scale hermeneutic" that I put forward here. Of course, deep-structural differences between anti-homosex and pro-homosex camps have been noted before, but just not in this way.

<sup>3</sup> It is not easy getting the right nomenclature down to define the different camps in the homosexuality issue. I often use the term *homosex* as convenient shorthand for homosexual practice (i.e. as a noun) or, more particularly, for that which pertains to homosexual practice (i.e. as an adjective). The term also rightly focuses the debate on behavior rather than on acceptance or rejection of persons. It is so much easier to refer to a pro-homosex position/person and an anti-homosex position/person than to have to spell out every time "a position that accepts committed homosexual unions" and "a position that is averse to homosexual

1. *Scripture*: Scripture shows consistent, strong, absolute, and countercultural opposition to homosexual practice. It is, in short, a core value in scriptural sexual ethics. The scriptural witness against homosexual practice is inclusive of caring homosexual unions and forms of homosexual practice involving some degree of congenital causation. The closest analogues to the Bible's opposition to homosexual practice are the Bible's opposition to adult incest and the New Testament's opposition to polygamy; in other words, forms of behavior that society today still proscribes. A similar argument may be made from church tradition (church fathers on).
2. *Philosophic reason (a nature argument)*: Transparent observation of the complementary features of man and woman in the material order of nature make evident that homosexual unions are structurally incongruous (cf. the nature argument in Rom 1:24-27). A same-sex union does not pair sexual counterparts or "other halves." Biologically related impulses are less reliable indicators of what is natural than the compatible structures of maleness and femaleness. This too is the view of Scripture.
3. *Scientific reason*: Homosexual behavior is characterized by higher rates of problems as regards sexually transmitted disease, depression and suicidality, high numbers of sex partners over the course of life, and short-term sexual unions. These problems, which occur at markedly different rates for homosexual males and homosexual females, are attributable, at least in significant part, to biological differences between men and women and the absence of a moderating, other-sex influence in homosexual

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practice per se." Some 'pro-homosex' advocates express offense at the term but this seems to be due, in part, to the way in which it defines the debate as a debate about being for or against practices rather than for or against persons. The terms *pro-homosexual* and *antihomosexual* unfairly claim the high ground for proponents of homosexual practice by suggesting that they alone are about the business of loving homosexual persons. In fact, I would argue that those who oppose homosexual practice with a view to reclaiming lives for the kingdom of God are the ones that truly love persons who experience same-sex attractions. Whereas *homosexual* can be construed as a reference to homosexual behavior or homosexual persons, 'homosex' can only be interpreted with reference to homosexual acts. It is also important to note that the term *homosex* did not originate with me but rather with proponents of homosexual practice (for web links see the insert "Why use the word 'homosex'?" on my homepage at <http://www.robgagnon.net/>). I don't like the nomenclature *traditional* and *progressive* because (1) the terms do not specify what people are allegedly traditional or progressive about, (2) I don't hold the position that I do-merely because it is traditional (*scriptural* would be more accurate) and (3) I don't wish to concede the point that affirming homosexual practice is in any sense an act of progress. I also don't use the terms *non-affirming* and *affirming* because (1) like *traditional* and *progressive* they do not specify the object of one's disposition, (2) *non-affirming* as a term with largely negative connotations does not adequately describe a position that aims at affirming the true sexual self created by God and re-created in Jesus Christ, and (3) I have no wish to concede the point that proponents of committed homosexual unions are *affirming* in the truest sense, any more than I would wish to label the Corinthian position toward the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5 as affirming.

relations.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, science has failed to show that homosexuality is an inevitable consequence of birth or in all respects culturally immutable.

4. *Experience*: Personal encounters with, or at least awareness of, individuals whom God appears to have 'healed' of same-sex attractions give hope for transformation. At the same time, however, it is unscriptural to define transformation as requiring the eradication of all unwanted impulses. Jesus' call to discipleship as a death to self is a call to self-denial in the midst of contrary impulses.

The pro-'homosex,' pro-affect,<sup>5</sup> or anti-structuralist side, for its part, formulates the following arguments, in this order of significance:

1. *Experience*: Personal encounters with, or at least awareness of, well-adjusted homosexual persons, who appear unable to change their sexual orientation and are in a caring homosexual relationship, provide persuasive evidence for the acceptability of homosexual relations.
2. *Scientific reason*: Science has shown that a homosexual orientation is often significantly influenced by congenital factors and very resistant to change. At least some of the problems associated with homosexual practice are attributable to the lack of societal supports for committed homosexual unions. Moreover, harm is not inherent.
3. *Philosophic reason*: The quality of affective bonds in a homosexual union trumps any formal/structural requirements.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the biologically related character of homosexual orientation makes homosexual expression "natural."
4. *Scripture*: While a small number of passages in Scripture appear to oppose homosexual practice, these passages do not oppose caring homosexual relationships between homosexually oriented persons. Moreover, Scripture's focus on the command to love and its special concern for the oppressed leave room for support of loving homosexual unions. Changes in the Bible's views on slavery, women's roles, and divorce/remarriage give hermeneutical license for developing a new perspective on homosexual practice.

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<sup>4</sup> No consensual sexual relationship, including incestuous and polyamorous unions, inherently leads to scientifically measurable harm in all circumstances to all participants. It is enough to establish disproportionately high rates.

<sup>5</sup> "Affect" with the stress on the first syllable. By "pro-affect" I mean an emphasis on the subjective, emotional character of a bond as opposed to an emphasis on objective, structural aspects of embodied existence such as the obvious holistic complementarity of the two sexes.

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Clayton Croy for the nomenclature of "formal" expectations of marriage (gender, relatedness, number, age, species), as opposed to "qualitative" expectations (love, faithfulness, mutual support). My own usual terms are "structural" and "affective" respectively.

Some will rightly see in the four-part structures above a sort of modified Wesleyan Quadrilateral. The differences are twofold: (1) I have lumped tradition in with Scripture as a secondary element; and (2) I have split the category of reason into “philosophic reason” and “scientific reason.” These modifications more accurately reflect the distinct types of arguments used in the debates about homosexual practice.

One is tempted to refer to the two main camps as *Scripturalists* and *Experientialists*.<sup>7</sup> This nomenclature has advantages and disadvantages. As regards advantages, it points to the underlying, deep-structural differences between opponents of homosexual practice and supporters of committed homosexual unions—differences that go beyond the issue of homosexual practice to the way in which *any* doctrinal or moral issue is looked at. Furthermore, it characterizes each group by its main, lead-off argument or concern. The chief disadvantage of this way of labeling the two main sides in the debate is that it suggests a truncated perspective on the part of each side, as if each side engaged only one element of a hermeneutical quadrilateral. In fact, “Scripturalists” are not normally interested only in Scripture. They usually factor in, as well, concerns for philosophic reason, scientific reason, and experience (in that order). Likewise, “Experientialists” are not normally disinterested in what Scripture says, to say nothing of philosophic concerns. They just give a larger slice of the hermeneutical pie to experience and science.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, the difference between anti-homosex and pro-homosex sides is not just that they have different starting points—Scripture for one and experience for the other—but that *each side adopts a range of arguments in inverse order of significance to the other side*. Perhaps one might do well to refer to, or at least think in terms of, *Graduated*<sup>9</sup> *Scripturalists* and *Graduated Experientialists* or (for a more felicitous but less precise expression) *Modified Scripturalists* and *Modified Experientialists*. The former are more trusting of scriptural arguments and applications, owing to the fact that they see the theological distance between the “then” of Scripture and the “now” of present-day application as relatively short

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<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, if one focuses on the category of philosophic reason, one could speak of *Structuralists* and *Affectualists*.

<sup>8</sup> This does not necessarily mean that Experientialists actually *know* the scientific evidence and its hermeneutical import better than Scripturalists. Indeed, in my own experience debating and dialoguing on the issue of the Bible and homosexuality, I have consistently found the opposite to be the case. My point is merely that Experientialists, on average, place more hermeneutical weight on alleged findings from science than do Scripturalists—that is, when it suits their purpose to do so. For arguments from science, see my first book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 395-432, 452-60, 471-85; and my “Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture*, Part 1,” in *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 22 (2000): 174-243, esp. pp. 196-216 which critique Christine Gudorf’s contribution, “The Bible and Science on Sexuality,” pp. 121-41 in D. Balch, ed., *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Or *Graded*.

for most issues. Human nature, they argue, has not changed all that much over the centuries, while Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). At the same time they are more suspicious of the self-interpreting character of experiences. Experientialists, however, tend to invert that scale of trust and suspicion. Arguments from experience carry significantly greater weight for them than for Scripturalists, while arguments from Scripture are viewed with greater suspicion because of a perception of significant cultural change and advance in scientific knowledge over the centuries. Again, this is not an “either-or” hermeneutic. It is rather an issue of ranking different types of information.

Those familiar with ancient Greek style might conceive the relation between these two mirror-opposite graduated scales by another metaphor: an extended chiasm. We have here an abcd-dcba pattern, an inversion of significance to four hermeneutical elements. Card players could liken the situation to two teams in which each team assigns a different value to each of four suits and does so in inverse relation to the opposing team. The result would be confusion all around if one team ranked the suits, from highest to lowest, as (1) spades, (2) clubs, (3) diamonds, and (4) hearts while the other team prioritized suits in reverse order, namely, by (1) hearts, (2) diamonds, (3) clubs, and (4) spades. The two teams would be playing by different rules. One team might play a spade, thinking that it trumps a heart while the other team is convinced that hearts trump spades. This is what is happening in mainline denominations. Different rankings for different elements in this modified Hermeneutical Quadrilateral have arisen, creating confusion all around.<sup>10</sup>

This recognition of inverted, graduated hermeneutics by two main camps in the mainline denominations explains why the homosexuality debate has the potential for splitting the denominations.<sup>11</sup> Currently, at least on paper, most

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<sup>10</sup> I once asked a candidate for a seminary teaching position how he justified hermeneutically his support for committed homosexual unions. The candidate answered: “I do so by appeal to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.” But that was not an adequate answer. Everyone in the academy of Christian scholars, or nearly so, makes use of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience in formulating Christian doctrine and morality. The real issue is how each element is ranked. This candidate probably knew that. Yet by simply saying “the Wesleyan Quadrilateral” he could dodge the bullet of having to admit in a seminary interview that experience and other factors were taking precedence over Scripture in his hermeneutic.

<sup>11</sup> Obviously there is some simplifying of complexity here in speaking of two main camps. To some extent the “graduated scales” to which I have been referring are “sliding scales.” In other words, the priority given to any given hermeneutical element will shift depending on the presenting issue. Some Experientialists on the homosexuality issue and other ethical matters are Scripturalists on matters of theological doctrine. Nevertheless, while recognizing the existence of some individual variation, I contend that the existence of two distinct camps is warranted by observation of general trends in the church. There is a proclivity on the part of most to gravitate toward either Scripture or experience as the first and primary interpretive medium. Furthermore, the ultimate resolution of the homosexuality issue within any given denominational structure will have a huge impact in shifting hermeneutical priorities, given the apparent intensity of Scripture’s opposition to homosexual practice.

mainline denominations do not operate with the principle that Scripture is a mere co-equal partner with tradition, philosophic and scientific reason, and experience, much less a junior partner. Rather, they rank Scripture above all the other interpretive factors. The question of homosexual practice is so important in ecclesiastical circles precisely because it threatens to reconfigure that long-standing hermeneutical ranking. Never before in the history of the church has a position so at apparent odds with Scripture gained ascendancy in the church. In any given denomination, should support for committed homosexual practice triumph over opposition to all homosexual practice, it will probably herald for that denomination a decisive paradigm shift in the reorganization of hermeneutical criteria. It will not necessarily knock Scripture off the hermeneutical scale. But it will relegate it to subordinate status, probably placing it at the bottom of the scale. The implications will not be realized overnight. But over time they will be officially realized for the life of an otherwise schizophrenic church that professes Scripture as the highest authority but makes decisions as if experience were the highest authority.

Two personal anecdotes may illustrate the point. The first one involves published remarks by Dan O. Via in the book that he co-authored with me, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*.<sup>12</sup> Via began his essay by asserting: "I take the Bible to be the highest authority for Christians in theological and ethical matters."<sup>13</sup> However, later in his response, after he had read my essay, Via made no attempt to rebut what he referred to as my "accumulation of biblical texts condemning biblical texts condemning homosexual practice," even though at a number of points my arguments anticipated and refuted the exegetical results of his essay.<sup>14</sup> He simply concluded: "I maintain, however, that the absolute prohibition can be overridden regardless of how many times it is stated."<sup>15</sup> This remark sidestepped one of the main points of my essay; namely, that the hermeneutical significance of Scripture's witness is located not just in the

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<sup>12</sup> Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Page 2. Via adds: "Authority does not mean perfection or inerrancy or complete consistency." Yet that position is irrelevant to my position, which is predicated on demonstrating that a two-sex prerequisite is a consistently held core value of biblical sexual ethics.

<sup>14</sup> Page 94. Via adds: ". . . since I agree that Scripture gives no explicit approval to same-sex intercourse." Via's justification needs correcting. First, there are a number of points in his essay in which he takes great pains (unsuccessfully, I contend) to minimize the biblical witness against homosexual practice and maximize allegedly countervailing material in Scripture, all in an attempt to make his own pro-homosex position more palatable. This suggests that, despite his dismissive remark regarding an accumulation of biblical texts contrary to his position, Via still felt a need to justify his position from Scripture itself. So his position is vulnerable to a case that establishes Scripture's strong opposition. Secondly, it is not enough to concede that "Scripture gives no explicit approval to same-sex intercourse" (emphasis added). As Via well knew from my book *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* and my essay in the *Two Views* volume, to say nothing of his own admission concerning the Bible's "absolute prohibition," Scripture gives frequent explicit and implicit strong rejection of same-sex intercourse.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Via adds: ". . . for there are good reasons to override it." For a rebuttal of his "good reasons," see my response on pp. 99-105, esp. 104-5.

number of times that the prohibition is explicitly and implicitly stated but also in the intensity of that opposition and its countercultural character. Via nowhere refuted my point that an other-sex prerequisite for sexual unions constituted a core value in biblical sexual ethics. In the end, Via's initial acknowledgement that the Bible was the "highest authority" carried no decisive weight in his hermeneutical deliberations and created no special burden of proof on his part. The acknowledgement turned out to be mere window dressing.

The other personal anecdote involves remarks made by David L. Bartlett, at the time academic dean and professor of preaching at Yale Divinity School,<sup>16</sup> in a debate with me at Erskine College on Sept. 8, 2004. Bartlett began with a half hour presentation that trotted out the standard arguments for alleging that the Bible gives no basis for opposing committed homosexual unions entered into by homosexually oriented persons. In my subsequent half hour presentation I endeavored to show (1) that the biblical witness against homosexual practice applies to all homosexual unions and (2) that there was no basis for supposing that the assumption of a congenitally based homosexual orientation would have mattered to the authors of Scripture. When Prof. Bartlett got up for a 15-minute rebuttal he conceded: "For me it is not about Scripture anyway." He sat down after using only a few minutes of his allotted time, making no attempt to rebut the case against his interpretation of Scripture that I had made. He could not establish that the church now had radically new knowledge, unknown to all of Scripture's authors, which justified a radical departure from Scripture's witness. He was simply going to depart from Scripture's strong witness anyway.

What these anecdotes illustrate is that the mainline denominations that move to support committed homosexual unions will ultimately have to give up any pretense in their official statements to treating Scripture as the highest authority in matters of faith and practice. The highest authority will now be whatever is "existentially engaging and compelling" to the individual interpreter; in other words, one's own subjective experience.<sup>17</sup>

## II. The Difficulty in Neutralizing Scripture for a Pro-Homosex Agenda

The problems that pro-homosex, anti-structuralist advocates have in attempting to circumvent the biblical witness against homosexual practice are well

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<sup>16</sup> Bartlett's Ph.D. was in New Testament and much of his writing since has focused on communicating the New Testament. He is now a professor emeritus. He has written on the Bible and homosexuality in "A Biblical Perspective on Homosexuality," *Foundations* 25.2 (1977): 133-47; and in *Romans* (WBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 30-31.

<sup>17</sup> The quote is from Via in *Homosexuality and the Bible* (p. 2), who champions this "experiential or existential view."

illustrated in the book by Myers and Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together?*<sup>18</sup> Myers and Scanzoni devote one of their five chapters on homosexuality to "What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say" (chapter 7, pp. 84-104).<sup>19</sup> The following chapter, "What God Has Joined Together?" (pp. 105-13), refers to scriptural concerns in part (pp. 108-111).

### A. Ignoring Opposing Arguments and Writings

What is most startling about Myers/Scanzoni's treatment of Scripture is the failure to respond to, or even show awareness of, the numerous counterarguments to the standard pro-homosex readings that they put forward. I will begin with their lack of responsible engagement with my own work, and then examine their failure to respond to the work of others.

Even though their book was published in 2005, they do not interact with my 500-page book on the subject published in August 2001 (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*), nor my 53-page essay and 7-page response in *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* published in September 2003 (which synthesize some of my exegetical and hermeneutical work in my first book and add some new arguments), nor my 50-page essay entitled "Does the Bible Regard Same-Sex Intercourse as Intrinsically Sinful?" in *Christian Sexuality: Normative and Pastoral Principles*, published in November 2003 (an article that focuses on the relevance of the creation texts and sexuality orientation theory in antiquity).<sup>20</sup> These publications are not even mentioned in their footnotes. Their entire interaction with my work is limited to (1) four or five short paragraphs (amounting to less than a page) from an eight-page article entitled "Why 'Gay Marriage' Is Wrong";

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<sup>18</sup> Since Myers is a psychologist and not a person who has published anything of a scholarly nature on biblical texts, I suspect that Scanzoni, who primarily writes on Christian feminism, sexuality, and marriage and family issues, is the primary author of the sections on Scripture. Scanzoni is also not a biblical scholar but she has at least written in the past about Scripture's views on homosexual practice, particularly in her co-authored book with Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* (2d. ed.; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1978]), esp. pp. 56-83.

<sup>19</sup> The bulk of the first four chapters of the book (pp. 1-51) are on the benefits of marriage generally rather than on homosexuality per se.

<sup>20</sup> Ed. R. E. Saltzman (Minneapolis: Kirk House). Other published work of mine that they could have consulted includes: my two part "Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the 'Plain Sense' of Scripture*" in *Horizons in Biblical Theology* (Part 1 = pp. 174-243 in 22:2 [2000]; Part 2 = pp. 179-273 in 25:2 [2003]); and "Are There Universally Valid Sex Prescripts? A Critique of Walter Wink's Views on the Bible and Homosexuality," *HBT* 24.1 (2002): 72-125 (these articles are also online at my website). For readers interested in consulting new works of mine on the subject of Scripture and homosexuality, see: "The Old Testament and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of the Case Made by Phyllis Bird," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117 (2005): 367-94; the entry "Sexuality" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. K. J. Vanhoozer, et al.; London: SPCK / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 739a-48b; "Scriptural Perspectives on Homosexuality and Sexual Identity," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 24.4 (2005): 293-303; and the 5-page entry "Homosexuality" in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (ed. W. C. Campbell-Jack, G. McGrath, and C. S. Evans; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2006 [forthcoming]).



and (2) a single sentence from a four-page article entitled "Gays and the Bible: A Response to Walter Wink."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, that extremely truncated interaction includes some misrepresentation and/or misunderstanding of my views.<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup> "Why 'Gay Marriage' Is Wrong" (<http://www.robgagnon.net/homoPresbyTodayArticle.htm>), a condensed version of which appeared in *Presbyterians Today* (Sept. 2004); "Gays and the Bible: A Response to Walter Wink," *Christian Century* 119:17 (Aug. 14-27, 2002): 40-43. Myers and Scanzoni quote from these articles on pp. 108-9, 126-27 and p. 43 respectively (footnoted by Myers/Scanzoni on pp. 170 n. 3, 173 n. 39). On p. 119 Myers and Scanzoni also quote briefly from p. 1 of my article on "Why 'Gay Marriage' Is Wrong" ("gay marriage" is a contradiction in terms"), though without proper acknowledgement, when they list as the first of seven anti-"gay-marriage" arguments: "'Same-sex marriage' is a contradiction in terms." And on p. 126 Myers and Scanzoni categorically deny any logical linkage between the arguments for accepting homosexual practice and arguments that could be used for accepting "polygamy and incest." This apparently attempts to respond to sentences that I make on the first and last page of my "Gay Marriage" article, though again without proper acknowledgment: "As with consensual adult incest and polyamory, considerations of commitment and fidelity factor only after certain structural prerequisites are met" (p. 1). "Arguing that we should grant marriage status to homosexually inclined persons to avert promiscuity is like insisting that we grant marriage status to adult incestuous or polygamous unions to promote relational longevity. It doesn't address the main problem with this particular kind of sexual immorality" (p. 7). For a rebuttal of Myers/Scanzoni on the linkage question, see II.B.4.b., pp. 41-45.

<sup>22</sup> I will deal with the misrepresentations and/or misunderstandings in their use of my "Gay Marriage" article later. Their single sentence quote from p. 43 of my "Gays and the Bible" article is truncated and taken somewhat out of context. Here's how they cite it: "Robert Gagnon is among those who would prefer to see gay people believe that 'for any given homosexual person hope exists for forming a heterosexual union.' But is he being realistic, or would such advice lead to many a failed marriage and broken heart?" (p. 127). The quote cuts my sentence in midstream. The entire statement is:

For any given homosexual person hope exists for forming a heterosexual union that brings *some* satisfaction of sexual urges. Even apart from therapeutic intervention the vast majority of self-identified homosexuals (nonbisexuals) have experienced some sexual attraction for the opposite sex at some point in their lives. (Emphasis added; for documentation of the last statement from Kinsey Institute research, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 419-20)

The remarks appear in a series of bullet points that respond to Walter Wink's contention that everyone has a right to sex that supercedes any structural requirements for sexual unions. The point of this particular bullet is not that most persons who experience intense same-sex attractions can or will eliminate such attractions (as Myers and Scanzoni imply that I am asserting). Rather, the point is that the experience of some limited degree of heterosexual arousal at some point in life is common among such persons and that no person with same-sex attractions can predict ahead of the end of life that s/he will never experience heterosexual arousal. As one minister living a homosexual life once put it to me: "Most gay men that I know experience some degree of attraction for women at some point in time. But sex with a woman is like playing tennis left-handed when one is right-handed; it's not as satisfying." My remarks regarding "hope" also have to be taken in the context of my previous discussion of the meaning of *change* earlier in the same article:

[There are] multiple meanings for change. Change can run the gamut from ceasing homosexual behavior, to a reduction in homosexual impulses, to the experience of heterosexual arousal. After ticking off a vice list in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul said of the Corinthian believers: 'such were some of you.' He was not asserting, for example, that former adulterers no longer experienced sexual desire for people other than their spouses. Rather, they no longer lived out of such fleshly impulses but rather out of the power of the Holy Spirit. (p. 42)

The primary hope that believers have lies in their ability, through the Spirit of Christ, to die to self and live a meaningful life in obedience to God's will, irrespective of the persistence of any desires opposed to God's will. Christian faith does not operate on a model of biological determinism. It operates on the model

fact that they cite from my website ([www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net)) the longer version of the article "Why 'Gay Marriage' Is Wrong" (posted in Summer 2004), shows that they must have been aware of the existence of my books as well as many other articles, all of which are prominently featured on that same website. Yet they ignore all but about a page of my material. Not once do they deal with the many counterarguments that I put forward against the stock pro-homosex interpretations, which they uncritically adopt, concerning the stories about Sodom and the Levite at Gibeah, the Levitical prohibitions, the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic texts about the *qedeshim* (cultic figures who engaged in receptive male-male intercourse), the meaning of the terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in male-male intercourse in 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10, the developed discussion in Rom 1:24-27, Jude 7, the Gentile inclusion narrative in Acts 10:1-11:18 and ch. 15, and, finally, the hermeneutical case against discounting the biblical witness on homosexual practice. Even the two short articles of mine that Myers and Scanzoni cite offer at least condensed arguments for most of these subjects. Yet Myers and Scanzoni ignore all of this, making reference only to my interpretation of the creation texts and their reuse by Jesus in Mark 10:6-9.

Moreover, it is not just *my* work and arguments that Myers and Scanzoni generally ignore. Among authors who contend for a two-sex prerequisite for valid sexual unions, Myers and Scanzoni also ignore entirely the work of Thomas Schmidt, William Webb, Richard Hays, David Wright, Willard Swartley, Donald Wold, Stanley Grenz, and James De Young.<sup>23</sup> Aside from the short quotes from my two short articles, the only scholar whom they cite for the scriptural case against homosexual practice is Richard J. Mouw (a systematic theologian, not a biblical scholar). And here they simply pull a short quote of Mouw's reported in a *Christianity Today* piece.<sup>24</sup> Even among biblical scholars that have written in favor of homosexual unions they show astounding gaps, most notably regarding the work of Martti Nissinen, David Fredrickson, Dale Martin, Stephen Moore,

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of a new creation in Christ. Not a single moral imperative in Scripture is predicated on the assumption that people first lose all desires to violate the imperative in question.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1995); William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2001); Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), ch. 16 (pp. 379-406); David F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *Arsenokoitai* (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 125-53; Willard M. Swartley, *Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 2003); Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998); James B. De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Their quote of Mouw (pp. 109-10) is from Rob Mall, "Civil Unions: Would a Marriage by Any Other Name Be the Same?" *Christianity Today* (Mar. 8, 2004), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/110/11.0.html>. Mouw is President and Professor of Christian Philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Victor Furnish, Walter Wink, and Via.<sup>25</sup> They appear to rely most on the now dated works by John Boswell, Robin Scroggs, and William Countryman, as well as more obscure treatments, with only passing references to the important works of Bernadette Brooten, Phyllis Bird, and William Schoedel.<sup>26</sup> I understand that Myers and Scanzoni are writing a more popular book for a broad audience. Yet even by these standards their treatment of the relevant biblical texts and current scholarship on them appears cursory and irresponsible.<sup>27</sup> This weakness becomes all the more glaring in light of the authors' claims that:

- "‘Family values’ and a biblically rooted faith can, we believe, happily coexist with supporting gay and lesbian persons’ full participation in the culture and the church" (i.e., right to marry).<sup>28</sup>
- "[W]e stake our lives on a biblically defined perspective" and live by the "reformers’ motto—‘reformed and ever-reforming according to the Word of God.’"<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); David E. Fredrickson, "Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24-27: Paul and the Philosophic Critique of Eros," in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, 197-241; Dale Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32," *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995): 332-55; idem, "Arsenokoites and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences," in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality* (ed. R. Brawley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 117-36; Stephen D. Moore, "Sex and the Single Apostle," in *God's Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces In and Around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 133-72; Victor P. Furnish, "The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context," in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (ed. J. Siker; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 18-35; Walter Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," in *Homosexuality and the Christian Faith* (ed. W. Wink; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 33-49; Dan O. Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, 1-39, 93-98.

<sup>26</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 232-37; Don Blosser, "Why Does the Bible Divide Us? A Conversation with Scripture on Same-Gender Attraction," in *To Continue the Dialogue: Biblical Interpretation and Homosexuality* (ed. C. N. Kraus; Telford, Penn.: Pandora Press, 2001), 121-47; Reta Halteman Finger, "What Can We Do When We Don't Agree? Christian Tolerance in Romans 14:1-15:6," also in *To Continue the Dialogue*; Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Phyllis Bird, "The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation Concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions," *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, 142-76; William R. Schoedel, "Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition," *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, 43-72. Myers and Scanzoni also cite annotations from *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), once in connection with the Levitical prohibitions (p. 88) and once in connection with the *qedeshim* texts (p. 92, 169 n. 14).

<sup>27</sup> Contrast the significantly larger number of references to scientific research on homosexuality in ch. 5 ("Understanding Sexual Orientation") and, to a lesser extent, ch. 6 ("Changing Sexual Orientation").

<sup>28</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 4. The language about "full participation" is a red herring. Nobody is arguing against "full participation" for anyone. Everyone in society is allowed full participation but only within a society structured by rules and requirements. We don't say, for example, that having number and age requirements for marriage prevent persons with 'polysexual' and 'pedosexual' orientations from being full participants in society.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 (emphasis added). See the end of this article for their qualifiers about humility and tentativeness.

Given that Scripture was this important to the authors, it is perplexing and disconcerting that they so inadequately researched and reflected on the pro and con arguments about Scripture and homosexual practice.

## B. The Nature Argument

Since Paul himself employs a nature argument in his indictment of homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27, and since too the creation texts in Genesis 1-2 presuppose continuity between God's acts in creation and ongoing structures in nature,<sup>30</sup> an attack on the position that same-sex intercourse is "contrary to nature" is to a certain extent an attack on Scripture itself.

### 1. A misrepresentation of my argument

On pp. 108-9 Myers and Scanzoni briefly discuss (and reject) what I have to say about the creation texts and the implications of Jesus' use of these texts, in my article "Why 'Gay Marriage' Is Wrong." I will come back to the problems with their attempted rebuttal. For now I will comment on their misrepresentation of a paragraph that they splice into their discussion from p. 2 of my article. Myers and Scanzoni write:

... Gagnon believes that this incompleteness of one sex without the other is evidenced by the fact that only a very tiny percentage of people seek same-sex mates. The vast majority of people seek mates of the other sex. Men desire women; women desire men. "All this," he says, "indicates a basic societal admission that there is an essential and holistic maleness and femaleness that transcend mere social constructs."

But wouldn't an argument be made just as easily about the small percentage of people who *do* seek same-sex mates? Might not their very existence among both humans and animals demonstrate that heterosexuality is not inevitable — that there is room for variation in sexual orientation as in handedness?<sup>31</sup>

Their attempt to compare homosexual attraction to handedness<sup>32</sup> reminds me of a contrary conclusion by the authors of the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey — still the best representative survey of sexual practices in the United States.<sup>33</sup> The latter write that a relatively uniform distribution of homosexuality in social groups "would fit with certain analogies to genetically or biologically

<sup>30</sup> As we shall see, Paul's indictments of homosexual practice in Rom 1:26-27 and I Cor 6:9 have Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:24 in view, respectively.

<sup>31</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>32</sup> They make this comparison also at the very beginning of their discussion of "Understanding Sexual Orientation," pp. 52-53.

<sup>33</sup> Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994). Quotations below from pp. 307-9 (some of which I also cite in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 416-17). The first emphasis is added.

based traits such as left-handedness or intelligence. *However, that is exactly what we do not find.* Homosexuality . . . is clearly distributed differentially within categories of . . . social and demographic variables." While the authors think that migration model may explain some of the "increased proportions of same-gender sexual practice, interest, and identification among people in larger cities," they also consider "another possibility"; namely, that

an environment that provides increased opportunities for and fewer negative sanctions against same-gender sexuality may both allow and even elicit expression of same-gender interest and sexual behavior. . . . It implies that the environment in which people grow up affects their sexuality in very basic ways. But this is exactly one way to read many of the patterns that we have found throughout this research. In fact, there is evidence for the effect of the degree of urbanization of residence while growing up on reported homosexuality. This effect is quite marked and strong for men and practically nonexistent for women.<sup>34</sup>

What particularly impressed the authors was that the number of men who reported male sex partners and whose residence at the age of 14 or 16 was in an urban setting was 3.3 to 7 times higher than the number of men who reported male sex partners and whose residence at the age of 14 or 16 was in a rural setting.<sup>35</sup> "Unlike current residence, residence at age fourteen or sixteen is very unlikely to be the result of a choice by the respondent based on sexual preference." Given these statements by Laumann et al., it is strange that Myers and Scanzoni, when noting the significantly higher rates of homosexual men in urban as compared to rural areas and even citing the Laumann et al. study, attribute this extreme variance *solely* to a migration theory.<sup>36</sup> This is precisely what Laumann et al. do not do. Don't Myers and Scanzoni have an obligation to

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<sup>34</sup> While Laumann et al. found that "the relation of urbanization to same-gender sexuality is . . . much weaker for women," they did find the relation of education to same-gender sexuality to "stand out for women in a way that it does not for men." Women who were college graduates were significantly more likely to report same-sex partners, same sex desire, and homosexual/bisexual identity than were women who had only a high school degree or less. Laumann et al. attribute the difference either to "greater social and sexual liberalism . . . and . . . greater sexual experimentation" that coincides with education or to "a higher level of personal resources (human capital)" that can allow women to please themselves rather than men (pp. 309-10). However, the fact that women are much less likely than men to be exclusively attracted to persons of the same sex and much more likely to vary sexual preference over time (a point acknowledged not only by Laumann et al. but even by Myers and Scanzoni) suggests that education is a cultural variable that can impact the incidence of homosexuality on some women. Men and women respond differently to different types of cultural stimuli. Male homosexuality appears to be governed more by pure libido, whereas female homosexuality is more cognitive and relational (a point that I make in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 417).

<sup>35</sup> The chart is on pp. 303-4. The statistics combine the samples from the NHSLs study with the General Social Survey (1988-93). The former measured residence at age 14 and the latter age 16. The difference between urban and rural is 3.7 times greater for same-sex partners in the last year, 6.5 times greater for same-sex partners in the past five years, and 3.3 times greater for same-sex partners since age eighteen.

<sup>36</sup> "Probably, however, this reflects people's gravitating to agreeable vocations and cities rather than vocation and location affecting sexual orientation" (*What God Has Joined Together?*, 58, 163 n. 9).

tell readers that, while they believe exclusively in a migration theory, the authors of the study that they cite do not? Moreover, that “residence at age fourteen or sixteen is very unlikely to be the result of a choice by the respondent based on sexual preference”? One might add, as regards a comparison of sexual orientation and handedness, that not only is sexual orientation more susceptible to cultural influences than handedness, it is also less clearly an inherently benign condition. It is not hard to think of inherently immoral impulses, both sexual and non-sexual.

To show that Myers and Scanzoni misrepresent my remarks, I reproduce what I actually wrote, along with the preceding paragraph for context:

By definition homosexual desire is *sexual narcissism* or *sexual self-deception*. There is either (1) a conscious recognition that one desires in another what one already is and has as a sexual being (anatomy, physiology, sex-based traits) or (2) a self-delusion of sorts in which the sexual same is perceived as some kind of sexual other. As one ancient text puts it, “seeing themselves in one another they were ashamed neither of what they were doing nor of what they were having done to them” (Pseudo-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart* 20). The modern word “homosexual” — from the Greek *homoios*, “like” or “same” — underscores this self-evident desire for the essential sexual self shared in common with one’s partner.

I am not talking merely about what some prohomosex advocates derisively refer to as an “obsession with plumbing.” I am talking about a fundamental recognition of something holistic, an essential maleness and an essential femaleness. Why else would 99% of all persons in the United States (97% heterosexual, 2% homosexual) limit their selection of mates to persons of a particular sex? Why else do so many “gays” claim exclusive attraction for persons of the same sex rather than, say, gender nonconforming persons of the other sex? All this indicates a basic societal admission that there is an essential and holistic maleness and femaleness that transcend mere social constructs.

Myers and Scanzoni misrepresent both my point and the support for my point. My point at this stage of the overall argument was not in the first instance “the incompleteness of one sex without the other,” as they claim, but, more accurately, “that there is an essential and holistic maleness and femaleness that transcend” both “mere social constructs” and an alleged “obsession with plumbing.” The support that I gave for this point was not “the fact that only a very tiny percentage of people seek *same-sex* mates,” as Myers and Scanzoni claim, but the fact that only a very tiny percentage of people *don’t care what the sex of their mate is* — a claim, incidentally, that Myers and Scanzoni also make elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> I didn’t say merely that “the vast majority of people seek mates of the

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<sup>37</sup> “But isn’t there a continuum of orientations, from exclusively heterosexual through bisexual to exclusively homosexual? Actually, although there is some variability, sexual orientation is one of the few human traits that are ‘bimodal’ rather than distributed along a bell-shaped curve. . . . [T]he number of actively bisexual people—those who feel and enact sexual attraction to both sexes—appears minimal. . . . nearly everyone is disposed in one direction or the other” (*What God Has Joined Together?*, 53; italics in

*other sex,*” as Myers and Scanzoni allege, but, more, that the vast majority of people “limit their selection of mates to persons of a particular sex.” I didn’t merely assert that “Men desire women; women desire men,” as Myers and Scanzoni portray it. I asserted that nearly everyone (99%) has predominant attractions for one or the other sex rather than for both sexes equally.

Consequently, I did not seek to demonstrate “that heterosexuality is . . . inevitable,” as Myers and Scanzoni wrongly contend. Obviously some persons, for whatever reason, experience significant same-sex erotic attractions. It would be ridiculous for me or anyone else to deny this. Rather, my point was to show that nearly everyone, including persons who claim exclusive sexual attraction to members of the same sex, recognizes in practice that maleness and femaleness is neither a mere social construct nor a superficial distinction. It is something

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the original). I would qualify Myers and Scanzoni to say that sexual orientation is “predominantly bimodal,” just as sexual orientation is predominantly heterosexual and overwhelmingly so. But just as it is not exclusively heterosexual, neither is it exclusively limited to one sex/gender at a time. Sexual attraction to more than one sex is significantly more likely to occur among women than it is among men (as even Myers/Scanzoni acknowledge, pp. 53, 67). In the 1992 NHLS survey by Laumann et al., only 2.8% of American men and 1.4% of American women surveyed identified themselves as homosexual or bisexual. Over a third of the women who self-identified as lesbian or bisexual self-identified as bisexual (.5%). Of the remaining .9% only one third of these, a miniscule .3%, said that they were exclusively attracted to females at the time of the survey (let alone ever). Of the 2.8% of males who identified themselves as homosexual or bisexual, .8% identified as bisexual. The remaining 2% stated that they were attracted exclusively to other males (noted in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 418). By self-identification alone, then, roughly .7% of the respondents in 1992 identified as bisexual and 1.5% as homosexual. In terms of sexual attraction merely *at the time of the survey*, roughly 1% of respondents experienced sexual attractions for both sexes and 1.2% exclusively for persons of the same sex. Spread out over time—and marriages are suppose to be spread out over time—a much larger percentage of persons would surely claim attraction for both sexes. I make this point because Myers/Scanzoni would doubtless argue (and indeed intimate as much in their book) that, since bisexuality has no real or significant existence, bisexual orientation cannot be used as an argument for cultural acceptance of faithful, bisexual polyamory. But, as it is, the existence of bisexual attractions is real and as significant, or nearly so, as the exclusively homosexual attractions. If society must change the institution of marriage to accommodate a tiny percentage of persons with exclusive homosexual attractions, why should it persist in “discriminating” against a tiny percentage of persons with a bisexual orientation by limiting the number of partners in a marriage to one?

On male-female differences in the degree of single-sex focus in sexual arousal, see also: Meredith L. Chivers, J. Michael Bailey, et al., “A Sex Difference in the Specificity of Sexual Arousal,” *Psychological Science* 15:11 (2004): 736-44. After testing the genital and subjective sexual arousal of 69 men and 81 women (both heterosexual and homosexual) to films depicting sexual scenes involving a man and a woman, two women, and two men, the researchers concluded: “Sexual arousal is category-specific in men; heterosexual men are more aroused by female than by male sexual stimuli, whereas homosexual men show the opposite pattern. . . . In contrast to men, women showed little category specificity on either the genital or the subjective measure. Both heterosexual and homosexual women experienced strong genital arousal to both male and female sexual stimuli. . . . These findings suggest that sexual arousal patterns play fundamentally different roles in male and female sexuality” (quoted from the article’s abstract). The authors also note, however, that while these findings suggest that women’s sexual arousal patterns tend in a significantly more bisexual direction, “they do not imply that women’s sexual orientation is inherently bisexual.” Rather, they suggest that “sexual arousal, especially genital sexual arousal, likely plays a much smaller role in women’s sexual-orientation development than it does in men’s” (pp. 742-43).

fundamental to human existence and for nearly everyone, heterosexuals and homosexuals alike, one of the most strongly and consistently held considerations in choosing sexual partners, surpassed perhaps only by an intra-human criterion.

Therefore, if sexual differentiation is something real and significant, same-sex attraction is, by definition, either narcissistic – arousal for what one already is as a sexual being, female for femaleness, males for maleness (cf. Rom 1:26-27) – or self-deceptive – wrongly viewing a same-sex person as one's sexual "other half," somehow completing or complementing one's own sexual self. This takes us to the fundamental problem of homosexual practice, which, incidentally, Myers and Scanzoni completely ignore in their book.

The point that I made in the article cited by Myers and Scanzoni was so clearly formulated, and so distorted by Myers and Scanzoni in their retelling, that serious questions have to be raised about the way Myers and Scanzoni handle arguments and evidence contrary to their own.

## **2. Articulating the nature argument**

Many persons find it hard to articulate the nature argument against homosexual practice. The reason is that the sexually dimorphic character of human sexuality (i.e., the fact of two sexes) and its implications for sexual relations is one of those irreducible minimums of sexual understanding, the foundation for so many other suppositions. Nevertheless, most people are capable of intuiting that there is something developmentally problematic about being sexually aroused by the distinctive features of one's own sex. They recognize a range of complementary features between men and women – on the level of anatomy, physiology, psychology, interpersonal behavior, and sexual arousal patterns – that suggest an inherent logic to male-female pairing not found in same-sex sexual relations. The primary existence of two sexes leads to an axiomatic corollary; namely, that a holistic sexual union requires the joining of the two sexes.

In a homosexual union, one may rightly ask: Where is one's sexual other-half? Because sexual merger is for sexual counterparts, a same-sex sexual union implies that the participants tacitly view themselves as half-male (if male) or half-female (if female), when in fact one is already complete as male or female quite apart from sexual pairing. What one lacks is the sex that one is not, not the sex that one already is. Thus, a one-sex sexual bond may be viewed as either narcissistic, if one is conscious of being sexually aroused by what one is and shares in common with another as a sexual being, or delusional, if one thinks of



one's sex as in need of structural supplementation and not just social affirmation.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. The effect of sexual sameness on male homosexual promiscuity

There is thus an inherent deficiency in homosexual unions: the absence of a sexual counterpart to moderate the extremes of, and fill the gaps in, the distinctive features of one's own sex. This deficiency is largely responsible for the disproportionately high rate of scientifically measurable, negative harm that attends homosexual activity, at different rates for homosexual males and homosexual females respectively. This includes higher rates of sexually transmitted disease (especially among homosexual males), higher rates of mental health problems (especially among homosexual females), higher numbers of sex partners lifetime (especially among homosexual males), shorter-term relationships (especially among homosexual females), and a higher correlation with adult-adolescent or adult-child sexual activity (among male homosexuals).<sup>39</sup> Although proponents of homosexual unions attribute these higher rates exclusively, or nearly so, to societal homophobia, a significant causation factor is likely the distinctive excesses of each sex that are not moderated in same-sex unions.

Myers and Scanzoni acknowledge the point at least so far as male promiscuity is concerned. Yet they seem not to grasp its damaging impact on their argument for gay marriage. On pp. 124-25, they defend against the argument that "gays are promiscuous" by explaining that higher numbers of sex partners on the part of male homosexuals can be attributed to the fact that they are males in all-male unions rather than to the fact of their homosexuality. I have made a similar point in my own work.<sup>40</sup> However, it is a Pyrrhic victory to exonerate the homosexual attraction while implicating the male-male dynamic. Either way the deficiency is inherent in male homosexual bonds and leads invariably to disproportionately high rates of nonmonogamous patterns of behavior among homosexual males. "Gay marriage" will more likely transform the nature of marriage into an institution more amenable to additional sex partners than tame most males in "gay marriage" to forego additional sex partners for the rest of their lives. It is

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<sup>38</sup> For a fuller unpacking of the nature argument, based on formal or structural considerations regarding sexual congruity, see my entry "Homosexuality" in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*. For a defense of the scriptural and also Reformed character of a limited argument from nature, see my online article, "Bad Reasons for Changing One's Mind: Jack Rogers's Temple Prostitution Argument and Other False Starts" (Mar. 1, 2004; <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoRogersResp2.pdf>), 12-18 (section III).

<sup>39</sup> For documentation of these disproportionately high rates of harm and a discussion of reasons for it, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 452-60, 471-85, and, more recently, my online "Immoralism, Homosexual Unhealth, and Scripture: A Response to Peterson and Hedlund's 'Heterosexism, Homosexual Health, and the Church': Part II: Science" (Aug. 2005; 40 pages; at <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoHeterosexismRespPart2.pdf>).

<sup>40</sup> E.g., *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 452-60.

difficult enough for many men in a heterosexual marriage to do this, even when they know that their wife will be adamantly opposed to extramarital "outlets." How much more so for men in "gay marriage," whose male "spouse" as a rule will "feel much less psychic conflict than women about casual sex."<sup>41</sup>

Even highly respected male homosexual activists have questioned the value of monogamy for "gay marriage." For example, Andrew Sullivan, a senior editor at *The New Republic* and a well-known columnist (and a homosexual man), wrote in his book *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (Random House, 1996):

There is more likely to be greater understanding of the need for extramarital outlets between two men than between a man and a woman; and again, the lack of children gives gay couples greater freedom. . . . Marriage should be made available to everyone. . . . But within this model, there is plenty of scope for cultural difference. There is something baleful about the attempt of some gay conservatives to educate homosexuals and lesbians into an uncritical acceptance of a stifling model of heterosexual normality. (pp. 200-204)

Similarly, Marvin Ellison, professor of Christian ethics at Bangor Theological Seminary and an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) (and a homosexual man), calls for a "broader debate" on the subject of multiple partners in his recent book *Same-Sex Marriage?*:

Should marriage, as the legal sanctioning of an intimate sexual affiliation, be limited to two and only two persons . . . ? Should religious communities bless multiple coexisting sexual partnerships? Surely one concern with polyamorous affiliations is exploitation, or what feminist critics of polygamy have called an "excess of patriarchy." But how exactly does the number of partners affect the

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<sup>41</sup> J. Michael Bailey, *The Man Who Would Be Queen: The Science of Gender-Bending and Transsexualism* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 2003), 101. In his chapter on "Gay Masculinity" (pp. 85-102) Bailey shows that homosexual males remain very much male in their sexual stimulation patterns. Like heterosexual men and in contrast to women generally, homosexual men show a greater interest in casual sex, manifest a higher response to visual sexual stimuli (hence, more likely to seek out pornography), invest greater significance in a prospective partner's physical attractiveness, show a stronger preference for younger partners, and are less driven to have and raise children. Linda Mealey summarizes sex differences in mating strategies across species. (1) In terms of "availability," "males are typically more sexually available than females." (2) As regards "arousability," "males are typically more easily aroused than females." (3) With respect to "commitment," "males are typically more likely to seek multiple sexual partners than are females" (*Sex Differences: Development and Evolutionary Strategies* [San Diego: Academic Press, 2000], 76). Cf. Myers and Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together?*, 125: "And who desires more frequent sex, thinks more about sex, masturbates more often, initiates more sex, and makes sacrifices to gain sex? The answers to these and other such questions . . . are men, men, men, men, and men. If *unmarried* gay men have more uncommitted sex, reflects Steven Pinker, 'they are simply men whose male desires bounce off other male desires rather than off female desires'" (emphasis added; citing Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* [New York: Norton, 1997], 474). There is no reason for Myers and Scanzoni to add the adjective "unmarried," as if the situation would change dramatically for married homosexual men. Whether married or not, men in a homosexual union will still have their desires "bouncing off other male desires rather than off female desires."

moral quality of the relationship? This question requires a serious answer. Could it be that limiting intimate partnerships to only two people at a time is no guarantee of avoiding exploitation, and expanding them to include more than two parties is no guarantee that the relationship will be exploitative?

He also asks, "How might it be possible to break with compulsory monogamy and make marriage genuinely elective, as a vocation (or calling) for some but not all?"<sup>42</sup>

Ellison is, incidentally, a member of The Gay Men's Issues in Religion Group in the American Academy of Religion.<sup>43</sup> This group adopted as a theme for one of their two sessions at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the AAR "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing: Varied Views on Polyamory." Essentially this was an advocacy session for "faithful" multiple-partner relationships, even going so far as to use the Trinity as a model for such. Not that this Group is monolithic in its concerns: The theme for one of their two sessions in the following year's national meeting was "Power and Submission, Pain and Pleasure: The Religious Dynamics of Sadomasochism." One paper, for example, advocated:

<sup>42</sup> *Same-Sex Marriage? A Christian Ethical Analysis* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 154-55.

<sup>43</sup> The American Academy of Religion (AAR) is the U.S. umbrella organization for professors of religion—church historians, theologians, ethicists, and scholars in world religions. Interestingly, when Ellison was part of a panel discussion debating "gay marriage" for an Evangelical Philosophical Society session held at the Nov. 2004 AAR national gathering, Ellison repeatedly stressed that he was speaking only about a committed relationship between two persons. I was in the audience. When the time came for questions, I asked Prof. Ellison how his stress on marital 'twoness' cohered with (1) Jesus' predication of marital 'twoness' on the creation of humans as "male and female" and (2) Ellison's own remarks in his book *Same-Sex Marriage?* regarding the need to reevaluate the limitation of the marital bond to two and only two persons. Ellison paused and then said, "I don't have to answer that question." It seemed to me that Ellison adopted one persona when speaking to the *Evangelical Philosophical Society* and a different persona when writing for a broader audience. This different posturing reflects the concern on the part of the homosexual lobby not to be too overt in specifying the radical implications of "gay marriage." That we have any admission at all on the part of respected homosexual male scholars, commentators, and church leaders is truly amazing. Also speaking at the session for same-sex marriage was Russell Long, professor of religion at Hunter College. Long had stated that we could reject polygamous unions because, on the whole, they prove less stable than monogamous unions. This was a strange statement on two counts. First, homosexual relationships have shown themselves to be less stable than traditional polygamous arrangements. By the same rationale should we not rule out homosexual unions? I pointed this out to Long but he had no response. Secondly, Long himself had presented a paper only a year earlier at the "Polyamory" session of the AAR Gay Men's Group. The abstract for the paper reads as follows:

*Heavenly Sex: The Moral Authority of a Seemingly Impossible Dream*

I would suggest that all sex be thought of as a form of meeting, so that sexual "introductions" might be seen as ends in themselves, and sex within a relationship as meeting in depth. We might also think of a man's erection as his wearing his heart on his sleeve, distortions taking place when he forgets.

For Long, apparently, sexual intercourse is just a greater step toward more intimacy: meeting someone "in depth," a particularly warm self-"introduction." A man's erection? Nothing more than "wearing his heart on his sleeve." Think of the ramifications for being "introduced" to new members of the faith. Since self-introductions do not follow a monogamy script (we introduce ourselves to many people in the course of life), this description of sexual intercourse does not appear to buttress a monogamy standard.

"Somasochistic homoerotic desire is part of what makes the spectacle of the crucifixion attractive and desirable."<sup>44</sup>

Consider, too, these words by L. William Countryman, professor of New Testament at The Church Divinity School of the Pacific (an Episcopal seminary of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif.) and a homosexual man, in his book *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*: "The gospel allows no rule against the following, in and of themselves: . . . bestiality, polygamy, homosexual acts," or pornography. As regards such matters we are not free to "impose our codes on others."<sup>45</sup> With respect to incest, Countryman conveniently avoids the subject of incest between adults. Although he seems finally to draw a line against adult-child incest, Countryman is the only biblical scholar that I know who argues that society's "taboo" against adult-child incest is too high.<sup>46</sup> Countryman was also one of the featured speakers in a 1997 conference of homosex activists at All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California, called "Beyond Inclusion." In response to a question about how the church should respond to *nonmonogamous* homosexual relationships, Countryman said: "I would be distressed if the drive toward blessing gay unions merely applied Reformation understandings of heterosexual unions to gay unions."<sup>47</sup>

The Metropolitan Community Churches bill themselves as "a worldwide fellowship of Christian churches with a special outreach to the world's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities" and "the world's largest gay and lesbian spirituality organization." Their 2005 General Conference in Calgary (Alberta, Canada, July 21-26) included the following presentation:

Building Closets or Opening Doors (Polyamory), Hyatt: Imperial Ballroom 3, Fran Mayes. Have we who know the freedom of coming out to live without fear or shame created our own MCC closets? The stories of some of us who love and/or partner with more than one other person will be presented as told to me for my dissertation "Polyamory and Holy Union in UFMCC". Chosen families in light of the Bible, a theology of sexuality, history, and worldwide practice.<sup>48</sup>

Even homosexual males that attempt "close coupling" seem to have a very difficult time achieving anything like lifelong monogamy or even long-term serial monogamy.<sup>49</sup> Consider a 2003 study entitled "Relationship Innovation in

<sup>44</sup> For a fuller description go to <http://www.robgagnon.net/AARGayMen'sGroup.htm>.

<sup>45</sup> Pp. 243-45.

<sup>46</sup> Pp. 257-58.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas L. LeBlanc, "Gay-'Marriage' Activists Say 'Inclusion' Is Not Enough"

(<http://eutopia.cua.edu/article.cfm?ID=37&Page=1>).

<sup>48</sup> <http://mccconferences.org/content/downloads/General%20Conference%202005%20Schedule%20of%20Events.pdf> (on p. 20, top).

<sup>49</sup> A 1994 Dutch study of 156 "close-coupled" male homosexual relationships found that by the sixth year of the relationship the number of outside sex partners averaged eleven. Two 1984 American studies also

Male Couples," presented at the 2003 American Sociological Association conference by Dr. Barry Adam, a professor of sociology at the University of Windsor and homosexual activist. Adam interviewed 70 homosexual men in Ontario who were part of 60 couples and found that only 25% reported being monogamous; and most of the latter were in a relationship of less than three years duration.<sup>50</sup> According to Adams, "One of the reasons I think younger men tend to start with the vision of monogamy is because they are coming with a heterosexual script in their head and are applying it to relationships with men. What they don't see is that the gay community has their own order and own ways that seem to work better."<sup>51</sup> While granting marriage to homosexual male couples may start them on a "heterosexual script" of monogamy, in time such "couples" will adapt the form of marriage to allow for greater laxity regarding extramarital outlets.

Society will then be faced with a choice: to retract marriage from homosexual men or become more accepting of the way homosexual males define marriage. J. Michael Bailey, professor of psychology at Northwestern University, opts for the latter choice:

Because of fundamental differences between men and women, the social organization of gay men's sexuality will always look quite different from that of heterosexual men's. *Regardless of marital laws and policies*, there will always be fewer gay men who are romantically attached. Gay men will always have many more sex partners than straight people do. *Those who are attached will be less sexually monogamous*. And although some gay male relationships will be for life, these will be many fewer than among heterosexual couples. . . . I suspect that regardless of the progress of gay rights, gay men will continue to pursue happiness in ways that differ markedly from the ways that most straight people do. This will be true even as society becomes increasingly tolerant of them. *Both heterosexual and homosexual people will need to be open minded about social practices common to people of other orientations.*<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, these are the kinds of remarks that Myers and Scanzoni prefer not to quote. Homosexual males in "gay marriage" are more likely to redefine the institution of marriage than to be defined and changed fundamentally by the heterosexual notion of marriage.<sup>53</sup>

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found that non-monogamous behavior was the norm for nine out of ten homosexual couples. See *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 456-57.

<sup>50</sup> Note that being in a relationship of at least a year was a qualification for being in the study. Adam did not consider the sizable percentage of homosexual males who at any given moment are engaged in non-committed sexual activity.

<sup>51</sup> Reported at <http://www.washblade.com/2003/8-22/news/national/nonmonog.cfm>.

<sup>52</sup> Bailey, *The Man Who Would Be Queen*, 101-2 (emphases added).

<sup>53</sup> Perhaps Myers and Scanzoni would respond that polyamory is as much a heterosexual phenomenon or even more so, practiced even by Old Testament patriarchs. If so, that would miss my point on two counts. First, I am not arguing here that male heterosexuals are immune to nonmonogamous patterns of behavior. I am arguing that male-male sexual pairing ratchets up the risk of such behavior exponentially. Secondly,

As I indicated above at the beginning of this section, I am not suggesting here that the only negative side effects of homosexual unions is a markedly higher rate of nonmonogamy, much less that homosexual females are immune to deficiencies in homoerotic relationships. Alongside the nonmonogamous patterns of behavior one sees higher rates of risky sexual practices (including oral-anal and penile-anal) and, accordingly, higher rates of sexual transmitted disease and lowered life span. Homosexual females are even more prone to some psychiatric disorders such as major depression and substance abuse than their homosexual male counterparts and are even less likely to establish unions of ten years duration or more. An explanation that takes into consideration basic biological/psychological differences between men and women probably provides the answer – consistent with the fact that mood disorders and anxiety disorders are also twice as high among heterosexual women as among heterosexual men. On average women tend to expect significantly more of a sexually intimate relationship than do men in terms of communication and relational responsibilities, thereby placing greater demands on a partner to meet personal needs. To have two women with this higher needs index in a sexual relationship puts additional strains on the relationship, which probably contributes markedly to more problems and breakups that then impact mental health.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4. Counterarguments by Myers and Scanzoni against the nature argument

Before leaving the nature argument, responses need to be made to three other arguments put forward by Myers and Scanzoni.

a. *Denigration of singleness?* Myers and Scanzoni reject the concept of marriage as a merger of two halves of a sexual whole on the grounds that “Jesus and Paul both speak positively about singleness without any implication that not being married meant that a person was somehow not whole.”<sup>55</sup> This misses the point.

First, to assert that male and female are two incomplete parts of a sexual whole is not the same as saying that all people must marry if they are to be whole persons. It is to say, rather, that *if* a person chooses to engage in sexual activity, that person always and only does so in his or her particularity as one part of a two-faceted sexual whole, as male or as female. Men and women have inherent integrity in their respective sexes: Men are wholly male and women are wholly female. They are not half-male and half-female, respectively (which, again, is the

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rejection of polyamory is logically predicated on sexual dimorphism (i.e., the ‘twoness’ of sexual differentiation) and the inherent *sexual* completeness of a man-woman bond. Jesus recognized this in citing Gen 1:27 (“[God] made them male and female”) as the basis for the principle of sexual ‘one-fleshness’ in Gen 2:24.

<sup>54</sup> “Immoralism, Homosexual Unhealth, and Scripture, Part II: Science,” 4-5, 13-14; *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 458 n. 191.

<sup>55</sup> Pg. 109.

unfortunate logic of same-sex sexual bonds). But if God created us “male and female,” then by definition neither maleness nor femaleness represents the totality of human sexuality. The union of the two sexes does. The image in Gen 2:21-24 of a woman being formed from what is pulled from the man/human illustrates the point that the missing element from one sex is not another of the same sex but rather one from the only other sex. Humans don’t have to have sexual intercourse with another. However, if they do, then it is self-evident that they are configured bodily – and here I mean ‘bodily’ in a holistic sense – as open-ended to a person of the only other sex (gender), not a person of the same sex.

Second, Jesus and (following Jesus’ teaching) St. Paul did indeed view the single state as a form of deprivation, though recognizing the value of a sexually unattached life for the advancement of God’s kingdom (Matt 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:7-8, 25-40). They also recognized a distinction, as persons do today, between foregoing a valid sexual union, which is an experience of deprivation but no sin, and willfully entering into a structurally incompatible union, which is sin.

**b. No linkage with other forms of sexual immorality?** Myers and Scanzoni categorically deny any linkage between homosexual practice and sexually aberrant behaviors such as incest and polyamory. “[T]he dominoes of same-sex marriage on the one hand, and of polygamy and incest on the other, are ten feet apart. They’re logically unrelated.”<sup>56</sup> But this assessment is more wishful thinking than reality.

**(1) Polyamory.** As noted in the discussion above, many homosexual males see a *practical* connection between male homosexual practice and polyamory. If men are more inclined toward nonmonogamous practices than are women, as one recent large-scale, crosscultural study concluded and Myers/Scanzoni acknowledge, then obviously a male-male bond will be significantly more prone to nonmonogamous practice than a male-female bond.<sup>57</sup> There is also an obvious *logical* link between homosexuality (whether male or female) and polyamory. The principle of monogamy, restricting a sexual relationship to two persons at a time, is predicated on the twoness or binary character of the sexes. Because there are essentially two and only two sexes, the presence of a male and female in a sexual relationship is necessary and sufficient for reconstituting a sexual whole, *so far as the number of persons in the union is concerned*. A third party is neither needed nor desirable. If society repeals a male-female prerequisite, there no longer remains any logical or nature-based reason for society to withhold approval from multiple-partner sexual unions, whether fashioned in the mold of

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<sup>56</sup> The quote is from p. 126 but the discussion of the issue begins on p. 125.

<sup>57</sup> David P. Schmitt et al., “Universal sex differences in the desire for sexual variety: Tests from 52 nations, 6 continents, and 13 islands,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85 (2003): 85-104 (cited by Myers/Scanzoni on p. 124). The study involved over 16,000 persons around the globe.

traditional polygyny or in a form characterized by greater egalitarianism and/or bisexuality.<sup>58</sup>

There is also another logical link created by the “GLBT” connection: Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgendered. Three-and-a-half years after officially opening up the institution of marriage to homosexual unions (Apr. 1, 2002), the Netherlands has taken its first step toward validating polyamorous unions. As Stanley Kurtz reports it,

On September 23, 2005, the 46-year-old Victor de Bruijn and his 31-year-old wife of eight years, Bianca, presented themselves to a notary public in the small Dutch border town of Roosendaal. And they brought a friend. Dressed in wedding clothes, Victor and Bianca de Bruijn were formally united with a bridally bedecked Mirjam Geyen, a recently divorced 35-year-old whom they’d met several years previously through an Internet chatroom. As the notary validated a *samenlevingscontract*, or “cohabitation contract,” the three exchanged rings, held a wedding feast, and departed for their honeymoon. . . . Although neither Mirjam nor Bianca had had a prior relationship with a woman, each had believed for years that she was bisexual. Victor, who describes himself as “100 percent heterosexual,” attributes the trio’s success to his wives’ bisexuality, which he says has the effect of preventing jealousy.<sup>59</sup>

The event occurred amidst much fanfare in the Netherlands, though it has been completely ignored by American mainstream media outlets – for obvious political reasons. Kurtz notes that, since this threesome has a bisexual dimension, one could argue: “If every sexual orientation has a right to construct its own form of marriage, then more changes are surely due.” Some homosex-activists have attempted to dismiss this event by arguing that a private cohabitation contract is not a state-registered partnership, much less a marriage. Yet “the popularity of cohabitation contracts among Dutch gays in the 1980s helped create laws in the early 1990s forbidding employer discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation—including discrimination between married and unmarried couples in the granting of benefits.” Already the Netherlands Justice Minister Piet Hein Donner has not only “refused to consider any attempt to ban such contracts in the future” but also asserted that they fulfill “a useful regulating function.” In

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<sup>58</sup> Myers and Scanzoni cite the homosexual apologist Jonathan Rauch when they claim that “by making universal a simple rule of *one person, one spouse*, we can ‘defend monogamy without hypocrisy or inconsistency’” and “send a clear and unequivocal message that sex, love and marriage go together” (p. 126; Jonathan Rauch, “The Way We Live Now: Power of Two,” *New York Times*, Mar. 7, 2004, 125, [www.nytimes.com/](http://www.nytimes.com/)). Anyone can make a “universal simple rule” such as one person, one spouse, just as one can make the universal simple rule of one man and one woman. The problem is that the former will have no rational basis after the latter is dismissed. In addition, how does monogamy “send a clear and unequivocal message that sex, love and marriage go together” in a way that a loving, committed polyamorous (or incestuous) union does not? Why can’t a committed bisexual marriage between three persons send the same message? See my point (3).

<sup>59</sup> Stanley Kurtz, “Here Come the Brides: Plural marriage is waiting in the wings,” *The Weekly Standard* 11:15 (Dec. 26, 2005); also online at <http://www.weeklystandard.com>.



addition, "Green party spokesman Femke Halsema, a key backer of gay marriage, has affirmed her party's support for the recognition of multipartner unions."

Kurtz also points to recent developments here in the United States. Networks within the Unitarian Universalist Church, which is headquartered in Boston and "played a critical role in the legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts," are now pushing for "polyamory awareness."<sup>60</sup> Some within the Unitarian Church have expressed concerns about this development but primarily from the vantage point of potential effects in derailing the "gay marriage" train, not from some principled rejection of polyamory. Nor are developments confined to the Unitarian Church, Kurtz adds. In 2004 University of Chicago Law School professor, Elizabeth F. Emens, argued in the *New York University Review of Law & Social Change* that the existence of "'poly' dispositions" justifies civil recognition of faithful polyamorous unions.<sup>61</sup> In 2005 sympathetic treatments of polyamory appeared in major newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *New York Post*, and the *Baltimore Sun*. A documentary of a 13-year sexual union between two bisexual-leaning men and a woman, entitled *Three of Hearts: A Postmodern Family*, was released in New York in Oct. 2005 and will be aired by BRAVO in Spring 2006.<sup>62</sup> To these developments can be added two from the sphere of religion already mentioned, in addition to recent developments in the Unitarian Church: the advocacy sessions on polyamory by the Gay Men's Issues in Religion Group

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<sup>60</sup> Among the examples cited by Kurtz are the following two: the formation of a group entitled "Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness" (UUPA), established in 1999 and whose vision "is for Unitarian Universalism to become the first poly-welcoming mainstream religious denomination" (see their website); and a statement by Rebecca Ann Parker, president of the Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, Calif., one of only two specifically Unitarian Universalist seminaries in the U.S.: "For the record: I support Unitarians for Polyamorous Awareness and completely disagree with those who use their belief that monogamous heterosexual marriage is ordained by God as a basis for rejecting same-sex couples and polyamorous relationships."

<sup>61</sup> The title of the article is "Monogamy's Law: Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence" (29.2, pp. 277-376). Kurtz also refers to a 2000 *Stanford Law Review* article entitled "The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure" by Kenji Yoshino, a Yale Law School professor, as laying the groundwork for a future bisexual defense of polyamory.

<sup>62</sup> Note too the following commentary on developments in Canada: "When social conservatives argue that legalizing same-sex marriage could lead to legalized polygamy, same-sex advocates either laugh or sneer. It's a scare tactic, they say. It'll never happen. Last year, however, as Canada legalized same-sex marriage, Prime Minister Paul Martin commissioned a \$150,000 study to debunk the polygamy argument. Big mistake: The study [written by three law professors] confirmed the scare tactic by recommending that Canada repeal its anti-polygamy law" (Debra Saunders, "Could Same-Sex Marriage Lead to Legalized Polygamy?," Jan. 19, 2006, at <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/Commentary>). The commentator confesses that she had long "argued that legalizing same-sex marriage would not open the door to polygamy. . . . Wrong. In these politically correct times, do-gooders expand definitions until words—or institutions—lose all meaning. Marriage can mean what you want it to mean." She quotes homosexual assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco and architect of pro-homosex legislation in California: "If you go beyond two [persons in a marital union], you can't draw a line anywhere else that isn't arbitrary." What Leno doesn't realize, or openly admit, is that drawing a line at two already becomes arbitrary once the idea of marriage as a union of the two sexes is dismissed.

at the 2003 American Academy of Religion national meeting and by the  
homosex-directed Metropolitan Community Churches at their 2005 General  
Conference.

(2) *Incest*. Incest is based on a principle analogous to that for opposition to  
homosexual intimacy. Incest is wrong in all circumstances, even when it is done  
as well as it can be done (i.e., in an adult, committed relationship), because it  
entails the sexual union of persons who are structurally too much alike on a  
familial level (cf. Lev 18:6: a man shall not have intercourse with the "flesh of his  
flesh"). Similarly, homosexual activity entails the union of persons who are  
structurally too much alike on sexual level, lacking a critical element of  
complementary sexual difference. If out of a desire to affirm homosexual unions  
society dismisses the principle that human sexual bonds require a certain degree  
of complementary difference, rejecting the twin extremes of too much structural  
sameness (same-sex intercourse, incest) and too much structural likeness  
(bestiality, pedophilia), then society will have no reasonable grounds for  
rejecting incest or even worse extremes.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Even William Saletan, national correspondent for [www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com) and a strong proponent of gay  
marriage, asks: "Incest Repellent? If Gay Sex is Private, Why Isn't Incest?" (Apr. 23, 2003;  
<http://www.slate.com/id/2081904/>). Saletan shares a conversation with both David Smith, Communications  
Director of the Human Rights Campaign (the leading U.S. "gay rights" organization) and Kevin Layton,  
HRC General Counsel, in which Saletan asked: "If gay sex is too private to be banned, why should incest  
be banned?" Neither Smith or Layton could give a good reason why. Saletan adds: "The easy answer—that  
incest causes birth defects—won't cut it. Birth defects could be prevented by extending to sibling marriage  
the rule that five states already apply to cousin marriage: You can do it if you furnish proof of infertility or  
are presumptively too old to procreate. If you're in one of those categories, why should the state prohibit  
you from marrying your sibling?" Using arguments made by Smith for gay unions, Saletan points out that  
sibling couples "are not less productive—or more dangerous—members of the community" by virtue of  
incestuous attractions. They can sustain "committed relationships." Saletan thinks that incest is bad because  
it "confuses relationships": If an incestuous relationship dissolves, your ex-partner remains a close blood  
relation and this will cause headaches for internal family dynamics. But one could easily answer that  
objection by pointing out that this is not an inherent problem; moreover, if two siblings are willing to take  
the risk, what business is it of the state to outlaw the relationship or, for that matter, withhold its blessings?  
Certainly there are considerable risks that homosexual unions face that incestuous unions do not. This  
doesn't stop persons from arguing for gay marriage. Saletan adds: "The way I see it, stable families are  
good, homosexuality isn't a choice, and therefore, gay marriage should be not just permitted but  
encouraged." To this I would respond: If someone feels sexual attractions for a close blood relation, is this  
merely a product of his or her own volition? Who would choose to be sexually attracted to a parent, sibling,  
or child if it were a matter of choice? And how exactly does the existence of a sexual "orientation" create a  
moral or legal right? Polysexual and pedosexual orientations are not choices either. In the end Saletan  
admits: "I don't see why a sexual right to privacy, if it exists, shouldn't cover consensual incest. I think  
[Senator Rick] Santorum is wrong [in claiming that establishing such a right for consensual sex within the  
home implies a right to consensual incest]. But I can't explain why, and so far, neither can the Human  
Rights Campaign." Saletan dealt only with the question of criminalizing consensual sexual conduct. Yet the  
same arguments could be applied to granting marriage contracts. Only the notion of structural/embodyed  
counterparts can provide a rational basis for withholding the state's blessing of incestuous unions.  
Proponents of homosexual unions would not like such an argument, though, because it would have obvious  
negative implications for sanctioning same-sex sexual unions.

(3) *Dismissing formal criteria.* Furthermore, the very arguments used to endorse homosexual unions trample over the notion that sexual relationships must meet special formal or structural criteria; that is, objective facets of congruity or complementarity that are grounded in nature or physical makeup and transcend both mutual commitment and an inability to prove inherent, measurable harm. If the quality of affective bonds is the prime consideration, as Myers and Scanzoni contend, then why should marriage be withheld from committed and caring sexual unions consisting of more than two persons or close blood relations (especially for the latter if one of the parties is infertile)?

(4) *Which is the more foundational violation?* To claim then that homosexual practice on the one hand and incest and polyamory on the other are "logically unrelated" is to ignore obvious contraindications. Yet my point here is not merely to make a slippery-slope argument. It is to get people to recognize that if committed multiple-partner unions and incestuous unions are unacceptable, then by much more should committed homosexual unions be unacceptable. For the twoness of human sexual relations, on which a prohibition of polyamory is based, is predicated on the deep structure of two sexes; and the structural requirement of complementary difference, on which a prohibition of incest is based, is more keenly disclosed in sexual differentiation than in blood unrelatedness.

c. *Misogyny as the underlying motivation?* A third argument that Myers and Scanzoni pose against the principle of male-female sexual complementarity is to charge that such a principle is merely code for "the notion of male dominance and female subordination."<sup>64</sup> They quote, without critique or qualification, a claim by Rosemary Ruether that an anti-homosex argument based on male-female complementarity "covertly *demand*s the continued dependency and underdevelopment of women."<sup>65</sup> However, the principle of gender complementarity cannot be simply collapsed into a principle of gender hierarchy. The prime motivation of the former is not the subordination of women to men, much less misogyny ('women-hating'). Certainly nothing in the philosophic rationale that I give above presupposes traditional hierarchical patterns for a male-female relationship. The ideas of sexual narcissism and structural self-deception are independent of matters of authority and submission.

Instead of responding to the kind of nature argument that I give, accurately represented, Myers and Scanzoni critique a quote from James Dobson that marriage of a man to a woman serves to "'civilize' and domesticate masculinity" and to avert the male tendency "to release the power of testosterone in a way

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<sup>64</sup> Pp. 110-12 (quote from p. 111).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 111 (emphasis added); from Rosemary R. Ruether, "The Personification of Sex," *Homosexuality and Ethics* (ed. E. Batchelor Jr.; New York: Pilgrim, 1980), 29.

that is destructive to himself and to society at large.”<sup>66</sup> It is true that Dobson presents this rationale in the context of positing traditional male-female roles. However, not even Dobson, who is a strong proponent for a husband’s headship in marriage (conceived in terms of love and service), treats opposition to homosexual practice merely as a means to an end of subordinating women to men. Moreover, as I noted above, even Myers and Scanzoni admit that men in homosexual unions are much less given to monogamy precisely because they don’t have to negotiate their sexuality in relation to female partners. Isn’t this a concession, however begrudging or subconscious, that there is an effective nature argument that transcends concerns for traditional roles?

I treat the misogyny argument in relation to Scripture in section II.D.3.e., pp. 80-83.

### C. The Scripture Argument: The Old Testament Witness

As already noted, Myers and Scanzoni give a very weak presentation of the biblical witness on homosexual practice, ignoring nearly all of the key arguments for countering pro-homosex readings of specific texts. We will discuss in turn the story of Sodom and related texts, the Levitical prohibitions of male-male intercourse, the witness of Jesus, and finally the witness of Paul. In treating the Pauline material, we will address whether the three main arguments for discounting a scriptural indictment of homosexual practice have any merit: the exploitation, orientation, and misogyny arguments.

#### 1. Sodom: Only indicting rape?

Myers and Scanzoni offer the standard line about the Sodom story in Gen 19:4-11 given by those who seek to dismiss the biblical witness against homosexual practice. Allegedly, this is just a story about same-sex gang rape perpetrated by heterosexual assailants against visitors “as a show of power and domination.” There is no indication here that the narrator would have been opposed to loving homosexual unions.<sup>67</sup>

It is certainly true that the Sodom story, like its literary cousin in Judges 19:22-25 (the Levite at Gibeah), does indeed treat a case of attempted same-sex gang rape against visitors. However, it does not follow that the narrator intends no indictment of same-sex intercourse per se. Criticism of homosexual rape, like criticism of incestuous rape or pedophilic rape, may be more than a critique of

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<sup>66</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 112; quote from James Dobson, *Marriage Under Fire: Why We Must Win This Battle* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 11-12.

<sup>67</sup> Pp. 85-88. Myers and Scanzoni also seriously consider that the word “know” in Gen 19:5 could be taken in a non-sexual sense. For conclusive arguments against this supposition, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 73-74. I know of no serious biblical scholar today who thinks that a non-sexual sense is likely in Gen 19:5.

rape. Both the historical context and the literary context suggest strongly that the story of Sodom is a "kitchen sink" narrative of compound offenses. The offense is not only attempted violent mistreatment of male visitors but also an attempt at dishonoring their masculine stamp by treating men sexually as though they were sexual counterparts to men, that is, as women who are sexually penetrated in intercourse.

a. **Five reasons for seeing an indictment of male-male intercourse.** To make this point one can adduce a series of five literary and historical concentric circles of context, which also demonstrate a strong interconnected witness against homosexual practice in the Old Testament.

(1) *The ancient Near Eastern context.* Other ancient Near East texts indicate that men who willingly engaged in consensual receptive intercourse with other males were held in low repute.<sup>68</sup>

(2) *Texts by the same narrator.* Other texts from the same author (J, the Yahwist), particularly the creation story in Genesis 2:18-24 and the story of Ham's rape of his father Noah in Genesis 9:20-27, confirm that the Yahwist would have understood the story of Sodom as an indictment of male-male intercourse per se.

(a) **The story of the creation of woman in Gen 2:21-24** communicates that man and woman are each other's sexual counterparts, two halves of a single sexual whole. The Hebrew word often translated "rib" (*tsela'*), denoting what is extracted from the 'adam (earthling, human) to form woman, is better understood as "side," in accordance with its 36 other occurrences in the Old Testament. This also accords with some later ancient Jewish interpretation.<sup>69</sup> *The image of one flesh becoming two sexes grounds the principle of two sexes becoming one flesh.* The only way to restore the original sexual unity is to reunite (not just unite) the primordial constituent parts, man and woman. A woman, not another man, supplies what is missing from male sexuality, and vice versa.<sup>70</sup>

(b) **As for the story of Ham's act against his father Noah in Gen 9:20-27,** there is strong evidence that Ham's offense was an act of incestuous, same-sex

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 45-56, 75-76.

<sup>69</sup> Speaking allegorically about the creation of woman in Genesis 2:21-24, Philo of Alexandria (first century AD) states: "Love . . . brings together and fits into one the divided halves, as it were, of a single living creature" (*On Creation* 152). "And which side did he take? For we may assume that only two are indicated. . . . Did he take the left or the right?" (*Allegorical Interpretation* 2.19-21). Compare the rabbinic text *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1, where a division of the earth creature front and back, rather than left and right, is proposed: "When God created Adam, he created him facing both ways; then he sawed him in two and made two backs, one for each figure" (Rabbi Samuel bar Nachman, third century A.D.).

<sup>70</sup> As a side point, it is contextually invalid to cite God's declaration in Gen 2:18, "It is not good for the human to be alone," as a biblical warrant for homosexual unions. Genesis 2:21-24 does not depict a right of all humans to have sexual intimacy in the manner that satisfies their sexual urges. Rather, it depicts a conditional opportunity that must meet certain structural prerequisites consistent with embodied existence as designed by God. The story requires sexual complements, not just generic life partners.

rape rather than mere voyeurism.<sup>71</sup> How does this help to establish the offense of same-sex intercourse in the Sodom story? First, the Ham episode underscores the point that a story about incestuous, same-sex rape is not just an indictment of rape. The story clearly involves multiple offenses. Second, there is also an apparent ideological nexus with Leviticus 18: In both Gen 9:20-28 and Lev 18 the subjugation/expulsion of the Canaanites is attributed to a constellation of sexual sins. Since two of the highlighted sins in Lev 18 are incest and male-male intercourse—and not only coercive forms—it is likely that the Yahwist in Gen 9:20-28 viewed these two sins as part of Ham's offense. This in turn makes it likely that the story of Sodom is not implicating only attempted rape; the same-sex dimension is a compounding element in the overall offense. Not surprisingly, then, the Yahwist alerts readers in Gen 10:19 to the fact that the territory of the Canaanites (Ham's descendants) extended from Sidon all the way to Sodom and Gomorrah.

(3) *The Deuteronomistic parallel in context.* We can get a good idea about how the Yahwist might have viewed an act of consensual, receptive male-male intercourse by looking at a parallel account that has a literary relationship to the Sodom story: the story of **the Levite at Gibeah in Judg 19:22-25**, found within a literary corpus known to scholars as the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua through 2 Kings). There can be little doubt about the Deuteronomistic Historian's abhorrence of *any* attempt at penetrating another male, whether coercive or consensual. This is clear from his apparent revulsion elsewhere in the History for the consensual homoerotic associations of the *qedeshim*. A literal translation would be "consecrated ones" but the context indicates cult figures who sometimes served as the passive receptive partners in male-male intercourse (1 Kgs 14:21-24; 15:12-14; 22:46; 2 Kgs 23:7; cf. Deut 23:17-18; Job 36:14).<sup>72</sup> If the

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 63-71; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 52-53; and Wold, *Out of Order*, 66-76. The literal interpretation, namely that Ham's offense was voyeurism, does not do justice to the statement that Noah "came to know what his youngest son had *done* to him" (9:24). Nor does it explain adequately the severity of the curse and its pronouncement on Ham's son Canaan rather than on Ham himself. The subtext implies a play on the concept 'seed'; namely, just as Ham offended with his seed/semen, so the curse falls on his seed/descendants, Canaan. The voyeur interpretation also ignores the fact that the expression "see the nakedness of" is used elsewhere with reference to sexual intercourse (Lev 20:17; similarly, "uncover the nakedness of" throughout Leviticus 18 and 20). It also overlooks the background story of incestuous homosexual rape in the Egyptian myth of Horus and Seth. The figurative interpretation of incestuous same-sex rape is hardly novel in modern scholarship; in addition to Nissinen, Wold, and myself, other proponents have included Hermann Gunkel, Gerhard von Rad, Christoph Levin, Thomas Schmidt, Athalya Brenner, and (recently persuaded by my case) Gordon Wenham. The Babylonian Talmud records a debate ca. A.D. 225 between two rabbis about the meaning of "had done to him" in Gen 9:24: one suggesting castration, the other homosexual relations (*Sanhedrin* 70a).

<sup>72</sup> Relying solely on Countryman and notes in *The Jewish Study Bible*, Myers and Scanzoni contend that the term *qedeshim* (sg. *gadesh*) "either refer to some form of [heterosexual] prostitution or, just as likely, to ritual activities (not necessarily sexual) performed by persons set apart to honor gods other than the God of Israel" (p. 92). Myers and Scanzoni, and their sources, are in error. The sexual connotation is established by the comparison with *qedeshoth*, female "consecrated ones," in Deut 23:17-18, who are also called

Deuteronomistic Historian was repulsed by the idea of men willingly consenting to be penetrated by other men (here too the term "abomination," *to'evah*, is used), then it is evident that he would have found the attempt of the men of Gibeah to have intercourse with a man to be inherently or structurally offensive, irrespective of coercion.

(4) *Other ancient Israelite texts.* Other texts in ancient Israel speak to the opposition toward male-male intercourse per se, and not only the prohibitions in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Every biblical narrative, law, proverb, exhortation, metaphor, and poetry having anything to do with sexual relations presupposes a male-female prerequisite.<sup>73</sup>

(5) *History of interpretation.* The history of the interpretation of the Sodom story also underscores the homoerotic dimensions of the narrative.

(a) Ezekiel likely interprets the Sodom story, in part, through the lens of the absolute prohibition of male-male intercourse in Lev 18:22 and 20:13. This is suggested by a number of considerations: (a) Ezekiel's extensive use elsewhere of the Levitical Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-24) or a precursor document; (b) Ezekiel's use of the same expression, "commit an abomination" (*asah to'evah*), to describe one of the offenses of Sodom (16:50) that is used of male-male intercourse in Lev 18:22 and 20:13; (c) the fact that Ezek 18:12 clearly distinguishes the offense of "oppressing the poor and needy" from "committing an abomination," suggesting that the similar two phrases in 16:49-50 are likewise to be distinguished; (d) the fact that in both Ezek 18:12-13 and Lev 18:22, 26-30 a singular use of "abomination" referring to a specific vice is followed by a summary plural use of "abominations" inclusive of all the previous vices; and (e) the fact that the two other occurrences of "commit an abomination" in Ezekiel involve sexual offenses (22:11; 33:26).<sup>74</sup>

(b) That Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:6-7, 10 also have in view a homoerotic dimension is evident from the closest parallels in early Jewish texts: Philo of Alexandria

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*zonoth* ("harlots, prostitutes"). The same-sex dimension is suggested by the label "dog" in Deut 23:18 (a term of disgust applied in Mesopotamia to male cultic figures who feminized their appearance and were penetrated by other males) and by the unlikelihood of male heterosexual prostitution (women paying men for sex?). Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 100-10. Even Martti Nissinen (*Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 28-34, 39-41) and Phyllis Bird ("The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberations concerning Homosexuality," 158-61, 170-76) concede that Deuteronomic law and the Deuteronomistic Historian identified the *qedeshim* with receptive male homosexual activity. It is odd that Myers and Scanzoni, who make passing reference to Bird's article in a footnote (p. 169 n. 14), appear unaware of this point. Myers and Scanzoni try to rescue their position by concluding: "In any case, they [i.e., the *qedeshim* texts] are not passages about homosexual persons or homosexual orientation" (p. 92). Yet the *qedeshim* probably did include, among others, men attracted to other males; moreover, their androgynous demeanor was attributed to forces beyond their control (specifically a goddess figure with androgynous traits). The disgust for such feminized masculinity in the ancient Near East generally and in Israel in particular was obviously not confined only to men who experienced no same-sex attraction.

<sup>73</sup> The David-Jonathan narratives are no exception (cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 146-54).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-85.

(*Abraham* 133-41; *Questions on Genesis* 4.37), Josephus (*Antiquities* 1.194-95, 200-201; *Jewish War* 4.483-5; 5.566) and the *Testament of Naphtali* (3:4). None of these authors/texts limit their critique to coercive forms of male-male intercourse. The sense of Jude 7 is not “they committed sexual immorality by going after other flesh” but rather “by committing sexual immorality they went after other flesh” (note that “other flesh” refers to angels). In other words, in the process of attempting the sexually immoral act of having active intercourse with other men, they got more than they bargained for, committing an offense unknowingly against angels. The interpretation of Jude 7 in 2 Peter 2:6-7, 10 refers to the “defiling desire/lust” of the men of Sodom. Since the men of Sodom did not know that the male visitors were angels, the reference cannot be to a lust for angels but rather must be to a lust for men.<sup>75</sup>

**b. What’s orientation got to do with it?** Myers and Scanzoni emphasize that it is unlikely that “every male in the city acting out of an erotic desire for *men*,” especially given Lot’s substitute offer of his two daughters.<sup>76</sup> In fact, a number of Jewish and Christian interpretations do assume a general lust for men on the part of the men of Sodom (noted above). But whether each and every man in the mob aimed solely at pure violence and domination or some/all also hoped to gratify their lust for men (whether as bisexuals or homosexuals) would likely have mattered little to the Yahwist and even less to the visitors. The contextual evidence indicates that the Yahwist perceived male-male penetration as an inherently demeaning act, especially for the man penetrated “as though a female”; so Lev 18:22 and 20:13, the disgust for the *qedeshim* in the Deuteronomistic corpus, and the general disgust in the ancient Near East for men who are penetrated willingly.

Although the evidence for viewing the Sodom narrative and related texts as including an indictment of all male-male intercourse is contextually overwhelming, Myers and Scanzoni give no indication that they even know what the evidence is. Yet the evidence is presented in both an extended and condensed form in my previously published work, which Myers and Scanzoni either didn’t bother to consult or chose not to share, much less engage.<sup>77</sup>

## 2. The prohibitions in Lev 18:22 and 20:13: Outdated purity legislation?

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-89. For further analysis of Jude 7 see my online response to Countryman’s review of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 9-13 (<http://www.robagnon.net/Reviews/homoCountrymanResp.pdf>). Myers and Scanzoni wrongly think that once they have interpreted the expression “went after other flesh” as a reference to angels there can be no question of lusting after men. The key to interpretation here, however, lies with the preceding participial phrase “(by) committing sexual immorality.” Neither the Sodom story nor any subsequent interpretation suggests that the men of Sodom knew that the visitors were angels. Any “lust” by the men of Sodom would have been for what they perceived the visitors to be (men), not for what the visitors really were (divine beings or angels).

<sup>76</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 86-87.

<sup>77</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 63-110, 155-57; *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, 56-62.



Not surprisingly Myers and Scanzoni classify the Levitical prohibitions of male-male intercourse in 18:22 and 20:13 under the rubric of obsolete legislation treating matters of ceremonial purity, like the prohibition of intercourse with a menstruating woman (Lev 18:19; 20:18) and the prohibition against mixing two types of seed or wearing clothes made of two types of fabric (Lev 19:19). They contend (following a note in *The Jewish Study Bible*) that the primary concern of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 is to forbid intentionally demeaning acts of anal intercourse with a male.<sup>78</sup>

a. **Seven reasons for their contemporary relevance.** Despite the attempt by Myers and Scanzoni to dismiss these prohibitions, there are at least seven reasons why Lev 18:22 and 20:13 have to be taken seriously by Christian communities today as evidence of God's ongoing disapproval of homosexual practice per se.

(1) *Part of an interconnected Old Testament witness.* As noted above, the Levitical prohibitions are part of a broader, interconnected Old Testament witness. There is no evidence to suggest that ancient Israelite society, acting in fidelity to Yahweh, would ever have approved of any form of homosexual practice.

(2) *Grouped with incest, adultery, bestiality.* The prohibition is *mostly* grouped with other relevant sex proscriptions (incest, adultery, bestiality) that we still abide by today.

(3) *A first-tier sexual offense.* Male homosexual practice is listed among first-tier sexual offenses in Lev 20:10-16, which incur a capital sentence.<sup>79</sup> As such, it is distinguished from non-capital sexual offenses in 20:17-21, which include sex with a menstruant and lesser incest violations. This first-tier status is confirmed, by implication, elsewhere in the Old Testament; namely, in the creation stories and the offenses of Ham, Sodom, Gibeah and the *qedeshim*. While all the sex violations in Lev 18 are designated *to'evoth* ("abominations, abhorrent / detestable acts") in the concluding summary (18:26-27, 29-30), only male-male intercourse is specifically tagged with the singular term *to'evah* (18:22; also 20:13).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Pp. 88-90.

<sup>79</sup> Obviously Christians under the law of Christ do not continue to impose a capital sentence. However, the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery in John 8:2-11 shows that Jesus waived the punishment of stoning not because he regarded all sexual offenses as light matters but rather because dead people do not repent and something much greater was at stake than loss of life in this world (cf. John 8:11 with 5:14: "Go, and no longer be sinning [lest something worse happen to you]").

<sup>80</sup> Myers and Scanzoni stress that homosexual acts are not "uniquely detestable in God's sight" since the term *to'evah* is used of many other offenses such as "lying, unjust business practices, pride, and stirring up dissension." They add: "It is regrettable that in some religious circles, the word *abomination* is cruelly and self-righteously hurled at homosexual persons while the message of Proverbs 16:5 ('All those who are arrogant are an abomination to the Lord') is ignored" (pp. 88-89). While not dismissing entirely these observations, I would add four qualifications. (1) There is no justification for any speech motivated by

(4) *Framed absolutely.* Also speaking to the seriousness of the prohibition is its absoluteness. Like the prohibitions of incest and adultery, it takes in all acts of intercourse of the type specified, not merely intentionally oppressive or coercive forms. Certainly, too, the penalties on both parties in Leviticus 20 and the accompanying refrain “their blood(guilt) [is/be] upon them” (20:11-13, 16, 27; cf. 20:9) presuppose consent on the part of the participants.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, as with the other prohibited acts of sexual intercourse, the penalty on male anal intercourse has implications for prohibiting erotic male-male contact short of penetration.

(5) *Contains the marks of moral impurity.* Contrary to those who dismiss these prohibitions as antiquated ritual purity law, the prohibition bears the marks of a *moral* purity issue. Unlike impurity of a merely ritual sort (e.g., corpse impurity, genital discharges, scale disease), moral impurities such as the prohibitions of incest, adultery, male-male intercourse, and bestiality are not (a) contagious through physical contact and (b) rectified by ritual bathing; moreover, (c) moral impurities concern only intentional acts. They also do not involve merely an exchange of fluid (as does menstrual impurity).<sup>82</sup>

(6) *Adopts a creation/nature model.* The reason for the prohibition, which is implicit in the phrase “lie with a male (as though) lying with a woman,” is that in the act of man-male intercourse a man signifies the male with whom he lays as his sexual counterpart, i.e., as a woman, thereby denying the latter’s God-given

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cruelty, self-righteousness, and arrogance. However, one wonders whether Myers and Scanzoni would, in practice, rule out of bounds any use of the term “abomination” in connection with homosexual practice as inherently cruel, self-righteous, and arrogant. (2) While not “uniquely detestable,” male-male intercourse does appear to be regarded by the authors of the Holiness Code as especially detestable. This would appear to be the point of tagging this specific act as an “abomination” within a list of abominable acts. Ezekiel uses the word *to’evah* more than any other OT author (more than a third of all OT occurrences) but his special use of the word in the singular as a metonym for male-male intercourse in 16:50, 18:12, and perhaps 33:26 suggests too the sense “specially detestable.” The fact that the Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic corpus also applied the word to the *qedeshim* (Deut 23:18 [MT 23:19]; 1 Kgs 14:24) indicates a widespread association of the term for male-male intercourse in ancient Israel, though certainly not an exclusive association. (3) Outside of the Levitical Holiness Code, the word *to’evah* is most frequently used of the worship of other gods (including sacrificing one’s children to pagan gods) and practicing sorcery, divination, and necromancy—all serious threats to the transcendent sovereignty of Yahweh; then of various acts of social exploitation. For a complete listing, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 118-19. Many acts fall under the rubric “abomination” in the OT. Some are more abominable than others; context is decisive. The association of male-male intercourse with narratives of extreme offense—Ham’s act, Sodom, Gibeah’s outrage—indicates a very high placement among detestable offenses in ancient Israel. Paul’s singling out of homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27, alongside idolatry, as a particularly conspicuous instance of suppressing truth given in creation/nature continues this association. (4) Same-sex intercourse occupies a distinctive and tragic place today as an act that is both widely attested in Scripture as an “abomination” and celebrated by some in the church as a potential good. There is no lobby in the church for “lying, unjust business practices, pride, and stirring up dissension.”

<sup>81</sup> Cf. also Ezekiel 18:10-14 which probably alludes to the prohibitions of male-male intercourse in the Levitical Holiness Code and does so in a context that stressed culpability only for intentional sin: “He has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood be upon himself.”

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22-34, 41-42; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1573, 1578, 1756; David P. Wright, “Unclean and Clean [OT],” *ABD* 6: 734.

sex (gender). As such, the prohibition leads the hearer back to a foundational creation/nature model (cf. also the prohibition of bestiality as illicit “mixing” of creation boundaries).

(7) *Appropriated by the New Testament.* The prohibition is clearly picked up in the New Testament. The term *arsenokoitai* (“men who lie with a male”) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is formulated from the Septuagint translation of Lev 18:22 and 20:13, which refers to not ‘lying’ (*koite*) with a ‘male’ (*arsen*). Paul’s critique of homosexual relations in Romans 1:24-27 also echoes Lev 18 and 20 by using two terms that appear in the Septuagint translation of these chapters: *akatharsia* (“uncleanness, impurity” in Romans 1:24 and Lev 18:19; 20:21, 25) and *aschomosune* (“indecent exposure” in Rom 1:27 and twenty-four times in Lev 18:6-19; 20:11, 17-21).

**b. Bad analogies for irrelevance.** These seven reasons for enduring relevance distinguish the prohibition of homosexual practice from alleged analogies to prohibitions of mixing cloth or seed and of sex with a menstruating woman and place it instead among sexual prohibitions that continue to be relevant today; namely, those against incest, adultery, and bestiality.

(1) As regards *cloth mixtures*, any attempted comparison with the prohibition of male-male intercourse breaks down at a number of points, including: *severity* (the penalty for wearing a garment made of two different fabrics was probably just the destruction of the fabric; cf. Deut 22:9-11 on the destruction of the crop); *absoluteness* (mixtures of linen and wool were actually enjoined for some Tabernacle cloths, parts of the priestly wardrobe, and the tassel of the laity); and *New Testament appropriation* (there is no evidence for such). The use of cloth mixtures in sacral contexts suggests the primarily symbolic character of the prohibition: mixtures apparently symbolized penetration into the divine realm (so Jacob Milgrom). However, the prohibitions of male-male intercourse – like the prohibitions of incest, adultery, and bestiality – are hardly exhausted by whatever symbolic value they carry.

(2) Similar arguments can be made against an alleged analogy with the prohibition of *intercourse with a menstruant*:

- Even the framers of the Holiness Code regarded such intercourse as a second-order severe offense, one not requiring immediate civil action (20:18).
- Elsewhere in Leviticus, outside the Holiness Code, the only ‘penalty’ mentioned for sex with a menstruating woman is that the man is put in a state of ritual uncleanness for seven days (15:24). In fact, of all the sexual transgressions cited in Lev 18 and 20, sex with a menstruating woman is the only one that overlaps with permitted ritual impurities in the Priestly Source (P). Also speaking to the issue of ritual purity is the fact that the

main issue is the interaction of fluids (menstrual blood and semen) and not the legitimacy of the sexual union per se (as with adultery, same-sex intercourse, incest, and bestiality).

- Other than in Ezek 18:6 and 22:10, we hear not a word elsewhere in the Old Testament about the problem of sex with a menstruating woman.
- There is no clear carry-over of this proscription into the New Testament canon.
- Sex with a menstruating woman does not carry quite the same “unnatural” quality of having sex with one’s parents, someone of the same sex, or an animal. It happens inadvertently, in the course of normal sexual activity. In addition, the social-scientific case for avoiding incest, bestiality, adultery, and same-sex intercourse is a world away from the evidence for abstinence from sex during menstruation.<sup>83</sup>

Once more, I had already put most of these arguments for the enduring relevance of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 in print, in both a longer and shorter form.<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, Myers and Scanzoni simply chose to ignore these resources.

#### D. The Scripture Argument: The New Testament Witness

##### 1. A consensus view of the New Testament

The New Testament witness, like the Old Testament witness, is uniform in its presumption of a two-sex requirement for valid sexual unions. A two-sex requirement is not an isolated view confined to three short texts in Paul but rather the accepted consensus view of the entire New Testament. It is the *only* view. When Paul discussed homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27, he could assume as much agreement on this matter as on the matter of idolatry (1:19-23). It was not a position unique to him. And the fact that we have only three explicit references to same-sex intercourse in the entire Pauline corpus certainly does not mean that Paul thought of it as a relatively minor offense.

As for texts outside the Pauline corpus, we have already seen how the interpretation of the Sodom story in Jude 7 and 2 Pet 2:7 indicates opposition to male-male intercourse of any sort. There can be no doubt about what the author of Revelation thought about homosexual practice, given the author’s conservative sexual and social ethics (cf. the letters to the seven churches in chs. 2-3) and the parallel references to “the abominable” and “the dogs” in the lists of offenders in Rev 21:8 and 22:15 respectively (an apparent echo to Deut 23:18 and the Deuteronomistic *qedeshim* texts).

<sup>83</sup> See further my article, “Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts,” 100-3.

<sup>84</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 111-46; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 62-68; plus my online rejoinder to Via, pp. 22-28, at <http://www.robagnon.net/2Views/homoViaRejoinder.pdf>.

The views of the authors of the Gospels cannot be in doubt, given the material from these books that we cite below regarding Jesus' presuppositions. In addition, Luke's position is easily surmised from the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15 (vv. 20, 29; cf. 21:25). This Decree welcomed Gentile believers on the condition that they abstain from "sexual immorality" (*porneia*). It has clear links to the regulations binding on the resident alien in Lev 17-18, including the prohibition of male-male intercourse, and to the developing "Noahide" laws in early Judaism, which often highlighted a prohibition of homosexual practice.<sup>85</sup> Matthew's perspective on homosexual practice can hardly be different from Paul's, given his stress on doing the law and fulfilling the commands. Nothing in the Gospel of John, the most sectarian of all the Gospels, suggests a more "enlightened" position (cf. 4:17-18).

As with Old Testament, every New Testament text that treats sexual relations always presupposes a two-sex requirement.<sup>86</sup> This includes the image of Christ and the church as a bridegroom and bride, which picks up on the same Old Testament image for Yahweh and Israel.<sup>87</sup> There is not a shred of evidence anywhere in the Bible suggesting that same-sex sexual intercourse is any more acceptable than incest or adultery.<sup>88</sup>

This consensus view has to be kept in mind when one reads the attempts by Myers and Scanzoni to equate infrequency of explicit mention in Scripture with insignificance. For instance, they list the following as their first "major point" regarding what the Bible says: "The Bible has very little to say about same-sex sexual expression."<sup>89</sup> Yet merely counting up the number of texts that speak explicitly to homosexual practice — which, incidentally, they underestimate — while ignoring the mountain of inferential evidence in Scripture, connected as it is with real historical authors and communities, is a constricted and ahistorical way of viewing Scripture. It is important to note that bestiality has even fewer explicit mentions in Scripture than same-sex intercourse (Exod 22:19; Lev 18:23; 20:15-16; Deut 27:21). If we applied the rationale of Myers/Scanzoni here we would have to conclude that bestiality is one of the least significant sexual offenses in Scripture, when in fact it is considered one of the worse, perhaps the worse. Same-sex intercourse receives about as much attention in Scripture as incest.

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<sup>85</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 435-36.

<sup>86</sup> E.g., Mark 6:18 par.; 10:2-12, 17-22 par.; 13:18-27 par.; Luke 16:18 par.; Rom 7:1-6; 1 Cor 7; 9:5; 11:1-16; 1 Thess 4:3-8; Col 3:18-19; Eph 5:22-23; 1 Tim 3:2, 12; 5:14; 1 Pet 3:1-7.

<sup>87</sup> E.g., Isa 5:1-7; 54:5-7; 61:10; 62:4-5; Jer 2:2, 20-3:3; 31:32; Ezek 16, 23; Hos 1-3; Mark 2:19-20 par.; Matt 22:1-14; 25:1-13; John 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:30-32; Rev 19:7-9.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 432-41.

<sup>89</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 103. Cf. p. 85, the beginning of the same chapter: "... the small number of biblical passages commonly used in discussions of homosexuality."

## 2. Jesus' view: Silence as approval or indifference?

Like many supporters of homosexual unions, Myers and Scanzoni interpret the fact that we have no saying of Jesus expressly forbidding same-sex intercourse as evidence for Jesus' lack of disapproval for committed homosexual unions.

### a. Did Jesus not pick up on sexual differentiation in Gen 1:27 and 2:24?

Myers and Scanzoni react negatively to the following sentences from my short article, "Why 'Gay Marriage' Is Wrong":

Jesus adopted a "back-to-creation" model of sexuality. He treated Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 as normative and prescriptive for the church (Mark 10:6-9). In contending for the indissolubility of marriage, Jesus clearly presupposed the one explicit prerequisite in Gen 1:27 and 2:24; namely, that there be a male and female, man and woman, to effect the "one flesh" reunion.<sup>90</sup>

According to Myers and Scanzoni, Jesus' citation and interpretation of Gen 1:27 and 2:24 when dealing with the question of divorce in Mark 10:6-9 did not presuppose a male-female prerequisite to marriage but simply addressed, in generic terms, the issue of marital permanence.

Jesus' point in Mark 10:6-9 was not about sexual differentiation. . . . Jesus was talking about husbands and wives, males and females, who were already in a marriage relationship, *because that was what the religious leaders were asking about*. This was not a philosophical or theological discussion about sexual differences and the need for a merger between two incomplete halves.<sup>91</sup>

However, Myers' and Scanzoni's supposition that Jesus in Mark 10:6-9 was giving a generic interpretation to the creation texts, where the sex of the partners was incidental or irrelevant, is simply not credible in light of the historical and literary context. It is obvious that Jesus presupposed a two-sex requirement for marriage and that this presupposition was essential for his argument. First, the one common denominator between Gen 1:27 ("*male and female* he [God] made them") and Gen 2:24 ("For this reason *a man . . . will be joined to his woman [wife] and the two*<sup>92</sup> shall become one flesh") is the premise that marriage is constituted by the joining of two sexes into one: male/female, man/woman. Second, we have no evidence that anyone in Second Temple Judaism thought that the two-sex dimension of marriage found in the creation texts, or any other text of Scripture, was a merely incidental feature that could be supplanted by two men or two women without doing great injury to Scripture. Third, Jesus' back-to-back citation of Gen 1:27 and 2:24 highlights more strongly the connection between the joining and sexual differentiation: "For this reason" – namely, because God

<sup>90</sup> Pp. 3-4 of the online pdf version.

<sup>91</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 109.

<sup>92</sup> The Hebrew text (MT) reads "they" but all the ancient translations (LXX, Syriac, Samaritan Pentateuch, Aramaic Targums, Vulgate) read "the two." This was the accepted interpretation of the text in Jesus' day.

“made them male and female” sexual counterparts—“a man . . . will be joined to his woman and the two will become one flesh.” Fourth, Jesus clearly *predicated* his opposition to remarriage after divorce and (implicitly) to polygyny on the ‘twoness’ or dimorphic character of human sexuality. Two and only two, Jesus insisted, become one flesh: “so they are no longer two but one flesh” (Mark 10:8). The number two is not pulled from thin air. It is derived from the creation splitting of the original human into two sexes: “male and female,” “a man [and] his woman.” The union of the only two sexes that God ordained recreates a complete and sufficient sexual whole that is the basis for excluding additional parties. As we have argued above, the creation story in Gen 2:21-24 itself presupposes the necessity of two sexes in a marital bond.

**b. Ten reasons for assuming Jesus’ opposition to homosexual practice.** There are other sayings of Jesus, besides (1) *Jesus’ interpretation of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24* in Mark 10:6-9 (above). These other sayings, when taken in the context of early Judaism, implicitly forbid same-sex intercourse. These sayings of Jesus include:

(2) *Defilement from desires for various kinds of porneia.* According to Mark 7:21 Jesus interpreted his own saying about what defiles a man to refer to the self-defiling character of desires for “sexual immoralities” (*porneiai*) and the comparatively non-defiling character of foods ingested. *Porneia* in early Judaism consistently meant, at the top of the list of sexual offenses, same-sex intercourse, incest, adultery, and bestiality (cf. the prohibition of *porneia* in the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15). The saying also establishes that an analogy between food laws and sex laws, which Myers/Scanzoni and others make, is misguided (cf. 1 Cor 6:12-20 for a similar point by Paul).

(3) *The adultery commandment as heading for other sex laws.* In the context of early Judaism, Jesus’ affirmation of the Decalogue commandment against adultery (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18) in Mark 10:17-22 implies opposition to homosexual practice. Given the context of the fifth and tenth commandments (“honor your father and mother” and “you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife”), the seventh commandment clearly presupposed a man-woman union as the one valid form of marriage. Moreover, Jews in antiquity treated the seventh commandment as an overarching rubric for the major sex laws of the Old Testament, including prominently the prohibition of male-male intercourse.

(4) *Singling out Sodom.* Jesus’ acknowledgement of Sodom’s role in Scripture as the prime OT example of abuse of visitors (Matt 10:14-15 par. Luke 10:10-12) does not occur in a vacuum. A comparison with other Jewish interpretations of the Second Temple period suggests that a key factor for such an assessment was revulsion for the attempt at treating males sexually as females.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Myers and Scanzoni think it significant that, “even when Jesus talked about Sodom, he spoke only about its sins of inhospitality to strangers” (p. 92). This observation misses the point that the blatant disregard of

(5) *Not giving "what is holy to the dogs."* Jesus' warning against giving "what is holy to the dogs" in Matt 7:6 probably echoes Deut 23:17-18, which forbids the wages of a "dog" or so-called "holy man" [*qadesh*] from being used to pay a vow to the holy "house of Yahweh."

In addition to these sayings, a number of **contextual factors** also confirm Jesus' opposition to homosexual practice. These include:

(6) *Jesus' general view of the law of Moses.* If Jesus retained the law of Moses even in relatively light matters (cf. Matt 23:23 par. Luke 11:42 on minute tithing), what is the likelihood that he rejected or ignored a prohibition as strong and intense as the one against male-male intercourse? If Paul retained strong opposition to homosexual practice even though he spoke of the law's abrogation in Christ, what is the likelihood that Jesus, who did not speak of such abrogation, would have held some secret acceptance of homosexual practice?

(7) *Jesus' approach to sexual ethics.* Jesus intensified the law's demand in sexual ethics (divorce/remarriage and adultery of the heart), closing remaining loopholes and inconsistencies in the law's commandments. In addition, he insisted that serial, unrepentant sexual offenses were serious enough to get one thrown into hell (Matt 5:27-32; 19:3-12 par. Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; cf. 1 Cor 7:10-11). His outreach to sexual sinners was predicated not on personal indifference to sexual sins but rather on the conviction that unrepentant sexual sinners would perish when God's kingdom came.

(8) *Jesus and John the Baptist.* The man to whose baptism Jesus submitted and whom Jesus assessed as the greatest "among those born of women" (Matt 11:11 par. Luke 7:28), John the Baptist, felt strongly enough about Levitical sex laws to risk execution for criticizing Herod Antipas for a case of adult consensual incest (cf. Mark 6:17-29; Lev 18:13, 16; 20:21).<sup>94</sup> Does this suggest that Jesus would have thought violation of the Levitical prohibition against male-male intercourse an offense to be ignored – for example, if Herod Antipas had taken a male lover?

(9) *The univocal stance of early Judaism.* Jesus was a mid-first-century Jew. From extant texts we know of no other Jew within a couple of centuries of Jesus' life with any degree of openness to homosexual unions. Early Judaism maintained a universally intense stance *against* same-sex intercourse and *for* a male-female prerequisite for a valid sexual union.<sup>95</sup>

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the visitors' masculine stamp is part of what made Sodom's inhospitality so notorious in ancient Israelite lore. How do we know this? We know this because this was the common view of the story in Second Temple Judaism.

<sup>94</sup> Herod Antipas married the ex-wife of his half-brother Herod Philip, a woman who also happened to be the daughter of another half-brother.

<sup>95</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, ch. 2 ("Same-Sex Intercourse as 'Contrary to Nature' in Early Judaism").



(10) *The univocal stance of the early church.* The early church was completely united in the understanding that sexual relations had an inviolable two-sex prerequisite. No one had the slightest inkling that this universal view in the church might be misreading the teaching of Jesus.

It is historically untenable, to the point of being ludicrous, to suggest that Jesus secretly supported a form of behavior that (a) conflicted with his own use of the creation texts and other texts in context; and (b) was strongly rejected by his Scripture, the whole of Second Temple Judaism, the man who baptized him, and all his followers for centuries to come. Myers and Scanzoni never acknowledge the existence of these arguments, even though most of them are mentioned a scant two and three paragraphs after the sentences that they quote from my "Gay Marriage" article.

c. **Problems with the silence/love argument.** Despite this cumulative evidence, Myers and Scanzoni argue that readers should learn from the fact that "Jesus is not recorded as having said anything at all about homosexuality, but he said a great deal about loving our neighbor, being humble, avoiding judgmentalism, and caring about people who were hurting and regarded as outcasts."<sup>96</sup> Their reasoning is flawed on all counts.

(1) *The hermeneutical significance of Jesus' "silence," in context.* Regarding the silence claim and its alleged hermeneutical significance, the cumulative evidence cited above indicates that, in various ways, Jesus was not silent about homosexual practice. That Jesus did not speak more explicitly was a product of two obvious facts. First, no one in Second Temple Judaism was advocating for homosexual practice (the precise opposite is the case). Secondly, homosexual practice was unheard of among the Jews of Jesus' day.<sup>97</sup> One would not expect Jesus to warn people to refrain from a form of severe sexual misbehavior that no one was advocating, let alone known to be committing. That we hear from Paul at all on the issue is due to his mission to Gentiles. Until the last decade I myself never heard a single sermon or teaching against homosexual practice in any of the churches that I attended. Yet neither I nor any of my fellow parishioners concluded from this "silence" that the minister thought that homosexual intercourse was a relatively minor infraction of God's will, much less that it was no infraction at all. I also have never heard a sermon or teaching on why we shouldn't engage in incestuous, polysexual, or pedosexual practices. But I'm quite sure that the hermeneutical significance of this "silence" is not that these sexual practices are matters of relative insignificance. Rather, it is that these are

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<sup>96</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 103. This is their final bulleted "major point" at the end of the chapter on "What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say."

<sup>97</sup> Later, in the rabbinic period, when the question came up as to whether two unmarried men could sleep in the same cloak, most rabbis permitted it on the grounds that "Israel is not suspected" (*t. Qid.* 5:10); that is, homosexual practice was unknown among Jews of the time.

bedrock matters of human sexual ethics in Scripture that do not need to be expounded.

Perhaps we should be grateful for the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5. Had he not committed his offense, we would have not a single text in the New Testament expressing disapproval of adult incest. And then some Christians today might conclude that incest is a minor offense or no offense at all. Despite the absence of any specific saying of Jesus dealing with incest, Paul did not wonder, "What would Jesus do?" when he encountered a case of consensual incest at Corinth. He didn't feel the need to get together a Task Force to iron out the differences between the Corinthian church and himself on this matter. He didn't seek to put the matter behind him by emphasizing matters of agreement and the importance of unity. He didn't label firm opposition to incest hateful, ungracious, self-righteous, or judgmental. He confidently declared that the church should take disciplinary action in the name and power of "our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:4). And he added rhetorically: "Are you not to judge those inside [the church]?" (5:12). Based on the comment that Myers and Scanzoni make about "judgmentalism" it would appear that their answer to this question is "No." But that is the wrong answer.

(2) *Jesus and judgment.* The comment above about 1 Cor 5:12 leads to our next point. Although Jesus did speak against judging others (e.g., Matt 7:1-5 // Luke 6:37, 41-42), the point of doing so was to warn against judgment done without a loving intent to restore, without an acknowledgement of one's own failings, and over matters of relative insignificance.<sup>98</sup> He was not advocating that his followers cease making moral distinctions between good and bad behavior. The very next saying after Matt 7:1-5 is about not giving what is holy to dogs or throwing pearls before swine (7:6)—certainly not a non-judgmental statement. Even apart from Matthew's special material (M) and John's Gospel, where judgment sayings abound, warnings about future judgment for those who do not mend their ways appear in over one quarter of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels.<sup>99</sup>

(3) *Jesus and the love commandment.* Jesus' interpretation of the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" in Lev 19:18b included the element of reproof. The broader context for this command is Lev 19:17-18a, where love of neighbor means, on the one hand, not taking revenge on, hating, or holding a grudge against one's neighbor *and*, on the other hand, *reproving one's neighbor* if s/he does wrong, lest one incur guilt for failing to warn the offender. Jesus obviously accepted such an understanding of the second greatest commandment. Jesus maintained *both* "if your brother sins, rebuke him" *and* "if he repents, forgive him," even "if he sins seven times a day" (Luke 17:3-4; cf.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Paul's similar view expressed in Gal 6:1: restore a person caught in a transgression in a spirit of gentleness, keeping an eye on yourself lest you too be tempted."

<sup>99</sup> See my "Rejoinder to Walter Wink's Views," 5-14 (<http://www.robagnon.net/2Views/homoViaRejoinder.pdf>)

Matt. 18:15, 21-22). The parable of the "good Samaritan" in Luke 10:28-35 does not communicate that we should accept the beliefs and behaviors of others that are contrary to Scripture's core values (which Jesus, incidentally, did not do; cf. John 4:16-22). It asks us, rather, to broaden the meaning of "neighbor" from the vantage point of one lying half-dead by the side of the road. We should act as much in the interests of another as we would want others, even enemies, to act toward us in our time of need. To draw the parallel for the issue of homosexual practice, Christians should treat those who are homosexually active as friends to be won over to the path of life, not as enemies to be consigned callously to the path of death.<sup>100</sup>

(4) *Loving outreach as recovery for obedience.* The end of the previous point brings us to our final point about Jesus' witness. Jesus' aggressive outreach to the lost of Israel does not provide precedent today for support of committed homosexual unions. Yes, Jesus reached out to sinners—persons who had egregiously, and repeatedly, violated the law of Moses. Yet, no, he did not do so to perpetuate their sin. A case in point is Jesus' response to "tax collectors," the biggest economic exploiters among first-century Palestinian Jews. Jesus combined a compassionate outreach (Mark 2:15-17; Matt. 11:19 par. Luke 7:34; Luke 7:37-39; 15:1-10; 18:13; 19:7) with a vigorous critique of both materialism and callous disregard for the poor. The same course of action applied to sexual sinners: a heightened sexual ethic coupled with a compassionate mission to violators (Matt. 21:31-32; Luke 7:36-50; 15:30; John 4:16-18; 7:53-8:11). The parables of the lost sheep and lost son in Luke 15 make the point well: an aggressive outreach to the lost is necessary to reclaim them for the kingdom of God and to avert God's just judgment against them. The formerly lost son is thrown a party but not because he is ready to go out and spend the other half of his father's money on prostitutes and wasteful living. The son humbly and gratefully returns to his father's house, knowing that he is not worthy to be called a son and throwing himself on his father's mercy, as a metaphor of repentance and restoration. Similarly, when Jesus protected the woman caught in adultery from the penalty of stoning (John 8:3-11), he was not communicating that adultery was a minor offense. Rather, in stimulating the woman's repentance through an act of kindness, Jesus was trying to prevent a worse fate from befalling her on the day of judgment (cf. John 8:11 with 5:14). Simply put, dead people don't repent. And failure to repent can lead to cataclysmic destruction at the coming of God's kingdom. So every effort must be expended to reclaim unrepentant persons for the kingdom of God.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> On this parable see my article, "A Second Look at Two Lukan Parables: Reflections on the Unjust Steward and the Good Samaritan," *HBT* 20 (1998): 1-11; also, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 226-227.

<sup>101</sup> Luke 10:13-15 par. Matt 10:15; 11:22-24; Luke 11:29-32 par. Matt 12:39-41; Luke 5:32; 13:3-5; 15:7, 10; Mark 1:15; 6:12.

In sum, all the evidence pertaining to Jesus points strongly in one direction; namely, that Jesus would have been, and is, appalled by any approval of homosexual practice and would have, and is, lovingly seeking to restore to holiness those engaged in such practice. The evidence that Myers and Scanzoni adduce for claiming otherwise does not have the hermeneutical import that they claim for it. Myers and Scanzoni are without any credible, historical basis for arguing that Jesus would have been accepting of, or at least relatively indifferent toward, homosexual activity. Once again, we see how Myers and Scanzoni have shut their eyes, and the eyes of their readers, to the strong evidence against their position.<sup>102</sup>

### 3. Paul *versus* the “new knowledge” arguments<sup>103</sup>

In their discussion of Scripture generally and their treatment of Pauline texts in particular (Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10) Myers and Scanzoni are insistent about two main points: There is no indication in these texts of any opposition to homosexual unions that (1) are committed and (2) entered into by persons with innate same-sex attractions. The flip side of this argument is that Paul’s (and, generally, Scripture’s) indictment of homosexual practice is aimed solely at (1) exploitative, promiscuous, or idolatrous forms of homosexual practice that are (2) perpetrated by constitutional heterosexuals. I call these two types of arguments *the exploitation argument* and *the orientation argument*, respectively. Parallel arguments, with some modification, could be made for committed polyamorous relationships and committed incestuous relationships.<sup>104</sup> These arguments have in common the fact that they ignore absolute, formal requirements based on the structures of embodied existence.

At the beginning of their chapter on “What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say” Myers and Scanzoni waste no time in making known their twofold “new knowledge” argument:

In the few places where same-sex sexual *acts* are mentioned in Scripture, the context suggests idolatry, violent rape, lust, exploitation, or promiscuity. Nothing is said about homosexual *orientation* as understood through modern science, nor is anything said about the loving relationship of two same-sex persons who have covenanted to be life partners.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See further *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 185-228; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 68-74.

<sup>103</sup> The nomenclature “new knowledge argument” is my own.

<sup>104</sup> For example, one might argue that Jesus’ remarks in Mark 10:6-9 about the ‘twoness’ of sexual bonds do not take into consideration multiple-partner unions that are committed, loving, fully reciprocal, and entered into by persons of polysexual or even bisexual orientation. Or one could argue that the Bible’s incest laws do not speak against loving incestuous unions between consenting adults in which women are given equal standing with men. These are not valid assertions but they are no more invalid than the kinds of claims made by Myers/Scanzoni and other proponents of homosexual unions.

<sup>105</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 86-87.

When introducing the most important New Testament texts, they remind readers:

[M]any biblical scholars are convinced that these passages have nothing to do with homosexual *orientation* and committed homosexual relationships as we know them today.<sup>106</sup>

Although they hedge their claim here by referring to “many biblical scholars,” they never discuss any arguments by other biblical scholars for reading the Pauline texts or other biblical texts as inclusive of commitment and orientation. When discussing 1 Cor 6:9-10 and 1 Tim 1:9-10 they indicate to readers that the meaning of the terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* either can’t be known or (following Scroggs) has to do with sex between men and male “call-boys.”<sup>107</sup> They limit the relevance of Paul’s remarks in Rom 1:26-27 to same-sex intercourse that occurs in the context of “unbridled lust, idolatry, and promiscuity” on the part of overheated heterosexual men.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, in their bulleted “major points” at the end of the same chapter they reiterate:

- The few verses that speak of same-sex acts must be seen *in their context* and in relation to the condemnation of idolatry, lust, promiscuity, and exploitation.
- Scripture does not speak to naturally disposed same-sex orientation, nor does it speak to loving, committed homosexual relationships.<sup>109</sup>

Later, in their next chapter (“What God Has Joined Together?”), Myers and Scanzoni hint that Paul’s opposition to homosexual practice may also be driven by a third concern; namely, to maintain male dominance over women. I call this the misogyny argument.<sup>110</sup>

I will respond to each of the three main “new knowledge” arguments in turn. At the outset, though, two points can be made about these arguments.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 93-97. Their ‘analysis’ of the terms in 1 Cor 6:9 consists solely of a listing of different committee translations.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 98-100; citing Verhey and alluding to Scroggs and Countryman.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 110-11, citing Bernadette Brooten without criticism. Brooten is very clear in her work that Paul’s critique of homosexual practice is motivated entirely by a desire to keep women down. Myers and Scanzoni are more evasive about whether Paul himself is motivated by male chauvinism or only those modern commentators who speak of male-female complementarity (see the vague discussion in the last full paragraph at the bottom of p. 111). They do not want to appear to the reader to be “discarding or demeaning Scripture” (ibid.). But they do seem to be suggesting that Paul is at least acquiescing to the “ancient social order” of strict gender roles, if not actually teaching it as normative.

a. **Trends in the use of new knowledge arguments.** The significance given to each of these arguments has varied among individual proponents of homosexual unions and, more importantly, chronologically within pro-homosex circles of the academy and church. The exploitation argument initially held pride of place in the academy of scholars, due largely to the work of New Testament scholar Robin Scroggs (1983).<sup>111</sup> In time his arguments filtered down to the church; namely, that St. Paul and other authors of Scripture opposed homosexual practice solely on the grounds that it took the form of pederasty (man-boy sex) and that usually in the form of prostitution (sex with call-boys) or slavery (sex with unwilling slaves).

Eventually, though, problems with the exploitation argument (see below) led many scholars to subordinate it to, if not replace it with, an orientation argument. Allegedly, the ancients had no knowledge of a congenitally influenced, and sometimes exclusive, attraction to members of the same sex when they applied their *contra naturam* ("against nature") arguments. Thus, too, they had no knowledge of the hardship that an absolute ban on homosexual practice would create for some persons. Scholars and churchman alike took on this argument as scientific studies increasingly reported a significant degree of congenital influence behind homosexual practice.

However, while it remains the dominant argument in the church today, many pro-homosex scholars have abandoned it for the misogyny argument, or at least relegated it to secondary status.<sup>112</sup> They could not deny that a number of theories were floated in antiquity that posited significant congenital causation for at least some forms of homosexual practice. Sometimes these theories were held even by opponents of these very practices. So some pro-homosex scholars suggested that Paul and others participated in a misogynistic worldview that could only conceptualize men as higher-status penetrators and women as lower-status penetrated persons. The misogyny position has not yet seeped fully into church debates, partly, I think, because it puts forward a very cynical view of Scripture.<sup>113</sup> However, it will probably be the next wave after informed ministers and laity realize the untenable character of the exploitation and orientation arguments.

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<sup>111</sup> Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*.

<sup>112</sup> E.g., Bird, "The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation Concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions"; Brooten, *Love Between Women*; Fredrickson, "Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24-27"; Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32"; Moore, "Sex and the Single Apostle"; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*; Diana M. Swancutt, "The Disease of Effemination: The Charge of Effeminacy and the Verdict of God (Romans 1:18-2:16)," *New Testament Masculinities* (SBL Semeia Studies 45; ed. S. D. Moore and J. C. Capel; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 193-234. Some of these scholars somewhat inconsistently hold the misogyny argument in tandem with the exploitation argument and/or orientation argument. Brooten is a notable exception.

<sup>113</sup> Again, note the cautious and ambiguous manner in which Myers and Scanzoni employ such an argument.

**b. Tension between two or more new knowledge arguments.** The second point to note about these three main “new knowledge” arguments is that they stand in some tension to each other. This tension is often not recognized, even by scholarly advocates for committed homosexual unions. If the litmus test for validating a sexual union is that the parties exhibit care and concern for each other, of what relevance is an orientation argument? Especially the misogyny argument is at odds with the other two new knowledge arguments. It suggests that Paul, for example, would not have accepted homosexual unions even of a nonexploitative sort conducted by people with an exclusive and fixed same-sex orientation. Even the latter type of union would have threatened a sexual paradigm of male dominance and female submission.<sup>114</sup> I believe that the tendency on the part of pro-homosex interpreters to lump all three new knowledge arguments together can be traced to the fact that Scripture is not the main concern of these interpreters. Scripture is largely an obstacle to be overcome or neutralized. For such an objective it matters less *which* argument silences anti-homosex texts in Scripture than that *an* argument be found to silence these texts. The concern is to bring the biblical witness into harmony with personal experience.

**c. The case against the exploitation argument.** The case against the exploitation argument is overwhelming. Even a number of scholars writing on behalf of homosexual unions acknowledge this. Paul’s opposition to homosexual practice was not limited only to particularly exploitative forms such as sexual intercourse with male prostitutes, boys, or slaves, or to homosexual practice associated with idolatrous cults. There is no basis for supposing that, had Paul known the kind of committed and caring adult homosexual relationships that we see today, he would have had a positive view of loving homosexual behavior.

**(1) Intertextual echoes to the creation texts in Rom 1:23-27 and 1 Cor 6:9-20.** Paul clearly echoes Gen 1:26-27 in his critique of idolatry and homosexual practice in Rom 1:18-27 and cites Gen 2:24 in close connection with his reference to male-male intercourse in 1 Corinthians 6:9.<sup>115</sup> That means that the standard used by Paul for assessing homosexual behavior was not just how well or badly it was done in his own cultural context but whether it conformed to God’s will in creation for male-female pairing. Paul, then, obviously thought that the primary problem with homosexual practice was not what it happened to be in his cultural context but rather what it wasn’t and could never be: a structurally congruous joining of the two sexes, male and female.

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<sup>114</sup> For example, Nissinen states *both* that Paul may have accepted committed homosexual unions by homosexually oriented persons if only he had known of such things (*Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 124, 128) *and* that Paul could not have accepted any homosexual union because it confused the notion that men had to be “on top” in relation to a women (*ibid.*, 108-9, 129).

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 361-80; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 77-78; and especially pp. 182-87, 206-13, 242-46 of my “Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture*, Part 2.”

In Rom 1:23-27 Paul talks about humans exchanging the Creator for worship of idols made “in the *likeness* of the *image* of a perishable *human* and of *birds* and *animals* and *reptiles*” (1:23); then about “*females* [who] exchanged the natural use” and “*males* leaving behind the natural use of the female” to have intercourse with other “*males*” (1:26-27). This obviously echoes Genesis 1:26-27: “Let us make a *human* according to our *image* and . . . *likeness*; and let them rule over the . . . *birds* . . . *cattle* . . . and . . . *reptiles*. And God created the human in his image, . . . *male* and *female* he created them.” There are here not only eight points of correspondence between Gen 1:26-27 and Rom 1:23, 26-27 but also a threefold sequential agreement: (1) God’s *likeness* and *image* in humans; (2) dominion over the animal kingdom (*birds, animals, reptiles*); and (3) *male-female* differentiation. Even the arrangement of the elements in the two sets of text generally coincides:

Gen 1:26-27

Rom 1:23, 26-27

**A. God’s likeness and image in humans**

- |     |                               |                               |     |
|-----|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----|
| (1) | human ( <i>anthropos</i> )    | likeness ( <i>homoioima</i> ) | (3) |
| (2) | image ( <i>eikon</i> )        | image ( <i>eikon</i> )        | (2) |
| (3) | likeness ( <i>homoiosis</i> ) | human ( <i>anthropos</i> )    | (1) |

**B. Dominion over the animal kingdom**

- |     |                             |                                 |     |
|-----|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----|
| (4) | birds ( <i>peteina</i> )    | birds ( <i>peteina</i> )        | (4) |
| (5) | cattle ( <i>ktene</i> )     | quadrupeds ( <i>tetrapoda</i> ) | (5) |
| (6) | reptiles ( <i>herpeta</i> ) | reptiles ( <i>herpeta</i> )     | (6) |

**C. Male-female differentiation**

- |     |                          |                             |                    |
|-----|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| (7) | male ( <i>arsen</i> )    | females ( <i>theleiai</i> ) | (8)                |
| (8) | female ( <i>thelus</i> ) | males ( <i>arsenes</i> )    | (7) <sup>116</sup> |

<sup>116</sup> There are two slight differences in the order of the elements but both differences can be readily explained. (1) The sequence of human-image-likeness in Gen 1:26 is inverted in Rom 1:23 to likeness-image-human (“they exchanged the glory of the imperishable *God* for the *likeness* of an *image* of a perishable *human*”). The reason is that Paul is making a second intertextual echo in Rom 1:23 by also alluding to Ps 106:20: “*they* (i.e. the Israelites in the golden calf episode) *exchanged* their (or: his) *glory* for the *likeness* of a calf eating grass.” Although the focus of Paul’s charge in Rom 1:18-32 is on Gentile culpability for suppressing the truth about God, Paul also wants to anticipate the indictment of Israel in Rom 2:1-3:9. This second intertextual echo to Ps 106:20 does not discount the first to Gen 1:26-27; it simply adds to the richness of Paul’s argument. (2) The sequence male-female in Gen 1:27 is inverted to female-male in Rom 1:26-27. What accounts for this difference? When Paul refers to female-female intercourse in Rom 1:26 he begins with the words “*Even* their females . . .” While many in the Greco-Roman world extolled the virtues of male-male sexual intimacy, no male in the ancient world sang the praises of lesbian intercourse. Paul thus begins with the easiest indictment of homoerotic relations first, an indictment that nearly all would concede (female-female intercourse), and then proceeds to the more disputed case in the ancient world (male-male intercourse).



What is the point of the echo in Rom 1:23-27 to Gen 1:26-27? Idolatry and same-sex intercourse constitute a frontal assault on the work of the Creator in nature. Those who suppressed the truth about God transparent in creation were more likely to suppress the truth about the complementarity of the sexes transparent in nature, choosing instead to gratify contrary innate impulses.

Just as Gen 1:26-27 lies in the background of Paul's remarks in Rom 1:23-27, so too Paul cites Gen 2:24 ("... the two shall become one flesh") in close proximity to his indictment of men who lie with males in 1 Cor 6:9 (cf. 6:16). The immediate point of the citation was to show that sexual intercourse per se, not just intercourse in the context of a marital commitment, has a bonding effect on the participants. Thus a Christian man engaged in unholy sexual intercourse with a prostitute (6:15-17), one's stepmother (ch. 5), another man's wife or other males (6:9) brings the indwelling Christ into the act. However, given the echo to Gen 1:27 in Rom 1:23-27, Paul could not have missed the relevance of Gen 2:24a-b ("a man shall... become joined to his woman") for his rejection of male homosexual intercourse in 1 Cor 6:9.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, his use of Gen 1:27 and 2:21-22 later in the same letter (11:7-12), though it has problems, clearly shows that Paul regarded these texts as integral for establishing the significance of male-female differentiation in the context of marriage. Moreover, the discussion of hair and headgear has overtones of concern for homosexual practice; namely, that by deliberately obliterating markers of sexual differentiation the community might move down a slippery slope of embracing homoerotic relations.

Hence in his two primary critiques of homosexual practice Paul took the same two creation texts that Jesus lifted up as decisive for defining sexual ethics, Gen 1:27 and 2:24, and applied them to various sexual issues, including an absolute rejection of homosexual practice. If the two-sex requirement of the creation texts is the standard against which Paul is rejecting homosexual practice, then a distinction between exploitative and non-exploitative homosexual practice would be beside the point.

(2) *The nature argument in Romans 1:26-27.* Paul's nature argument in Romans 1:26-27 is also not the kind of argument that lends itself to a distinction in Paul's mind between good and bad forms of homosexual practice: "their females exchanged the natural use for that which is contrary to nature; and likewise also the males, having left behind the natural use of the female. . . ." Nature for Paul here refers to the material structures of creation, still intact despite the fall of Adam and still giving evidence for God's will even to those without access to the revelation of Scripture. This is precisely the point made in

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<sup>117</sup> It is every bit as inconceivable as suggesting that Paul would not have discerned a link between Gen 2:24 and his reference to "adulterers" in 1 Cor 6:9, immediately preceding his reference to "soft men" and "men who lie with males."

the parallel discussion about idolatry in 1:19-24; namely, that humans (here primarily Gentiles) are culpable not merely for sinning but, even more, for suppressing the knowledge of the truth accessible to them in creation structures.

Thus Rom 1:19-20 emphasizes:

The knowable aspect of God is visible (or: transparent, apparent, evident) to them because God has made it visible to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible qualities are clearly seen, being mentally apprehended by means of the things made.

For Paul the sin of same-sex intercourse provides the perfect complement on the horizontal level to the sin of idolatry on the vertical level. For, like the sin of idolatry, it involves the suppression of truth that should be obvious to all by means of the "things made," here the complementarity of our gendered bodies in terms of genital fit, physiology (including procreative capacity) and various interpersonal features distinctive to men and women. Female-female intercourse and male-male intercourse are "beyond nature" (*para phusin*), contextually in the negative sense of being "contrary to" or "against nature," because they "dishonor" this self-evident complementarity of male and female "bodies" through a bodily incongruous union with a structural same. The issue of exploitation by having sex with a minor, slave, or prostitute is simply irrelevant to a global indictment based on gender incompatibility.

Myers and Scanzoni misunderstand the nature argument in Rom 1:24-27 in at least two ways. First, they assume that Paul's remarks do not apply to persons who don't worship idols. They ask: "What does the passage have to do with two same-sex persons who have never turned to other gods and who love and serve their Creator wholeheartedly, but who yet desire a faithful, committed relationship of the kind we are discussing in this book?"<sup>118</sup> But this misunderstands Paul. While Paul presents homosexual practice as a consequence of idolatry it is clear that he does not see idolatry in the strict sense (i.e., the worship of statues or other images) as a necessary precursor to homosexual practice. Romans 1:24-27 says nothing about how homosexual desire originates. It says only that God "gave/handed over" idolaters to such desire and to other desires (1:24, 26, 28) – desires that were apparently preexisting but not overpowering. In other words, God stepped back and did not intervene to restrain sinful desires from mastering the behavior of those worshipping idols. The story presented in Rom 1:18-32 is not about the origination of sin (for which see the discussion of Adam's fall in Rom 5:12-21) but rather about how it is that sinful *practices* are qualitatively and quantitatively greater in the Gentile world than in the Jewish world. Paul is speaking of collective entities, not individuals, and in terms of widespread effect, not origin. Certainly none of the other vices

<sup>118</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 99.

enumerated in 1:29-31 require prior worship of statues, even though here too Paul treats such vices as the consequence of worshipping idols and God's handing over (1:28).<sup>119</sup>

The same point can be made with respect to the vice list in 1 Cor 6:9-10, where obviously none of the vices, including that of male-male intercourse, presupposes prior worship of statues (excepting, of course, the vice of idolatry). Paul knew that a believer could as well engage in male-male intercourse as in man-mother incest (1 Cor 5) quite apart from participating in idol worship in the strict sense. Indeed, the context of both the real case of the incestuous man in ch. 5 and the hypothetical example of a believer having sex with prostitutes in 6:15-20 presupposes that Christian offenders are primarily in view in 6:9-10.<sup>120</sup>

So it is certainly incorrect for Myers and Scanzoni to suggest that Rom 1:24-27 gives us no indication of Paul's view of 'Christian' same-sex intercourse. For Paul, any person who engaged in homosexual practice would be attempting a structurally incongruous union at odds with the Creator's design and intent, irrespective of whether such behavior was the conscious outcome of bowing down before statues resembling humans or animals. Connection with idolatry is at one level incidental. Why not permit same-sex intercourse within the cult of Yahweh? Why does Paul single out same-sex intercourse committed by idolaters as wrong and not, say, other-sex intercourse committed by idolaters? Simply laying same-sex intercourse at the doorstep of idolatry does not explain why Paul finds this particular activity committed by idolaters, and not some others, so very wrong. At another level there is an intrinsic link between homosexual practice and idolatry in a looser sense. For homosexual practice entails the conscious suppression of the visible and self-evident truth that the Creator shaped male and female as complementary counterparts for sexual pairing and not "males with males" (Rom 1:27) or females with females (1:26). It is a rebellion against the Creator on the horizontal level, as idolatry is on the vertical level. And it is so whether or not the perpetrator acknowledges it to be so. Claiming allegiance to Christ's lordship and even possessing Christ's Spirit doesn't change that reality but only makes it worse since it makes Christ an accomplice to the sin (cf. 1 Cor 6:16-17, which has the incest case in 1 Cor 5 still in the background). Persons who engage in homosexual practice by definition do not "love and serve their Creator wholeheartedly," for, if they did, they would not be engaging in homosexual practice. Sinful desires may not be chosen but behavior always is. Whether service of God is wholehearted or not is determined in the first instance

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<sup>119</sup> Note that Rom 1:18-32 is an extended vice list, focusing first on idolatry, 1:19-23, then on sexual immorality with same-sex intercourse as the highlighted case, 1:24-27, and finally on a range of other vices, 1:29-31.

<sup>120</sup> See, further, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 284-89 ("Did Paul Think Only Idol Worshipers Could Engage in Same-Sex Intercourse?").

by obedience to God's commands, not by some claim to having good motives when disobeying God's commands.

The second misunderstanding of the nature argument in Rom 1:24-27 by Myers and Scanzoni surfaces in their next question: "If same-sex sexual acts are considered unnatural . . . , what can be said to women and men of homosexual orientation who say that *heterosexuality* is unnatural to them?"<sup>121</sup> Indeed, what can be said to women and men of polysexual or pedosexual orientation who say that monosexuality and teleiosexuality (sex with adults) is unnatural to them? *Nature* for Paul meant something structurally broader than "sexual orientation" or congenitally influenced attractions and desires. Paul did not characterize all biologically related impulses as existing *according to nature*. He distinguished between, on the one hand, innate passions perverted by the fall and exacerbated by idol worship and, on the other hand, that part of material creation least likely to be marred by human sin. The latter would be the best indication of God's intended structural design for human sexuality. Immediately following his reference to same-sex intercourse, Paul gives a list of other vices that certainly have some innate basis—for example, covetousness, envy, and arrogance—and yet do not for that reason accord with nature (1:29-31). Innate desires are notoriously unreliable indicators of God's will, as an array of sexually impure impulses also proves. Paul would never have described as *according to nature* a sexual orientation that, from a scriptural standpoint, was incompatible with essential embodied existence as a gendered being. There are two sexes, each structurally configured and open-ended to the other. A male's desire to merge with what he already sexually is, or a female's desire to merge with what she already sexually is, does not alter the fact that the desire is for something that is both structurally incongruous and inherently narcissistic.

(3) *Exchange, mutuality, and lesbianism in Romans 1:26-27*. Other features of Romans 1:26-27 rule out a focus on particularly exploitative behavior. (a) The wording of 1:26-27 regarding "exchanging" and "leaving behind" the other sex for the same sex is absolute and clearly inclusive of all same-sex sexual relations: "their females exchanged the natural use . . . and likewise also the males, having left behind the natural use of the female, were inflamed with their yearning for one another, males with males . . ." What is the point of Paul charging males with "leaving behind" sexual intercourse with "the female" and females with "exchanging" natural intercourse (with the male) if his indictment is aimed solely at an exploitative subset of same-sex unions? Would he not rather have to say that they exchanged or left behind loving consensual relationships with a person of either sex? This is precisely what he does not say. (b) In fact, the wording in 1:27 stresses the mutuality of affections: ". . . were inflamed with their

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<sup>121</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 99.

yearning for one another" (similarly, 1:24: "their bodies being dishonored among themselves"). (c) Further, the mention of lesbian intercourse in 1:26 does not fit with a focus on intercourse with prostitutes, slaves, and adolescents, since in the ancient world lesbianism is neither known nor critiqued primarily for such practices.<sup>122</sup>

In short, there is nothing in Paul's critique of homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27 about an absence of loving commitment. "Passions of dishonor" (1:26) clearly refers to passions to engage in a sexual "use" or function of the body that is "in deviation from nature" (1:26), namely, a use in which females exchange intercourse with males for intercourse with fellow females and, likewise, males leave behind intercourse with females for intercourse with fellow males ("males with males," 1:27), thereby "dishonoring their bodies among themselves" (1:24). The notion put forward by some,<sup>123</sup> and embraced also by Myers and Scanzoni,<sup>124</sup> that Paul is only concerned with excess passion (cf. "inflamed in their yearning" in 1:27) and not with the gender of the participants gets Paul's critique backwards. 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." Indeed, how would one

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<sup>122</sup> Myers and Scanzoni (citing Boswell) state that "it is not clear whether sexual expression *between two women* was the intended meaning." A few other scholars have followed Boswell; for example: James E. Miller, "The Practices of Romans 1:26: Homosexual or Heterosexual?" *NovT* 37 [1995]: 1-11; Fredrickson, "Romans 1:24-27," 201 n. 15). Most commentators, however, do recognize that female-female intercourse is being indicted in Rom 1:26, including Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 248-52. The parallel phrasing of Romans 1:26 and 1:27 leaves little doubt: "even *their females exchanged the natural use* [i.e. of the male] for one contrary to nature, and *likewise also the males, having left the natural use of the female*, were inflamed in their yearning for one another, males with males." For the "likewise also" of 1:27 to be appropriate, both the thing exchanged and the thing exchanged *for* must be comparable—here sex with members of the same sex, not non-coital sex. Male and female homoeroticism are paired often enough in ancient sources—for example, in Charicles's argument against same-sex intercourse in (pseudo-)Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart* 28—so that there to be nothing surprising about such a pairing in Rom 1:26-27. In addition, while it was commonplace in the Greco-Roman world to refer to female homoeroticism as "unnatural," there are no explicit references to anal or oral *heterosexual* intercourse as unnatural. Finally, in the context of the Greco-Roman world, it is not possible that Paul could have been strongly opposed to male homosexual practice while being favorably disposed to female homoeroticism. For although some Greco-Roman moralists were open to specific forms of male homoerotic practice, attitudes toward female homosexual practice were uniformly negative. Paul's statement that "even their women" engage in such practices underscores the point. That Paul and other biblical authors were opposed to lesbian intercourse can be taken as an historical given. Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 297-99.

<sup>123</sup> E.g., Martin, "Heterosexism," 339-49; Fredrickson, "Romans 1:24-27," 200-201; Victor P. Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues* (2d ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 60-65.

<sup>124</sup> Myers and Scanzoni refer to "a context of unbridled lust," state that Gentiles turned to "the god of lust, as shown in the phrase 'consumed with passion,'" and quote Allen Verhey's comment that "homosexual behaviors were evidently understood by Paul as prompted by an insatiable lust" (*What God Has Joined Together?*, 98-100; Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 237).

know to define a given passion as excessive apart from some prior understanding about what is wrong with the behavior in question?<sup>125</sup>

(4) *“Soft men” and “men who lie with a male” (1 Cor 6:9) in context.* The terms *malakoi* (literally, “soft men”) and *arsenokoitai* (literally, “men lying with a male”) in 1 Cor 6:9 also do not suggest any kind of restriction to exploitative practices. The sense of *malakoi* as “men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners” is evident from: its place in the vice list amidst other participants in illicit sexual intercourse, its pairing with the immediately following word *arsenokoitai*, Philo of Alexandria’s use of cognate words, and instances where the parallel Latin word *molles* is used to refer to effeminate *adult* males who are biologically and/or psychologically disposed to desire penetration by men. The complaint about such figures in the ancient world generally, and certainly by Philo, centers around their attempted erasure of the masculine stamp given them by God/nature, not their exploitation of others, age difference, or acts of prostitution.<sup>126</sup>

The word *arsenokoitai* is a compound formed from the Greek words for “lying” (*koite*) and “male” (*arsen*) that appear in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Levitical prohibitions of men “lying with a male” (18:22; 20:13). The rabbis used the corresponding Hebrew abstract expression *mishkaw zakur*, “lying of/with a male,” drawn from the Hebrew texts of Lev 18:22 and 20:13. This way of talking about male homosexuality is a distinctly Jewish and Christian formulation, undoubtedly used as a way of distinguishing their absolute opposition to homosexual practice, rooted in the Torah of Moses, from more accepting views in the Greco-Roman milieu. The appearance of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Tim 1:10 makes the link to the Mosaic law explicit, since the list of vices of which *arsenokoitai* is a part are said to be derived from “the law” (1:9).

That Jews of the period construed the Levitical prohibitions of male-male intercourse absolutely and against a backdrop of a male-female requirement is beyond dispute. For example, Josephus explained to Gentile readers that “the law [of Moses] recognizes only sexual intercourse that is according to nature, that which is with a woman. . . . But it abhors the intercourse of males with males” (*Against Apion* 2.199). There are no limitations placed on the prohibition as regards age, slave status, idolatrous context, or exchange of money. The only limitation is the sex of the participants. According to *b. Sanh.* 54a, the male with whom a man lays in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 may be “an adult or minor,” meaning

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. my “Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture*, Part 2,” 217-19; *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 380-92.

<sup>126</sup> E.g., Philo, *Cont. Life* 59-60; *Spec. Laws* 3.37-42; *Abraham* 135-6. On *malakoi* see *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, 82-83, esp. with online notes 97-99 at <http://www.robgagnon.net/2Views/HomoViaRespNotesRev.pdf>; also, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 306-12.

that the prohibition of male-male unions is not limited to pederasty. The term *arsenokoites* and cognates after Paul (the term appears first in Paul) are applied solely to male-male intercourse but, consistent with the meaning of the partner term *malakoi*, not limited to pederasts or clients of cult prostitutes.

This absolute and inclusive sense is further confirmed not only by Paul's longer treatment of male-male intercourse in Romans 1:27 ("males with males") but also by the broader context of 1 Cor 5-7: the parallel case of incest in ch. 5 (which gives no exceptions for committed, loving unions and echoes both Levitical and Deuteronomic law), the vice list in 6:9-11 (where sexual offenders are distinguished from idolaters, consent is presumed, and a warning is given to believers not to engage in such behavior any longer), the analogy to sex with a prostitute in 6:12-20 (where Gen 2:24 is cited as the absolute norm and the Christian identity of the offender is presumed), and the issue of marriage in ch. 7 (which presumes throughout that sex is confined to male-female marriage).<sup>127</sup>

(5) *Caring homosexuality and universal critiques in Greece and Rome.* The Greco-Roman milieu of Paul's day supplies us with two additional reasons why Paul's opposition to homosexual practice was not grounded in a perceived absence of loving commitment in homosexual relationships.

One reason is that the conception of caring homoerotic unions existed in Paul's cultural environment. For example, in Plato's *Symposium* Aristophanes refers to males who are "not inclined by nature toward marriage and the procreation of children, yet are compelled to do so by the law or custom" and must "live their lives out with one another unmarried." When those who are "fondly welcoming that which is of the same kind"

happen upon that very person who is his half . . . they are wonderfully struck with affectionate regard and a sense of kinship and love, almost not wanting to be divided even for a short time. And these are they who continue with one another throughout life. . . . [the lover] desiring to join together and to be fused into a single entity with his beloved and to become one person from two."  
(192)<sup>128</sup>

Similarly in the much later work, the Pseudo-Lucianic *Affairs of the Heart* (ca. A.D. 300) Callicratidas defends love for males by arguing, in part, that "reciprocal expressions of love" between a man and his young male beloved reach a point where "it is difficult to perceive which of the two is a lover of which, as though in a mirror. . . . Why then do you reproach it . . . when it was ordained by divine laws . . . ?" (48). There are numerous examples of committed homosexual love in antiquity (see texts in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, edited by Thomas K. Hubbard).<sup>129</sup> Had Paul and other Jews of the period opposed only unloving

<sup>127</sup> Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 312-36; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 83-88.

<sup>128</sup> Translations here and below are my own.

<sup>129</sup> Subtitle: *A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 2003).

kinds of homosexual unions, they could easily have made the distinction in their writings.

The second reason for recognizing the absolute quality of Paul's anti-homosex indictment is that even some emerging Greco-Roman thought rejected homosexual practice completely. As Hubbard notes, the first few centuries of the common era "bear witness to an increasing polarization of attitudes toward homosexual activity, ranging from frank acknowledgement and public display . . . to severe moral condemnation of all homosexual acts."<sup>130</sup> He adds: "Basic to the heterosexual position is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other."<sup>131</sup> Such arguments transcend the issue of individual exploitative acts and reject homosexual acts categorically.

For example, Plutarch's friend Daphnaeus admits that homosexual relationships are not necessarily exploitative, for "union contrary to nature does not destroy or curtail a lover's tenderness." Yet, he declares, even when a "union with males" is conducted "willingly" it remains "shameful" since males "with softness (*malakia*) and effeminacy (*thelutes*) [are] surrendering themselves, as Plato says, 'to be mounted in the custom of four-footed animals and to be sowed with seed contrary to nature'" (*Dialogue on Love* 751). Similarly, as Craig A. Williams notes, "some kind of argument from 'design' seems to lurk in the background of Cicero's, Seneca's, and Musonius' claims: the penis is 'designed' to penetrate the vagina, the vagina is 'designed' to be penetrated by the penis."<sup>132</sup> The second-century (A.D.) physician Soranus (or his fifth-century "translator" Caelius Aurelianus) characterized desires of "soft men" to be penetrated by other men as "not from nature" insofar as they "subjugated to obscene uses parts not so intended" and disregarded "the places of our body which divine providence destined for definite functions" (4.9.131). Part of Charicles' attack on all homosexual practice in *Affairs of the Heart* is the assertion that male-male love is an erotic attraction for what one already is as a sexual being:

She (*viz.*, Aphrodite) cleverly devised a twofold nature in each (species). . . . having written down a divinely sanctioned rule of necessity, that each of the two (genders) remain in their own nature and that neither should the female be masculinized contrary to nature nor too should the male be softened (*malakizesthai*) in an inappropriate manner. . . . Then wantonness, daring all, transgressed the laws of nature. . . . And who then first looked with the eyes at the male as at a female . . . ? One nature came together in one bed. But *seeing themselves in one another* they were ashamed neither of what they were doing nor of what they were having done to them. (19-20; emphasis added).

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>132</sup> *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 242.



Knowing the universal disdain among men for lesbianism, Charicles culminates his argument by saying that, "if males find intercourse with males acceptable, henceforth let women too love each other" (28).

Ancient opponents of homosexual practice also often employ a variety of exploitation arguments, as do modern apologists for a two-sex prerequisite when they allude to disproportionately high rates of harm attending homosexual behavior. Nevertheless, they clearly add an array of arguments that strike at homosexual activity per se: an appeal to nature, the anatomical and physiological (e.g., procreative) incompatibility of same-sex unions, arousal for and merging with one's already intact sexual nature, blurring or erasure of essential maleness and essential femaleness, and an indictment of all lesbianism. It makes no sense to assert, then, that Paul, operating in a Jewish milieu known in the ancient world for its vigorous opposition to homosexual practice, was more affirming of homosexual practice than these Greco-Roman critics.

**Conclusion.** Given these five arguments, there is absolutely no basis for claiming that Paul's rejection of homosexual practice did not have in view homosexual activity per se. Unfortunately, Myers and Scanzoni alert readers to not a single one of the arguments laid out above. Nor do they tell readers that a number of scholars supportive of homosexual practice reject an exploitation argument. For example, Bernadette Brooten, a New Testament scholar who identifies herself as lesbian and has written extensively on lesbianism in antiquity, criticized John Boswell:

Boswell . . . argued that . . . "The early Christian church does not appear to have opposed homosexual behavior per se." The sources on female homoeroticism that I present in this book run absolutely counter to [this conclusion].<sup>133</sup>

Similarly, she criticized Robin Scroggs's interpretation that Paul was thinking only of pederastic (man-boy) relationships:

If . . . the dehumanizing aspects of pederasty motivated Paul to condemn sexual relations between males, then why did he condemn relations between females in the same sentence? . . . Rom 1:27, like Lev 18:22 and 20:13, condemns all males in male-male relationships regardless of age, making it unlikely that lack of mutuality or concern for the passive boy were Paul's central concerns. . . . The ancient sources, which rarely speak of sexual relations between women and girls, undermine Robin Scroggs's theory that Paul opposed homosexuality as pederasty.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>134</sup> *Love Between Women*, 253 n. 106, 257, 361. Cf. Dan Via: "The Pauline texts . . . do not support this limitation of male homosexuality to pederasty" (*Homosexuality and the Bible*, 11). On the matter of pederasty, William Schoedel, another supporter of committed homosexual unions, intimates that in the Greco-Roman world homosexual intercourse between an adult male and a male youth was regarded as a less exploitative form of same-sex eros than intercourse between two adult males. The key problem with homosexual intercourse—behaving toward the passive male partner as if the latter were female—was

Even Walter Wink, in his generally mean-spirited review of my book *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, had to admit:

Gagnon exegetes every biblical text even remotely relevant to the theme [of homosexual practice]. This section is filled with exegetical insights. I have long insisted that the issue is one of hermeneutics, and that efforts to twist the text to mean what it clearly does not say are deplorable. Simply put, the Bible is negative toward same-sex behavior, and there is no getting around it. . . . Gagnon imagines a request from the Corinthians to Paul for advice, based on 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 [on how to respond to a man in a loving and committed union with another man]. ". . . . When you mentioned that *arsenokoitai* would be excluded from the coming kingdom of God, you were not including somebody like this man, were you?" . . . No, Paul wouldn't accept that relationship for a minute.<sup>135</sup>

Louis Compton, another strong proponent of homosexual unions, has recently written:

According to [one] interpretation, Paul's words were not directed at "bona fide" homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well-intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by

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exacerbated when the intercourse was aimed at adult males who had outgrown the "softness" of immature adolescence. Schoedel's comment on Philo of Alexandria is apt:

Philo adds something new in this connection when he rejects the love of males with males even though they "only" differ in age ([*Cont. Life*,] 59). The "only" is important here. For the difference in age made all the difference in the Greco-Roman view. Philo is subtly suggesting that the normal abhorrence for the love of adult males can with equal propriety be extended to pederasty. ("Same-Sex Eros," 50)

So those who argue that Paul's indictment of homosexual practice was limited to the worst form, pederasty, get it backwards. It is not: Paul's indictment was limited to pederasty and not extended to committed adult unions. Rather: If Paul's indictment primarily had in mind man-boy love then, *a fortiori*, it surely also took in man-man love.

<sup>135</sup> "To Hell with Gays?" *Christian Century* 119:13 (June 5-12, 2002): 32-33. On the mean-spirited character of Wink's review, which incidentally violated his own prior call for compassion in the homosexuality debate, see my fuller online response, "A Response to Walter Wink's *Christian Century* Review," pp. 1-3. Wink is not quite accurate when he claims that he had "long insisted" that "the Bible is negative toward same-sex behavior [per se]." In his 1999 article "Homosexuality and the Bible" Wink cited as one of his arguments for discounting Rom 1:26-27 Paul's alleged inability to conceive of committed adult homosexual relationships (p. 36). After reading my book, apparently, Wink completely abandoned the exploitation argument for a different "new knowledge" argument: the orientation argument. Dan Via also acknowledges in his response to my essay in *Homosexuality and the Bible* that the Bible's rule against homosexual practice is "an absolute prohibition" that condemns homosexual practice "unconditionally" and "absolute[ly]" (pp. 93-95; cf. pp. 11-14). This is an interesting admission in view of the fact that he had charged me in his essay with "absolutizing . . . the biblical prohibition of all same-sex intercourse" (p. 27). What does it mean to "absolutize" an already absolute biblical prohibition? Like Wink, Via rejects all *absolute* prohibitions and makes his stand on an orientation argument. For a critique of his stance against moral absolutes, see *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 100-1 with online notes, esp. nn. 124-28; and my online "Rejoinder to Dan Via's Response," pp. 3-12 ("The Extremism of No Absolutes and No Structural Prerequisites").

mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian.<sup>136</sup>

**d. The case against the orientation argument.** Like many, Myers and Scanzoni contend that the concept of sexual orientation is an entirely modern phenomenon. Moreover, they believe that had St. Paul known about a fixed homosexual orientation he might have changed his mind about homosexual practice. This "new knowledge" orientation argument falls short at several points.

(1) *Ancient sexual orientation theories.* Greco-Roman theories (Platonic, Aristotelian, Hippocratic, and even astrological) existed that posited at least some congenital basis for some forms of homosexual attraction, particularly on the part of males desiring to be penetrated. These theories included: a creation splitting of male-male or female-female binary humans; a particular mix of male and female sperm elements at conception; a chronic disease of the mind or soul influenced indirectly by biological factors and made hard to resist by socialization; an inherited disease analogous to a mutated gene; sperm ducts leading to the anus; and the particular alignment of heavenly constellations at the time of one's birth.<sup>137</sup>

Some of the ancient theories are obviously closer to modern theories than others. Differences, however, are beside the point for our discussion here. What matters is that many in the ancient world attributed one or more forms of homosexual practice to an interplay of nature and nurture; and, moreover, believed that homoerotic impulses could be very resistant to change. As Hubbard notes, "homosexuality in this era [viz., of the early imperial age of Rome] may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category of personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation."<sup>138</sup> He also points to a series of later texts from the second to fourth centuries that "reflect the perception that sexual orientation is something fixed and incurable."<sup>139</sup> It is important to add here that many of the same Greco-Roman moralists and physicians who held such views could still oppose the behaviors arising from homoerotic predispositions. They could do so by distinguishing, as one Aristotelian text puts it, between behavior that is in accordance with nature and behavior that, though given "by nature," is yet "constituted contrary to nature" as a "defect" (*Problems* 4.26).

(2) *Evidence from Paul's letters in context.* Although it is usually assumed that Paul in Rom 1:24-27 treats homosexual attraction solely as a chosen

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<sup>136</sup> *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 114.

<sup>137</sup> For this and a rebuttal of the orientation argument generally see my article, "Does the Bible Regard Same-Sex Intercourse as Intrinsically Sinful?" 140-52. This expands and builds on the work that I began in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 384-85

<sup>138</sup> *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, 386.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 446.

condition of constitutional heterosexuals, nothing in the wording of the text substantiates such an assumption. The expressions "exchanged" and "leaving behind" in 1:26-27 do not refer to a willful exchange of heterosexual desire for homosexual desire. Rather, they refer to a choice of gratifying innate homoerotic desires instead of complying with the evidence of male-female complementarity transparent in material creation or nature. In fact, the terms "exchanged," "leaving behind," "God gave them over," "desire," and "inflamed with their yearning" in 1:24-27 collectively suggest passions that are preexisting, controlling, and exclusive.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, as with Philo of Alexandria, Paul was probably aware of the existence of a lifelong homoerotic proclivity at least among the "soft men" (*malakoi*) who, even as adults, feminized their appearance to attract male sex partners (1 Cor. 6:9).

(3) *Paul's compatible understanding of sin.* Even exaggerated claims about "homosexual orientation," particularly notions of congenital determinism and absolute immutability, are compatible with Paul's view of sin in Romans 5 and 7. Sin for Paul was an innate impulse to commit actions prohibited by God – an impulse passed on by an ancestor, running through the members of the human body, and never entirely within human control. This view of sin, combined with ancient orientation theories, suggests that, if Paul could be transported into our time and told that same-sex attractions for some seem to be partly influenced by congenital factors – which is all that we can claim at the present time – he would likely say either "I suspected as much" or at least "That fits well with my understanding of sin."

(4) *The disconnection between orientation and morality in ancient context.* Some will still insist that we cannot be absolutely certain that Paul entertained the possibility of congenital influences on the development of even some forms of same-sex attractions. And if he did not, they continue, then Paul still might have changed his perspective on homosexual practice had he known that the latter was partly influenced by congenital factors. The problem with this reasoning is threefold. First, it places the burden of proof on those who support Scripture's strong witness against homosexual practice rather than on those who oppose it. This approach is inconsistent with an emphasis on the authority of Scripture for the faith and practice of the church. Since there is no qualification given to Scripture's repeated opposition to homosexual practice (much like Scripture's opposition to man-mother incest), the burden of proof is on those who think that such a limitation exists to establish such beyond reasonable doubt. Secondly, not only is the establishment of such not possible, but the weight of the evidence actually falls strongly on the side of an absolute proscription. If, as we have argued above, Paul and Scripture generally are opposed even to committed, loving homosexual unions, then what relevance

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<sup>140</sup> For further discussion of this point see my "Intrinsically Sinful?" 146-47.

would an orientation argument have? After all, an 'orientation' toward some activity is not a moral claim. People are oriented, innately, to all sorts of activities that the Bible expressly forbids, as Paul himself makes clear in his own view of sin. So to have established that Scripture's prohibition includes committed homosexual unions is to have made an orientation argument superfluous.

The third problem with any idea that Paul would have changed his mind is this: If some Greco-Roman moralists and physicians, operating within a culture that tolerated and at times endorsed at least some homosexual practice, could reject forms of homosexual practice committed by those with a biological predisposition, it is virtually impossible that Paul, operating out of a Jewish subculture, would have embraced homosexual unions entered into by homosexually oriented persons. Nor could one charge Paul with logical inconsistency if he, aware of something akin to homosexual orientation, did not acknowledge homosexual desire as "natural" in the best sense. For the ancients rightly recognized that not everything that has an origination in nature is natural in the sense of conforming to nature's well-working processes. Persons' deeply ingrained sexual desires can be at odds with their embodied sexuality. (A pedophilic orientation would be an instance that all could agree on today.) For Paul, too, nature meant something structurally broader than innate desires: the transparent structures of creation, including essential maleness and femaleness in their anatomical, physiological, and interpersonal complementarity.

Bernadette Brooten acknowledges that knowledge of homosexual orientation would have made little difference to Paul's absolute views on homosexual practice:

Paul could have believed that *tribades*, the ancient *kinaidoi*, and other sexually unorthodox persons were born that way and yet still condemn them as unnatural and shameful. . . . I believe that Paul used the word "exchanged" to indicate that people knew the natural sexual order of the universe and left it behind. . . . I see Paul as condemning all forms of homoeroticism as the unnatural acts of people who had turned away from God.<sup>141</sup>

So also Martti Nissinen:

Paul does not mention *tribades* or *kinaidoi*, that is, female and male persons who were habitually involved in homoerotic relationships, but if he knew about them (and there is every reason to believe that he did), it is difficult to think that, because of their apparent "orientation," he would *not* have included them in Romans 1:26-27. . . . For him, there is no individual inversion or inclination that would make this conduct less culpable. . . . Presumably nothing would have made Paul approve homoerotic behavior.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Love Between Women*, 244.

<sup>142</sup> *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 109-10, 112. Nissinen is inconsistent on this point inasmuch as he later insists that "we cannot possibly know" what Paul would say today about homosexual practice, given what we now allegedly know about homosexual orientation (*ibid.*, 111, 124-25). I would suggest that

Do we hear of any of these major problems with an orientation argument in the book by Myers and Scanzoni? Not a one.

**e. The case against the misogyny argument.** The current dominant explanation among biblical scholars supportive of homosexual unions for why Paul specifically and Scripture generally opposes homosexual practice fixates on misogyny (women-hating), a deep-seated desire to keep women down, both literally and figuratively. In support of this theory is the fact that there was a misogynistic dimension behind much Greco-Roman critique of passive homosexual males and all lesbians. The effects of this way of thinking can be clearly seen in Philo of Alexandria, who referred to penile-receptive males as infected with "female disease." Moreover, the New Testament retained a concern for a husband's headship over his wife and Paul in 1 Cor 11:7-9 interpreted the creation texts to mandate such headship. It would not be surprising, then, if a concern for gender stratification played a part in Scripture's condemnation of homosexual practice. Ultimately, however, the misogyny theory is too reductionistic, as the following five points make evident.

(1) *Ignoring concerns for structural compatibility.* Asserting that issues of male dominance constitute the main reason for Scripture's categorical rejection of homoerotic behavior is like arguing that Scripture's main complaint with incest or bestiality has to do with status issues. It completely ignores concerns for structural congruence.

(2) *Greco-Roman structural congruity arguments.* Not even among all Greco-Roman critiques of homoeroticism is a desire to keep women down the sole driving force. The structural complementarity of the sexes, as regards both anatomical and procreative design, is often cited, as noted above.

(3) *Absoluteness and the priority of gender over status.* If issues of status had been the sole, or even primary, concern of the biblical writers, then the same sort

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Nissinen's more lucid and unbiased moment occurred when he acknowledged the inclusivity of Paul's rejection of homosexual practice, since this acknowledgement cuts against the grain of Nissinen's ideological biases. A similar point may be made about William Schoedel who, despite some later waffling when discussing the hermeneutics of appropriating Paul's witness, notes that the orientation argument is problematic as a means of circumventing the Pauline witness. Schoedel states that "some support" exists in Philo, *Abraham* 135 for thinking that Paul might be speaking in Rom 1:26-27 "only of same-sex acts performed by those who are by nature heterosexual." But he then dismisses the suggestion:

But such a phenomenon does not excuse some other form of same-sex eros in the mind of a person like Philo. Moreover, we would expect Paul to make that form of the argument more explicit if he intended it. . . . Paul's wholesale attack on Greco-Roman culture makes better sense if, like Josephus and Philo, he lumps all forms of same-sex eros together as a mark of Gentile decadence.

Schoedel also acknowledges that a "conception of a psychological disorder socially engendered or reinforced *and genetically transmitted* may be presupposed" for Philo ("Same-Sex Eros," 67-68, 56 [emphasis added]). See also my short review and critique of Schoedel in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 392-94.

of qualified mentality against homoerotic behavior prevailing in the ancient world would likely have developed in ancient Israel and in early Judaism and Christianity. For in the ancient world some significant accommodation was made to male homosexual practice within a broader misogynistic bent, specifically the right of males to penetrate socially inferior males such as youths, foreigners, and/or slaves.<sup>143</sup> The greater the role played by status over gender, such that an inferior male could be considered less of a male, the more openness to homosexual practice existed. It is precisely the intense opposition to all homosexual practice in early Judaism and Christianity that leads to the conclusion that for these subcultures gender differentiation was a far greater concern than gender stratification.

(4) *Women's liberation as a stimulus for opposing all male homosexual unions.* Related to the above point, the misogyny argument presumes that the greater the disdain for women, the more intense the opposition to all homosexual practice. Yet the opposite appears to have been the case in the Greco-Roman milieu. Thomas Hubbard rightly notes that in the age of imperial Rome "the increasingly liberated status of women was crucial to the polarization of sexual preferences." When one looks at debates over whether male-female love or male-male love is superior (Plutarch's *Dialogue on Love* 1-12, Achilles Tatius' *Lucretia and Clitophon* 35-38, and pseudo-Lucian's *Affairs of the Heart*), one finds that the heterosexual position espouses a *higher* view of women as suitable companions and friends deserving of equal pleasure in the sexual bond, "whereas the pederast's position seems in every case to have its origins in a fundamental hatred of women."<sup>144</sup> Likewise, the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus combined an affirmation of women's capacity for learning philosophy with a strong rejection of homosexual practice (12). Given this pattern, there seems to be no necessary correlation between Scripture's intense opposition to homosexual practice and a devaluation of women. Indeed, the obverse – opposition to male homosexual practice intensifies as appreciation for women grows – seems more likely to be the case.

(5) *An absurd corollary: Jesus and scripture authors as the biggest misogynists.* Following from this, a one-to-one correlation between misogyny and opposition to homoeroticism impels one to the absurd corollary that the authors of Scripture, and Jesus, were among the biggest misogynists of their time. For none of the major civilizations in the ancient Near East or Mediterranean basin promoted a more stringent opposition to homosexual practice. And yet in the midst of such opposition we find a view toward women that, on the whole, compares well with developments elsewhere. The creation story in Gen 2:4b-3:24, for example, treats male-female differentiation as the one

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (2<sup>d</sup> ed.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*.

<sup>144</sup> *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, 444-5.

most essential ingredient for (re)integrating sexual halves into a sexual whole (2:18-24), while relegating a husband's rule over his wife to the Fall (3:16). The implication here is that gender differentiation cannot be collapsed into gender stratification. The former is prior and has priority. Likewise, Gen 1:26-28 stresses male-female compatibility, not male dominance. Male and female combined express God's image and both are called on to manage God's creation. Elsewhere in the OT, even within a broader patriarchal context significant women figures appear throughout Israel's history; for example, Miriam, Tamar, Rahab, prophetess/judge Deborah, Jael, Ruth, the prophetess Huldah, and Esther. Occasionally an inequitable old law is revised to provide greater parity between men and women, as with the law governing the release of slaves (cf. Exod 21:2-11 with Deut 15:12-18). Feminine metaphors are occasionally applied to Yahweh's actions toward his people Israel alongside dominant male metaphors (e.g., Num 11:12; Deut 32:11, 18; Ps 22:9-10; Isa 42:14; 49:14-15; 66:13).

In New Testament texts, there is an increased affirmation of women's roles. Jesus was known to have women followers, who also played an important part in the empty tomb stories (Luke 8:1-3; 23:55-24:11), and to have encouraged women to give priority to learning from him over their own domestic duties (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus healed women (e.g., Mark 1:29-31; 5:24-34, 35-43; 7:24-30) and praised them for exemplary acts (Mark 12:41-44; 14:3-9). As noted above, he also revoked special male privileges with respect to divorce and polygyny and declared the taking of another wife to be an act of adultery, not just against another man, but against his own first wife (i.e., fidelity in marriage as a two-way street). He predicated this teaching about the indissolubility of the marital bond on the attendant institution of marriage as the instrument for reuniting the two sexual halves, man and woman, into a sexual whole. Paul continued this teaching on divorce and remarriage in his churches (1 Cor 7:10-11). While he believed in a husband's authority over his wife, albeit conceived largely in terms of self-emptying service (cf. Eph 5:22-33), he also did much to undermine conventional, subordinate roles for women: laboring alongside numerous women co-workers (cf. Rom 16; Phil 4:2-3); insisting on the mutuality of conjugal rights (1 Cor 7:3-4); maintaining that there is "neither male and female" (Gal 3:28) in the new creation in Christ; and affirming women's prophetic roles, but in such a way that women did not need to become androgynes to be spiritual beings (1 Cor 11:3-16). Even as he interpreted Gen 2-3 as establishing male headship, he could still add a "nevertheless" of interdependence (1 Cor 11:11-12).

The point to be made here is that, obviously, Jesus and the authors of Scripture, particularly St. Paul, were not the biggest misogynists of their day. In the context of a relatively affirming posture toward women, they nonetheless maintained vigorous opposition to homosexual practice. Paul's gesture toward female equality as regards homosexual unions was not to excuse homosexual practice



for both women and men but rather to make explicit the implications of the Levitical prohibition of male homosexual practice for prohibiting female homosexual practice as well (Rom 1:26).

f. **Addendum: Does Paul reject judgment of homosexual practice?** Myers and Scanzoni suggest that Paul in Rom 1:18-32 is merely citing behavior abhorrent to law-observant Jews so that he can “turn the tables” against those who boast in their own morality and assert that such persons have “no room to judge others” since “all are under sin.”<sup>145</sup> This is an argument that has been used by other apologists for homosexual unions. I have already answered at length in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*.<sup>146</sup> It is an argument that can be readily rebutted simply by encouraging its advocates to read on, beyond Rom 2-3 to Rom 6:1-8:17.

Paul does indeed set up a sting operation in Rom 2 against moral persons – in context, primarily unbelieving Jews – who condemn those who engage in the sinful activities of Rom 1:18-32 while committing sins of their own. But Paul does so not to trivialize the moral life but rather to underscore the universal human need for putting one’s trust in Jesus’ atoning death and being indwelt by God’s empowering presence, the Spirit. God’s wrath is *still* coming on those who live under sin’s primary rule, which for Paul meant all unbelievers and some self-professed believers in Christ (2:3-12; 6:15-23; 8:12-14, 17). Jesus’ amends-making death (3:21-26; 8:3) makes possible the indwelling of Christ’s Spirit for those who believe, which in turn makes possible a Spirit-led life, with an outcome of eternal life (6:15-23; 7:5-6; 8:4-17). A return to the sin-led life of old puts at risk one’s inheritance in the kingdom of God, whether one claims to be a believer or not. This includes a return to the practice of same-sex intercourse.

When Paul asks in ch. 6 the rhetorical question, “Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” he answers by insisting that genuine adherence to the lordship of Jesus Christ leads us *out of* a life under the control of the sinful impulse.<sup>147</sup> Thus Paul can assert:

Just as you [formerly, as unbelievers] presented your bodily members as slaves to *sexual uncleanness (akatharsia)* and to [other acts of] lawlessness with a view to [engaging in] lawlessness, so now [as believers] present your bodily members as slaves to righteousness with a view to holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with respect to [not doing] righteousness. What fruit, therefore, were you having at that time? Things of which you are now ashamed, for the end (i.e., end result, outcome) of those things is death. (6:19-21)

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<sup>145</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 100 (citing Reta Finger, “What Can We Do,” 213).

<sup>146</sup> Pp. 277-84.

<sup>147</sup> Rom 6:15-23; 7:5-6; 8:1-17; cf. 6:1-14.

Interestingly, same-sex intercourse in Rom 1:24-27 is cited as the prime example of "sexual uncleanness" (*akatharsia*) – the very word used in Rom 6:19 to denote the behavior that Christians must now leave behind if they are to inherit eternal life (note that the term appears nowhere else in Romans). The mention of shameful practices that lead to death in Rom 6:19-21 also clearly echoes the theme of shame and dishonor in Rom 1:24-27. Obviously, then, the point of the Christian life is to discontinue the shameful practices of 1:19-31, including females having intercourse with females and males having intercourse with males. If *the wrath of God* manifested in this age (1:18) involves, in part, God permitting people to engage in such self-dishonoring, shameful behavior, with death resulting, then *the saving righteousness of God* must mean not merely forgiveness of sins but empowerment, through the Spirit, to be delivered from the primary control of such shameful impulses. What kind of salvation would leave people trapped in degrading behavior and continually subject to the wrath of God?

Accordingly, "sin shall not be lord over you, for you are not under the law but under grace" (6:14). To be "under the law" is to be dominated by sinful passions that "bear fruit for death" (7:5). To be "under grace" is to be Spirit-controlled and thus bearing fruit for life (7:6). It is life *lived* in "the law of the Spirit of life" – that is, life lived under the primary regulating power of the indwelling Spirit – that effects liberation from "the law of sin and death – the regulating power of sin operating in human flesh, which brings death to those who obey it (8:1-2). Life lived in conformity to the Spirit "fulfills the righteous requirement of the law" (8:4) rather than violates or ignores the law.

For Paul, the transformed life, while not meriting salvation, is the indispensable middle term between Christ's justifying death and the gift of eternal life. Self-professed Christians who continue to live life under sin's primary sway will perish. Thus the conclusion to the question, "Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?" – that is, should we sin because there are, allegedly, no apocalyptic repercussions for sinning – is as follows:

So then, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, that is, to live in conformity with the flesh. For if you live in conformity to the flesh, you are going to die. But if, by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live. For as many as are being *led* by the Spirit of God – these are the children of God. (8:12-14; emphasis added)

In other words, a profession of faith void of a transformed life is worthless and will not save a person from divine wrath. Calvin put it well when, in commenting on Rom 8:9, he wrote:

Those in whom the Spirit does not reign do not belong to Christ; therefore those who serve the flesh are not Christians, for those who separate Christ from His Spirit make Him like a dead image or a corpse. . . . Free remission of sins cannot be separated from the Spirit of regeneration. This would be, as it were, to rend Christ asunder.<sup>148</sup>

Similarly, commenting on Rom 6:19, Calvin contends that Christians should be “no less eager and ready in performing the commandments of God” than they were eager, as unbelievers, to engage in sinful conduct.<sup>149</sup>

Indeed, the same point is made in 1 Cor 6:9-20, where Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers not to return to the sexual immorality of their former life, which could include adult consensual incest, male-male intercourse, adultery, fornication, and sex with prostitutes. “These things some of you *were*; but you washed yourselves off, you were made holy, you were made righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (6:11). The basis for his appeal is that sex, *unlike dietary concerns*, is not a matter of soteriological indifference (6:12-20; contra Myers/Scanzoni and others who have appealed to the inclusion of Gentile believers in Acts 15 as a parallel). Precisely because Christ has purchased us out of slavery to sin, we belong to God, not ourselves, and so should “glorify God in [our] bodies” (6:19-20). In the immediate context it is obvious that Paul was not against the church passing judgment on believers who engage in sinful sexual behavior, even behavior of an adult, consensual, and committed sort. As regards the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5 who “calls himself a brother” (i.e., believer), a somewhat exasperated Paul asked the Corinthians: “Is it not those inside [the church] that you are to judge?” (5:12). Obviously, then, Paul was not opposed to the church assessing certain acts as sexually immoral and, for the sake of the offender and the community, taking appropriate disciplinary measures against the offender, even though neither Paul nor anyone at Corinth had achieved a state of perfection.<sup>150</sup>

In short, *the fact that all persons have sinned is no license to continue in sin*. The point of our “baptism into Christ’s death” is that we should now, “as if alive from the dead,” put our bodily members at God’s, not sin’s, disposal (Rom 6:3-14). The difference between our lives before faith and our lives in faith is *not* that we now get to live sinful lives without fear of apocalyptic repercussions, but rather that we are now empowered, through Christ’s atoning death and sending of his Spirit, to live lives that do not lead to death. To suggest, as Myers/Scanzoni and others do, that Paul is more opposed to judging those who engage in homosexual

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<sup>148</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (trans. R. MacKenzie; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 164.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Phil 3:12: “not that I have already . . . been perfected (or: reached full maturity, reached the goal).”

practice than to the homosexual practice itself is to miss completely Paul's point in context.

### **E. Is homosexual practice the diet and circumcision issue of today?**

Using two arguments that compare the homosexuality issue of today to the circumcision and diet issues of the first century, Myers and Scanzoni attempt to move readers into the view that acceptance of committed homosexual unions should not threaten church unity.<sup>151</sup>

#### **1. Romans 14:1-15:13: A matter of indifference like diet?**

Myers and Scanzoni assure readers that Paul's handling of the dispute over dietary and calendar issues in Rom 14:1-15:13 is "more helpful" for church discussions of homosexuality today than is Rom 1:24-27. We should learn not to pass judgment on each other and to respect those in the church who are "acting according to *their* consciences."<sup>152</sup>

The main problem with this reading of Paul is that Paul himself would never have accepted it. Indeed, he would have been appalled by the application of principles regarding diet and calendar to cases of sexual immorality. For all the importance that issues of diet, calendar, and circumcision had in early Judaism, Paul expressly rejected any comparison between these matters and matters of sexual immorality. Whatever relevance the slogan "all things are permitted me" might have had for issues of idol meat, it had no value for negotiating sexual matters (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23). While food and circumcision affect the body only superficially, the one who participates in sexually immoral behavior sins against the whole body (1 Cor 6:12-20; 7:18-19). This approach by Paul has some precedent in the teaching of Jesus since Jesus, in addition to critiquing Pharisaic Sabbath regulations, explicitly rejected any equation between the defilement that might come from ingesting unclean foods on the one hand and the defilement arising from active desires for "sexual immoralities, . . . adulteries, . . . sexual licentiousness" on the other hand (Mark 7:18-23).

In Rom 14:1-15:13, Paul urges tolerance as regards dietary matters because "the kingdom of God does not consist in food and drink but righteousness (i.e., right conduct in matters of ethical significance) and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17). Sexual behavior, however, is not among the matters of indifference (Stoic *adiaphora*), as is evident from Rom 1:24-27; 6:19; and 13:13. Immediately before the discussion in 14:1-15:13, Paul in 13:13 insists that believers "lay aside works of darkness" such as "immoral sexual activities and licentious acts." The Greek word for "immoral sexual activities" is *koitai*, which literally means, "lyings" or

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<sup>151</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 100-3.

<sup>152</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 100-1 (again citing Rita Finger).

“beds,” a term that obviously links up with *arsenokoitai*, “men lying with a male,” in 1 Cor 6:9 as a particular instance of an immoral “lying.” The Greek word for “licentious acts” is *aselgeiai*, which refers to a lack of self-restraint with respect to refraining from prohibited sexual behaviors. In Rom 6:19 Paul insists that believers must no longer put their bodily members at the service of “sexual impurity” (*akatharsia*), the very same label that Paul gives to same-sex intercourse in 1:24-27 alongside of the label “indecent” or “shameful conduct” (1:24, 27). Failure to put aside such behavior could lead to “death” rather than “eternal life” (6:20-23; 7:6; 8:12-14).

The discussion around diet in Rom 14:1-15:13 does not apply to such sexual practices because the former treats actions that are only sinful if one regards them as sinful (14:14, 20, 22-23) while the latter treats actions that are intrinsically sinful. We know how Paul would have handled the case of a professed Christian man in a sexual relationship with another man. He would have dealt with the matter in the same way that he dealt with the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5. Here injunctions not to pass judgment on one’s brother (Rom 14:3-4, 12) were completely out of place because the offender’s life was put at risk by the behavior in question (1 Cor 5:5; 6:9-10). The community too was put at risk of allowing further intrusions of sexual immorality in their midst and of incurring God’s wrath against them (1 Cor 5:6-8; cf. 10:8, 22). Paul chastised the church for taking pride in its tolerance and insisted that, instead, it should have mourned over this life-threatening, sexually immoral behavior (1 Cor 5:2; cf. 2 Cor 12:21).<sup>153</sup> He even recommended that, far from foregoing judgment and respecting the different conscience of the offender, the church *should* pass judgment on the offender’s action – for the offender’s sake as well as that of the community. They should temporarily remove him from the life of the community, as a wake-up call to him and until such time as he repents (1 Cor 5:3-13; cf. 2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:8-13).

As far as Paul is concerned, an appeal to conscience as a basis for deviating from common Christian practice is acceptable only in matters of indifference, such as whether to eat, in a non-temple setting, food that may have been previously dedicated to idols (1 Cor 8, 10). There is no legitimate comparison between allowing persons to abstain from, or engage in, morally indifferent acts on the one hand and supporting persons in the commission of acts deemed by Scripture to be high moral offenses on the other hand. Paul would have recoiled at such an attempted comparison. The fact that people who violate God’s commands do not think that they are sinning is beside the point. While Paul indicates that whatever a person regards as sin becomes sin for that person, he does not adopt the reverse conclusion; namely, that whatever a person regards as right becomes

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<sup>153</sup> “I may have to mourn over many who have continued in their former sinning and did not repent of the sexual uncleanness (*akatharsia*), sexual immorality (*porneia*), and licentiousness (*aselgeia*) that they practiced.”

right for that person. On the contrary, Paul repeatedly warns against the self-deception of persons who think that their behavior, especially sexual behavior, has no bearing on their inheritance of the kingdom of God.<sup>154</sup>

## 2. Acts 10, circumcision, and the Gentile inclusion analogy

The second argument that Myers and Scanzoni use as a model for heading off divisions on the homosexuality issue is the oft-cited analogy of including Gentiles in the church without requiring circumcision (Acts 10:1-11:18; 15). Just as seeing the evidence of the Spirit in the lives of uncircumcised Gentile believers led the early church to challenge the applicability of circumcision laws for Gentiles, so too today, allegedly, "getting to know devout gay and lesbian people of faith" should cause the church to reconsider "our Creator's intent in creating humankind as male and female and providing the institution of marriage."<sup>155</sup> Although I have already dealt extensively with the Gentile inclusion analogy in several places, Myers and Scanzoni are either unaware that any substantive critique of the alleged analogy exists or inclined to leave readers unaware.<sup>156</sup>

There are at least seven reasons why the alleged analogy is unworkable, some of which have already been suggested.

**a. Ignores creation grounding.** Jesus grounded the two-sexes prerequisite for marriage in the will of the God established at creation – a fact that gave it preeminent significance for him (Matt 19:8: "but from the beginning of creation it did not happen in this way"). Circumcision is not grounded in creation structures. Paul correctly understood this, alluding to Gen 1-2 as background for his remarks against homosexual practice while contending that circumcision was nonessential (Rom 1:24-27; 2:25-29; ch. 4; 6:19; 1 Cor 6:9; 7:18-19).

**b. Confuses a Jewish ritual prescription having minimal effect on the body with a universal sexual proscription having maximal bodily effect.** The alleged analogy treats as comparable distinctively *Jewish ritual* requirements that affect the body *superficially* and *universal moral standards* for sexual ethics that affect the body *holistically*. The comparison is especially problematic in view of the fact that

<sup>154</sup> Gal 5:19-21; 6:7-9; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Eph 5:3-6; cf. 1 Thess 4:2-8.

<sup>155</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 101-3. Here they cite only Blosser, "Why Does the Bible Divide Us?," 143, though it did not originate with Blosser but with other more prominent scholars. To my knowledge, Luke Timothy Johnson first introduced the analogy in his book *Decision Making in the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983; pp. 96-97), reprised in subsequent publications (in the expanded rev. ed. of *Decision Making*, entitled *Scripture and Discernment* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1996], 144-48; and in "Debate and Discernment, Scripture and the Spirit," *Commonweal* [Jan. 28, 1994]: 12-13). It was also picked up by Jeffrey S. Siker ("Homosexual Christians, the Bible, and Gentile Inclusion," in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* [ed. J. Siker; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994], 187-90; idem, "Gentile Wheat and Homosexual Christians," in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality* [ed. R. Brawley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 145-46) and Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998; pp. 119-26), among many others.

<sup>156</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 460-69; "Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*," 234-38; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 43-44 (with online notes 4-6).

both Jesus and Paul rejected it, as noted above. While Jesus gave diminished significance to diet and Sabbath regulations, he intensified God's demands in sexual ethics, predicated his view on marital 'twoness' on God's creation of two complementary sexes (Mark 10:5-9; Matt 5:27-32), and specifically rejected an equation between food entering the body and desires for prohibited sexual conduct proceeding from the body (Mark 7:14-23). Paul likewise contended that immoral sexual behavior – unlike food, days, and circumcision – could not come unreservedly under the slogan "all things are permitted me," for the former alone affected the body holistically and could lead to not inheriting God's kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-20; 7:18-19; cf. Rom 13:13-14:23).

**c. Confuses persons and behaviors.** The alleged analogy confuses what Acts 15 clearly distinguishes: welcoming *persons* and accepting *behaviors*. The Apostolic Decree forbade continued participation in *porneia* (15:20, 29; 21:25) and did so with the sex laws in Lev 18 in view. Paul similarly *welcomed Gentiles* into the household of faith while commanding them *not to live like Gentiles*, especially as regards engaging in sexual behavior that Scripture categorically forbids (1 Thess 4:3-8; Rom 6:19; cf. Eph 4:17-24; 5:3-5). Although Gentile life was viewed as *typically*, but still only *incidentally*, sinful, same-sex intercourse (like incest) was treated as intrinsically sinful.

**d. Confuses very different degrees of scriptural support.** The alleged analogy between prescribing circumcision and proscribing homosexual practice overlooks the degree to which Scripture and the putative new work of the Spirit are in tension. Embrace of uncircumcised Gentiles has some significant OT precedents<sup>157</sup> and uniform NT support, whereas embrace of homosexual practice constitutes a radical departure from Scripture in both Testaments. Given how far affirmation of homosexual practice would have to override Scripture, claims to the Spirit's authenticating role must be considered highly dubious from the start.

**e. Overlooks limitations of a Spirit-possession /fruit-bearing test.** The premise of the alleged analogy is that evidence of the Spirit's outworking in one area of a person's life necessarily validates other areas, even if the latter entails a severe violation of Scripture's core standards in sexual ethics. But the premise is naïve. Obviously, a person can both give generously to the poor and engage in immoral sexual behavior, without impugning the former or validating the latter in God's sight. People are very good at separating off or compartmentalizing various aspects of their lives, bearing moral fruit in some areas while having moral difficulties in others. It is possible to have the Holy Spirit and even to live in the Spirit's power at points while doing things that do not honor the Spirit. The incestuous man at Corinth appears to be a case in point, whether or not the incestuous bond was committed and loving (1 Cor 5). Certainly Paul regarded Christians who engaged in homosexual practice as another case in point (1 Cor

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<sup>157</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 464, 466-69.

6:9; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Tim 1:10).<sup>158</sup> The fruit-bearing test, which appears often in the New Testament,<sup>159</sup> worked for overriding circumcision only because, even for many first-century Jews, uncircumcision did not automatically disqualify a Gentile from being considered “righteous.” However, engaging in same-sex intercourse or any other sexually immoral act would have had precisely that effect.

**f. Sidesteps the reason for the proscription.** The alleged analogy sidesteps completely the reason why Scripture regards same-sex intercourse as wrong: a dishonoring of the integrity of the sexual self through attempted completion with what one already is as a sexual being. It implicitly treats the very notion of a formal or structural prerequisite for sexual activity as obsolete.

**g. Confuses ethnicity and “sexual orientation.”** It is a mistake to equate a sexual impulse with ethnicity. On the one hand, ethnicity is a feature of human existence that is (1) entirely heritable, (2) absolutely immutable, (3) primarily non-behavioral, and (4) inherently benign. On the other hand, same-sex attraction as an impulse may be (1) only partly and indirectly heritable (as, for instance, pedosexual attraction or alcoholism); (2) susceptible to some change (at least reduction in intensity, if not redirection) given cultural variables, incremental choices, and therapeutic intervention; (3) primarily behaviorally directed (an impulse to *do* something), requiring an assessment of the behavior; and (4) not inherently benign (many impulses of a deeply ingrained sort are sinful).

The Gentile inclusion analogy would only be a strong analogy if one ignored, as Myers and Scanzoni do, the seven problems with the analogy cited above. But one cannot ignore these problems. Homosexual practice is not the circumcision, diet, and calendar issue of today. It is more like the incest issue of today. This leads us to a discussion of other analogies.

## F. The Use of Other Analogies

Like most apologists for homosexual unions,<sup>160</sup> Myers and Scanzoni appeal also to changing views on slavery, women in ministry, divorce and remarriage, and

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<sup>158</sup> Those who use the Gentile inclusion analogy also often presuppose that any behavior that exhibits love and does not produce scientifically measurable harm to all participants in all circumstances must be acceptable in some circumstances. This ignores the implication that such a presupposition would have for assessing the morality of adult incest, polyamory, and even adult-child sex. Few consensual sexual behaviors, even those that society still rejects, always lead to measurable harm.

<sup>159</sup> E.g., Matt 3:8-10 par. Luke 3:8-9; Matt 7:16-20 par. Luke 6:43-44; Matt 12:33; Mark 4:20 par.; Luke 13:6-9; John 15:1-16; Rom 7:4-6; Gal 5:22-23; Phil 1:11; Col 1:6, 10; Jas 3:17-18.

<sup>160</sup> An exception is Dan Via, who in his response to my essay in *Homosexuality and the Bible*, states: “Gagnon’s critique of analogies . . . does not affect my position, for I make no use of those analogies” (p. 97). What Via doesn’t recognize is that, if there are no good analogues for the kind of massive violation of Scripture’s witness that endorsement of homosexual practice would require, then Via has little basis for advocating such departure while maintaining the pretense of calling Scripture “the highest authority for



the institution of marriage generally as adequate analogies for disregarding the biblical witness against homosexual practice.

[T]he church has reformed its understanding of slavery, of women's roles, of what it means to have dominion over the earth — and even of marriage. Most people reading this book will not share their ancestors' Scripture-quoting support for arranged marriages and male headship, or their contempt for interracial couples and for those who have suffered divorce. With time, understandings change.<sup>161</sup>

[Christians who read the Bible literally] cherry-pick which verses should be applied, thereby condemning homosexuality while accepting divorce and remarriage.<sup>162</sup>

The problem with such appeals is that they manipulate the pool of potential analogues in order to reach a desired ideological objective. Myers/Scanzoni and others choose weak analogues with insignificant points of contact to the Bible's other-sex sexual prerequisite while ignoring much stronger analogues with significant points of contact, such as the Bible's stance on incest and Jesus' position on polyamory. I have treated extensively, in various published work, the question of appropriate analogies but Myers and Scanzoni have ignored it all.<sup>163</sup>

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Christians in theological and ethical matters" (p. 2). He has to concede that he is recommending an unprecedented denial of biblical authority. Via also ignores my argument that the Bible's stance on incest constitutes the best analogy to the Bible's stance on same-sex intercourse (pp. 48-50). The incest analogue undermines a number of Via's claims; for example, that there are no formal or structural prerequisites for sexual relationships that trump consent, love, and fidelity. This analogy does not go away just because Via chooses to ignore it.

<sup>161</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 9.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 133, citing approvingly Mark G. Toulouse, "Muddling Through: The Church and Sexuality/Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, 6-42 (reference to p. 34). For a critique of Toulouse's article, see my "Review Essay, Part 1," 176-82. For a critique of the "cherry-picking" argument, see my "'God and Sex' or 'Pants on Fire'?" Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* on the Bible and Homosexuality" (<http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoKristofResponseSB.pdf>), pp. 10-11. My remarks about Kristof apply equally to Toulouse and Myers/Scanzoni. "Kristof's ultimate complaint is that 'conservatives' 'cherry-pick biblical phrases and ignore the central message of love.' The reality is the obverse of what Kristof argues. . . . It is Kristof who approaches the biblical text with the singular aim of bending it to his own purposes. He often ignores literary and historical context matters inconvenient to his reading, makes a series of specious exegetical moves, and develops no coherent or consistent criteria for distinguishing close analogues from distant analogues. He 'cherry-picks' Scripture for texts that, he hopes, will make any significant appeal to Scripture look absurd in a vain effort to make opposition to homosexual practice look arbitrary. To call an appeal to the Bible's witness against homosexual practice 'cherry-picking' is even more far-fetched than contending that the Bible's witness against man-mother incest is 'cherry-picking.' What would constitute 'cherry-picking' is the attempt to show that a two-sex requirement for sexual unions is a marginal concern of the writers of Scripture. As regards Kristof's complaint that 'conservatives' 'ignore [the Bible's/Jesus'] central message of love,' it is hard to see how this is so unless one simply equates love with the desire for sexually intimate relationships. . . . Maintaining structural prerequisites to sexual intercourse . . . does not violate Jesus' emphasis on love. What is unloving is to celebrate the developmental shortcomings in being erotically attracted to what already is or has as a sexual being: male for maleness, female for femaleness."

<sup>163</sup> On slavery: *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 443-8; "Slavery, Homosexuality, and the Bible: A Response," at <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoKrehbielResponse.pdf>; "Slavery, Homosexuality,

## 1. Slavery

Slavery is a particularly bad comparison. Simply put, the Bible does not provide the kind of clear and unequivocal witness *for* slavery that it exhibits *against* same-sex intercourse. Biblical core values are not at stake in the former but are in the latter. Scripture nowhere expresses a vested interest in preserving slavery, whereas Scripture does express a clear countercultural and creational mandate to preserve an exclusive male-female dynamic to human sexual relationships.

Indeed, the Bible shows a decidedly critical edge to the institution of slavery. Central to Israelite memory was remembrance of God's liberation from slavery in Egypt (e.g., Exod 22:21; 23:9; Lev 25:42, 55; Deut 15:15). Christian memory adds the paradigmatic event of Christ's redemption of believers from slavery to sin and people (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; and often). Israelite law put various restrictions on enslaving fellow Israelites: mandatory release dates, the right of near-kin redemption at any time, prohibiting the return of runaway slaves, and insisting that Israelites not be treated as slaves. St. Paul, at least as reflected in the undisputed Pauline corpus, regarded liberation from slavery as a penultimate good (1 Cor 7:21-23; Philemon 16).<sup>164</sup> The ultimate good for Paul, as for Stoics, was to put one's life in service of God.

Moreover, the Bible maintains this critical edge against a form of slavery that was much less pernicious than that of the antebellum American South. Slavery in the ancient world was not predominantly race-based. It often did not mean lifelong servitude, often served as a form of criminal justice (in the absence of long-term prison facilities), and often allowed private enterprise. It sometimes led to social advancement. Finally, it operated in a political context that made complete abolition of the institution problematic (maintained in non-democratic states with no welfare net).

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and the Bible, Part II," at <http://www.robgagnon.net/articles/homoKrehbielResp2.pdf>; and *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 44-45. On women in ministry: *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 46 (with online notes 9-12). On divorce/remarriage: "Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts?," 110-22; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 46-47 (with online notes 13-16). On incest: *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 48-50 (with online notes 17-20).<sup>164</sup> The ultimate good, of course, is being enslaved to God rather than to sin. 1 Corinthians 7:21 is best rendered: "Were you called as (i.e. while) a slave? It should not be of concern to you. But even if (or: if indeed) you are able to become free, all the more (or: rather) make use of it (i.e., your freedom, to serve God as a slave)." The point is that believers who are freed should not view their freedom as an opportunity to do whatever they want but rather should redouble their efforts to serve God. Cf. BDAG, KJV, RV, ASV, RSV, ESV, NASB, NIV, REB, NLT, CEV, Schrage, Wolff, Garland, Fee, Deming, Harrill, Horsley, Merklein, Lang, Dawes, Baumert, Stuhlmacher, Bartchy. Among those who understand Paul as advocating the nonsensical position that believers should remain as slaves even if they can become free, cf. NRSV, NJB, NAB, Thiselton, Senft, Strobel, Conzelmann, Barrett, Orr/Walther. For an analysis of 1 Cor 7:21 and of Philemon as texts that view release from slavery as a second-order good, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 444-48.

Far from being appalled by an emancipation movement, Jesus and Paul probably would have been sympathetic to such, though they might have questioned: (a) how it could be accomplished without massive violence; (b) how some particularly destitute persons would survive; and (c) how the church would survive state persecution if it made emancipation a cornerstone. Slavery was at best a sometimes unavoidable, penultimate evil. Although the contemporary church has gone beyond the Bible in its total opposition to slavery, the biblical stance was fairly liberating in relation to the cultures out of which these texts emerged. The Bible's stance on slavery is a world away from the Bible's stance on a two-sex requirement for sexual relations, where there is no question of accommodating to prevailing socio-political realities, much less of drifting toward greater acceptance of homosexual unions than existed elsewhere. Scripture shows no reservations about prohibiting same-sex intercourse in the strongest possible terms, does not treat an other-sex prerequisite as merely a preferred good, and is distinctly countercultural in the rigor and absoluteness of its opposition. Rejection of a two-sex sexual requirement would have appalled Jesus, St. Paul, and all early Judeo-Christian communities as a rejection of creational, pre-fall foundation-structures ordained by God for the holiness of his people.

Comparisons between slavery and opposition to homosexual practice are thus entirely out of place. What sense does it make to say: Since we have changed on a view that was never a core advocacy position of Scripture to begin with and for which change one can find sympathies already within Scripture, why not change a view that Scripture treats as foundational and holds tenaciously to? In my opinion, it makes no sense.

## **2. Women in ministry**

An analogy to women in ministry is flawed for three reasons. First, it confuses categories. Being a woman is much more of a fixed, immutable condition than the experience of homosexual desire. Unlike impulses generally, the sex of an individual is 100% congenitally determined (i.e., by chromosomes). It cannot be elevated or lowered in 'intensity' in accordance with early childhood socialization, macrocultural influences, or individual life experiences. Moreover, being a woman is not a self-definition directly linked to sinful behavior. Homosexual passion, on the other hand, is a direct desire for scripturally prohibited, structurally incongruous behavior. Second, as noted in the refutation of the misogyny argument above, there are many places in Scripture that take a positive view of women in ministry, which in turn provides some degree of precedent for expanding such roles. Unlike the misguided refrain, "in Christ there is neither heterosexual orientation or homosexual orientation," one doesn't have to dream up an antinomy for Gal 3:28, "there is no 'male and female.'" Third, the direction of Scripture's countercultural witness has to be considered.

Relative to the broader milieu, the New Testament witness regarding women looks fairly liberating; but, again, the only countercultural dynamic operating in Scripture as regards homosexual practice is in the direction of greater opposition.

### 3. Divorce and remarriage

Here we note three reasons why the current stance of most mainline churches to divorce/remarriage is not a good analogue for adopting "gay marriage." At the outset it is worth noting that those who use a divorce/remarriage analogy seem to want to make a virtue of being more consistently disobedient to Jesus' teaching.

**a. Violation of structural prerequisites as greater offenses.** Scripture itself does not put homosexual unions and divorce on the same level of severity. Jesus' statements on divorce-and-remarriage were designed to close remaining loopholes in the law of Moses, not to suggest that divorce-and-remarriage was a more serious infraction of divine norms than having sex with, say, one's mother, sister, or daughter, a person of the same sex, or an animal. There is a big difference between the dissolution of a natural union and entrance into an inherently unnatural union that violates God's creation ethic. Both Paul and Matthew provide for limited exceptions to the prohibition of divorce and remarriage in Jesus' teaching. However, neither would ever have granted exceptions to a prohibition of homosexual practice. The kinds of extenuating circumstances existing for divorce, which might mitigate an absolute prohibition, are not comparable to the kinds of extenuating circumstances alleged for homosexual practice. Some people can be divorced more or less against their will or may seek divorce only after the partner has in effect already dissolved the union through serial unrepentant acts of adultery or serious spousal abuse. These are very different circumstances from an active choice to enter a homosexual union, which Scripture regards as grossly incompatible with structural, embodied existence and which choice is not coerced or accompanied by a threat of violence. In Scripture's eyes, the male-female paradigm was so sacred that violating it at any point was considered a major sacrilege against the Creator – a point confirmed, incidentally, by the horror expressed toward homosexual practice everywhere in early Judaism.<sup>165</sup> The permanent twoness of marriage is not more sacred than the two-sex prerequisite foundation on which the permanent twoness is predicated.

**b. Why remarriages are not like homosexual practice.** Second, while remarriage may not be God's initial will there is no evidence that Jesus felt that remarried persons should dissolve their second (or third) marriage. The reason is obvious: The problem with divorce is that it dissolves a natural marital bond. To require dissolution of a second or third marriage, a union that is otherwise natural, would be to restart the cycle of dissolution that was the problem to begin

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<sup>165</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, ch. 2 (pp. 159-83).

with. Consequently, the church rightly does not counsel a second (or third) divorce but rather a renewed commitment to a lifelong union. However, Scripture is not reluctant to command the dissolution of an inherently unnatural union that does not meet the structural prerequisites of sex, age, or degree of blood unrelatedness. The primary problem with such unions is not the *absence* of longevity and commitment but rather the *presence* of longevity in, and commitment to, a form of relationship that is structurally unsound. Continuing in inherently sinful and unnatural behavior does not improve the moral quality of that behavior. It merely regularizes the sin. Homosexual behavior is wrong because it involves a union with someone who sexually is a structural same rather than a sexual counterpart. Dissolution of such a union does not exacerbate that problem but rather appropriately ends it.

c. **Working to end the cycle of both divorce/remarriage and homosexual practice.** Since society and certainly church do not encourage multiple divorces and remarriages, a better analogy with participants in regular homosexual practice would be with persons who have been divorced and remarried dozens of times, who think that this cycle of dissolution and remarriage is a good thing, and who plan on continuing in that cycle for the rest of their lives, hopefully with the fewest negative side-effects. Those who appeal to a divorce analogy typically overlook the fact that any sin can be forgiven but all sin must be repented of. That is the point of contact between divorce and homosexual practice. The issue is whether the behavior is *repetitive* and *unrepentant*. Divorced-and-remarried persons should commit anew to stop the cycle of divorce and remarriage. Homosexually active persons, like persons engaged in incest or polyamorous behavior, should commit anew to stop the structurally discordant behavior, here specifically sex with persons of the same sex. Just as society and certainly church work to end the cycle of divorce and remarriage, so too they should work to end the cycle of homosexual behavior. It is inadequate to say: But we do want to end the cycle of *promiscuous* homosexual activity. For neither do we say merely: We should end the cycle of promiscuous incestuous or polygamous activity. The structural incongruity of same-sex intercourse remains even when the promiscuity stops.

#### 4. Other attempted marriage analogies

Myers and Scanzoni add other alleged marriage analogies to contest the view that marriage should be defined as "the union of a man and a woman":

[T]he understanding of marriage has changed repeatedly. . . . not only from polygamy to monogamy, but from arrangement to romantic choice, from male headship to mutuality, and from stigmatizing both interracial marriage and remarriage after divorce to accepting them. . . . The question is, should our understanding of marriage change again? Or should marriage be defined not just by vows, fidelity, or children (all of which homosexuals can have) but also by its

exclusion of homosexuals, as the proposed federal marriage amendment would require?<sup>166</sup>

The last remark is particularly revealing. Myers and Scanzoni state here that the sole criteria for marriage are “vows, fidelity, or children” – and children they surely don’t mean since their very next argument is that marriage doesn’t require children.<sup>167</sup> So their criteria are down to two, vows and fidelity, which is really one single criterion: the vow to be faithful.<sup>168</sup> This makes all the more bizarre their point just 5-6 pages later that the case for “gay marriage” does not leave society without “principled grounds” for denying “three [persons] in love.”<sup>169</sup> Do Myers and Scanzoni believe that three or more consenting adults are incapable of making vows to be mutually faithful to each other? Or, for that matter, that close blood relations cannot make such a vow? Opposition to homosexual practice is based in part on the recognition that vows to fidelity are necessary but *insufficient* grounds for marriage. A series of prerequisites for formal or structural congruity must first be met (regarding species, gender, number, age, non-blood relatedness). Myers and Scanzoni appear to understand this when they talk about polygamous unions but forget it when they consider whether heterosexual unions have a claim to marriage that homosexual unions do not.

Myers and Scanzoni suggest that **a change from polygamy to monogamy** justifies a change from a two-sex marital prerequisite to same-sex marriage. This alleged analogue is poorly conceived since Jesus predicated his insistence on marital monogamy and permanency precisely on a two-sex requirement. “Male and female he made them” (Gen 1:27) was Jesus’ rational basis for ending the male exemption as regards simultaneous polygyny or serial monogamy (Mark 10:5-9). It is Jesus himself who insisted that marriage be “the union of a man and a woman” – otherwise, there is no point to his citation of Gen 1:27. The twoness of the union derives from the twoness of the sexes. Consequently, the correct analogy is really between advocacy for homosexual unions and the demise of monogamy. Of course, a society like ancient Israel, which always had a two-sex prerequisite for marriage, can be inconsistent on the question of monogamy for men even as it maintains consistent monogamy for women. However, it ceases to be inconsistent once it ignores altogether the significance of sexual differentiation for the selection of a marital partner.

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<sup>166</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 120-1.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 121: “couples who have chosen not to [or can’t] have children can be just as married as anyone else.”

<sup>168</sup> After all, fidelity in marriage cannot be demonstrated until after the marriage begins.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-26 (see my rebuttal of this argument in II.B.4.b., pp. 41-45). Myers and Scanzoni refer here to “three men in love” but their point is the number, not the sex, of the participants.

Another point of serious breakdown in the alleged analogy is that nowhere does the Old Testament *require* that men have multiple wives. As with divorce, eradicating polygyny does not overturn a core value of the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New Testament. It simply removes a concession to human hardness of heart.<sup>170</sup> The same applies to the alleged analogue of moving away from arranged marriages to marriages based on romantic love. Scripture does not command arranged marriages. Moreover, Scripture is not entirely disinterested in the quality of affective heterosexual bonds.<sup>171</sup> Prohibitions of “interracial” marriage in the OT—more accurately, prohibitions of Jew-Gentile marriages—are based largely on questions of fidelity to Yahwistic faith, as the Book of Ruth and Ezra 9-10 indicate. The New Testament eliminates the consideration of ethnicity but retains the concern that God’s people should marry “in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39).

As regards a shift from “male headship to mutuality” the Bible does enjoin a hierarchical model for marriage, even in the New Testament. At the same time, the New Testament conceives of male headship primarily in terms of service and self-surrender (Eph 5:25-33) and in many places lifts up the role of women in the proclamation of the gospel. Our discussion of the “misogyny argument” (II.D.3.e., pp. 80-83) underscored egalitarian elements in Scripture that provide some scriptural basis for those who want to make the case for marriage without male headship. Whether it supplies an adequate basis remains a matter for debate in the church. But the degree to which one has to override the biblical witness to support homosexual practice of any sort is a quantum leap away from the case for egalitarian marriage. The level of severity of the two issues simply cannot be compared without making a mockery of analogical reasoning. A wife who does not submit to her husband in all respects is not said to be liable to capital sentencing (OT) or exclusion from the kingdom of God (NT). The case for a two-sex prerequisite neither depends for its validity on the case for male headship nor shares the same level of significance.

In short, these are all bad analogies for the kind of substantive departure from Scripture’s commands that would be required of the church if it condoned homosexual bonds. None of them come close to the kind of radical change in the definition of marriage that “gay marriage” would bring. Of course, Myers and Scanzoni would argue that homosexual marriage is not all that radical a change in the structure of marriage. The problem is that such an opinion cannot be

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<sup>170</sup> For further discussion of why polygamy is a bad analogue, see “Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts?,” 103-8. In the main polygyny in ancient Israelite society was an occasional concession to the need for progeny to insure survival and to carry on the family name—so the use of slave concubines by Abraham and Jacob, at the urging of the primary wives. The excesses of polygamy by Israel’s kings were just that: excesses (cf. Deut 17:18).

<sup>171</sup> Gen 2:18-24; 24:67; 29; Deut 24:5; Prov 5:15-20; Mal 2:14-17; 1 Cor 7:2-5; and, of course, the Song of Solomon. Cf. “The Old Testament and Homosexuality,” 369-70.

sustained from Scripture itself. What would constitute a comparable change in the definition of marriage from Scripture's perspective? We turn now to the closer, and thus superior, analogues.

### 5. Better analogies: "Responsible" incest, polyamory, and pedosexuality

Those who cite slavery, women in ministry, divorce/remarriage, and other changes in marriage over the centuries as the best analogies to homosexual practice ignore analogies that have stronger points of contact. Obviously the best analogies would be those sexual behaviors that church and society continue to regard as structurally incompatible: incest, polyamory, adultery, pedophilia, and bestiality. These are also behaviors that the witness of Scripture condemns (adult-prepubescent sex implicitly). While it is true that the Old Testament made exceptions for polygyny (never, however, for polyandry), Jesus revoked these in accordance with a back-to-creation model. **Incest and polyamory** provide particularly good parallels since they, like homosexual intercourse, involve behaviors that are (a) capable of being adult, consensual, long-term and faithful (monogamous for incest, faithful to more than one partner but not promiscuous for polyamory); (b) wrong partly because they are structurally incongruous or unnatural (incest in terms of too much sameness on a familial level, polyamory because it violates the binary character of male-female sexuality); and (c) wrong partly they carry a disproportionately high risk of negative side effects (incest as regards potential birth defects and intergenerational intimacy, polyamory as regards relational instability and jealousy). **Pedosexuality and bestiality** are more extreme forms of sexual immorality because of the issue of consent. Nevertheless, they provide parallels to homosexual practice in terms of both a nature argument of structural incompatibility (here of extreme unlikeness, pedophilia as regards maturity, bestiality as regards species) and a socio-scientific argument of disproportionately high rates of harm (though not universal, measurable harm).

Undoubtedly Myers and Scanzoni would argue that even committed incestuous unions and committed polyamorous unions are *inherently* harmful. I would contend the same for committed homosexual unions, inasmuch as homosexual unions endorse narcissistic arousal for one's sexual self and imply, by the logic of same-sex merger, that each partner is only half of his or her own sex. Yet neither they nor I can prove *scientifically measurable* harm for all participants in all circumstances. In fact, not even with respect to adult-child sexual activity is it possible to prove scientifically measurable harm in all circumstances.<sup>172</sup> How, then, shall they prove it for committed incestuous or polyamorous unions?<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> This point was argued by B. Rind, et al., "A meta-analytic examination of assumed properties of child sexual abuse using college samples," *Psychological Bulletin* 124 (1998): 22-53. The study was controversial, although even the authors acknowledged that "lack of harmfulness does not imply lack of wrongfulness. Moral codes . . . need not be . . . based on considerations of psychological harmfulness or



While most proponents of homosexual unions express outrage at *any* comparison between homosexuality and pedophilia (pedosexuality), some researchers make the case that pedosexuality is not a mental disorder by using arguments similar to those once used to remove homosexuality from the *DSM* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*). The journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior* devoted an entire issue in 2002 (31.6: 467-510) to discussing "Is pedophilia a mental disorder?" opening with an article by Richard Green (pp. 467-71) that made precisely such a case. Green, a pioneer in research on the correlation of femininity in boys with homosexual orientation<sup>174</sup> and an influential advocate thirty years earlier for the removal of homosexuality from the *DSM*, argued that pedophilia, as with homosexuality, is relatively widespread historically, cross-culturally, and across species. Studies indicate that 17-25% of men experience significant arousal to sexual images of children and/or adolescents. As with

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health. . . . The current findings are relevant to moral and legal positions only to the extent that these positions are based on the presumption of psychological harm" (p. 44). The Rind et al. study was subsequently and extensively critiqued by S. J. Dallam et al., "The effects of child sexual abuse: comment on Rind, Tromovitch, and Bauserman (1998)," *Psychological Bulletin* 127 (2001): 715-33. However, although the second study presented evidence that the first study may have overstated its case and misread some data (though see the response by Rind et al. in the same issue: "The Validity and Appropriateness of Methods, Analyses, and Conclusion in Rind et al. (1998): A Rebuttal," 734-58), even Dallam et al. begin their study with the following caveat: "Please note that the purpose of our article is not to argue that all types of sexual abuse do in fact cause pervasive and intense harm in all victims. Indeed, *it is well recognized in the empirical literature* that the aftereffects of CSA [child sexual abuse] are extremely varied and *that a significant percentage of abused children remain a-symptomatic*" (p. 716; emphasis added). Similar conclusions about the absence of intrinsic or inherent pathology to adult-child sex are stated in a book by David M. Fergusson and P. E. Mullen, entitled *Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Evidence-Based Perspective* (SAGE Publications, 1999). They note that as many as 40% of children who experience sex with an adult may grow up without any measurable, adverse symptoms. A 2004 study purported to show that 26 homosexual and bisexual men who "reported sexual experiences before age 17 with someone at least 5 years older" but "perceived their sexual experiences as non-negative, noncoercive, and nonabusive were similar . . . in their levels of adjustment" to a control group of 142 homosexual and bisexual men who reported no such sexual experiences (J. L. Stanley et al., "Gay and bisexual men's age-discrepant childhood sexual experiences," *Journal of Sex Research* 41:381-9).

<sup>173</sup> A sexual "threesome" is generally less stable than a sexual "twosome," but it is not inherently so. Traditional "plural marriages" have historically fared far better in terms in long-term commitment than have homosexual unions. Ironically, polygynous males on average probably have fewer sex partners in the course of life than do homosexual males. To those who contend that adult incestuous unions produce inherent measurable harm I say: Prove it. If the two close blood relations love each other and are adults who are taking proper birth control precautions, how is measurable harm going to be proven? By their distress? What if they don't feel distress? Or what if whatever distress they might feel is due to intense societal incestphobia? How else is harm going to be proven? By establishing that it makes them socially dysfunctional? But what if they can continue to do their job and have social networks at least with people who aren't offended by the incestuous quality of their bond? How then are they going to prove measurable harm? Of course, the answer is: They can't. They are left with a vague but powerful sense that a certain degree of blood unrelatedness is one of those irreducible minimums of sexual relationships, irrespective of whether measurable harm can be proven. There is simply too much structural sameness on a familial level—what Leviticus calls having sex with "the flesh of one's own flesh" (18:6). And that is the problem with same-sex intercourse, only now on the level of sex or gender. Indeed, homosexual practice is arguably a greater offense than a loving incestuous union because it violates a more foundational creation standard.

<sup>174</sup> Richard Green, *The 'Sissy Boy Syndrome' and the Development of Homosexuality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

homosexuality, pedophilia does not intrinsically cause personal distress or societal maladaptiveness.<sup>175</sup> What harms the mental health of pedophiles is societal condemnation of their actions. Green concludes: "This does not mean that [pedophiles] must be accepted culturally and legally today. The question is: Do they constitute a mental illness? Not unless we declare a lot of people in many cultures and in much of the past to be mentally ill. And certainly not by the criteria of DSM."<sup>176</sup>

<sup>175</sup> He cites a unique British study of 77 "non-prisoner, non-patient pedophiles" that concluded: "The most striking thing about these results is how normal the paedophiles appear to be according to their scores on these major personality dimensions—particularly the two that are clinically relevant [neuroticism and psychoticism]" (p. 57).

<sup>176</sup> On this and other connections between pedophilia and homosexuality, see my "Immoralism, Homosexual Unhealth, and Scripture: Part II: Science," sec. IV: The Problem of Pedophilia (pp. 16-36). Even the noted researcher of child-sex abuse, Kurt Freund (also an apologist for gay rights), acknowledged that the "proportion of true pedophiles among persons with a homosexual erotic development is greater than that in persons who develop heterosexually"; otherwise stated, "a homosexual development notably often does not result in androphilia [sex between adult males] but in homosexual pedophilia" (K. Freund and R. Watson, "The proportions of heterosexual and homosexual pedophiles among sex offenders against children: an exploratory study," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 18 [1992]: 34-43, quotes from the abstract on p. 34 and from p. 41 respectively). Using a phallometric test (which records penile volume changes during the presentation of nude pictures or other potentially erotic stimuli), Freund and Watson estimated that homosexual development results in pedophilia *at least* twice as often as heterosexual development does. But even this high estimate is probably seriously underestimates the actual rate, as Freund and Watson admit (see my discussion on pp. 25-27; the actual figures for incarcerated offenders suggest a rate seventeen times as often). "The rate of homosexual attraction is 6 to 20 times higher among pedophiles" (R. Blanchard, et al., "Fraternal Birth Order and Sexual Orientation in Pedophiles," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 29 [2000]: 463-78, quote from p. 464).

In terms of etiology (origination) and attendant traits, homosexual teleiphilia (man-man attraction) shares both differences and similarities with homosexual pedophilia. That some differences would exist—apart, of course, from the obvious difference of age preference—is to be expected; otherwise, all homosexual persons would be homosexual pedophiles when, in fact, most homosexual persons are not homosexual pedophiles. K. Freund et al. contended that homosexual pedophiles are more likely to be bisexual than homosexual teleiophiles (K. Freund, et al., "Erotic gender differentiation in pedophilia," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 20 [1991]: 555-66; "Deficient erotic gender differentiation in pedophilia: a follow-up," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 22 [1993]: 619-28) and that only homosexual teleiophiles "show significant levels of feminine identification" in childhood and reported "significantly poorer father-son relations" ("Feminine gender identity and physical aggressiveness in heterosexual and homosexual pedophiles," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 13 [1987]: 25-34; "Is the distant relationship of fathers and homosexual sons related to the sons' erotic preference for male partners, or to the sons' atypical gender identity, or to both?" *Journal of Homosexuality* 9 [1983]: 7-25).

At the same time, there are also connecting links between homosexual pedophilia and homosexual teleiphilia, besides the obvious presence of a dominant attraction to the same sex. Freund et al. concluded from one study that "the establishment of erotic sex preference precedes that of erotic age preference" ("Toward a testable developmental model of pedophilia: the development of erotic age preference," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 17 [1993]: 315-24). In addition, Freund et al. found that "male homosexuals in general" (i.e., those preferring prepubescent, pubescent, or adult sexual partners) "tend to be unaggressive in boyhood," in contrast to male heterosexuals in general ("Feminine gender identity and physical aggressiveness in heterosexual and homosexual pedophiles," cited above). A 1988 study found that male child molesters "responded with moderate sexual arousal . . . to the [slides of] nude males of all ages" (W. L. Marshall et al., "Sexual offenders against male children: sexual preferences," *Behavior Research and Therapy* 26: 383-91). Finally, a 2000 study of "Fraternal birth order and sexual orientation in pedophiles" by R. Blanchard et al. (cited above) found that "fraternal birth order correlates with homosexuality in pedophiles, just as it does in men attracted to physically mature partners. . . . Results also argue against a

Also of relevance here are the views on pedophilia held by Dr. Fred Berlin, founder of the Sexual Disorders Clinic at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and professor of psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. In a 1997 interview with the Office of Communications of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Berlin, while not defending pedophilia, described pedophilia as an "orientation" that (1) is sometimes exclusive, (2) no one chooses to have, (3) is probably caused by a combination of congenital and early childhood influences, and (4) can be treated but not cured. Many pedophiles have "genuine affection" for the children with whom they have sex. "Pedophiles are not 'less than human' but valued human lives that have 'gone astray.'"<sup>177</sup> In a later interview with a popular magazine Berlin aptly remarked: "The biggest misconception about pedophilia is that someone chooses to have it. . . . It's not anyone's fault that they have it, but it's their responsibility to do something about it."<sup>178</sup> Although Berlin himself does not draw a parallel with homosexuality, it is hard not to see significant similarities.

Myers/Scanzoni and other proponents of homosexual unions ignore the better analogues in favor of the weaker ones. The only explanation for this that I can come up with is that the better analogues do not favor the position that they espouse.

### III. Concluding Observations

Final observations are in order about the witness of Scripture, manipulative rhetoric in the homosexuality debate, the argument from scientific reason, and why "gay marriage" is a bad idea.

#### A. Conclusions from the Scripture Argument

I believe that the arguments arrayed above show, beyond reasonable doubt, that

- The scriptural witness for an other-sex or two-sex practice and against homosexual practice is strong, pervasive, absolute, and countercultural.

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previous explanation of the high prevalence of homosexuality in pedophiles (25% in this study), namely, that the factors that determine sexual preference in pedophiles are different from those that determine sexual preference in men attracted to adults" (abstract). This study lent support for the conclusion of a 1998 study by Blanchard and A. F. Bogaert; namely, that "homosexuality in men attracted to immature males is etiologically related to homosexuality in men attracted to mature males" ("Birth order in homosexual versus heterosexual sex offenders against children, pubescents, and adults," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 27: 595-603; see also: Bogaert, Blanchard, et al., "Pedophilia, sexual orientation, and birth order," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 106 [1997]: 331-5).

Consequently, while there are some developmental differences between pedophilic homosexuals and teleiophilic homosexuals, significant continuity exists that justifies seeing a spectrum of developing homoerotic possibilities rather than a sharp line separating two polar extremes.

<sup>177</sup> Sept. 8, 1997 (available online at: <http://www.usccb.org/comm/kit6.htm>).

<sup>178</sup> *People Magazine*, Apr. 15, 2002.

- Attempts to dismiss that witness through appeal to one or more “new knowledge” arguments (exploitation, orientation, or misogyny) prove to be baseless.
- There is a kind of nature argument against homosexual practice that makes good sense, one employed by Scripture itself. This argument posits formal or structural prerequisites to sexual behavior that transcend both vows to commitment and an absence of universal, inherent, and scientifically measurable harm.
- Appeals to various alleged analogues as justification for departure from this core standard in sexual ethics (Gentile inclusion, slavery, women in ministry, divorce/remarriage, other changes to the institution of marriage) are fatally flawed and ignore far better analogues in sexual behaviors that church and society continue to proscribe.

I return to the title of this article and apply it to Myers and Scanzoni: Why did Myers and Scanzoni reach very different conclusions about the biblical witness on homosexual practice? Was it because they marshaled an impressive case to counter the kinds of arguments that I put forth here, or others have put forward in other publications? Our analysis of their presentation of Scripture shows little evidence of this. Rather, as with their inadequate attempts at dismissing the nature argument that Scripture uses, their conclusions about the witness of Scripture appear to be a product of three factors. First, they are unaware or unwilling to consider virtually every effective argument and counterargument against a pro-homosex reading. Second, in the occasional instances when they actually attempt to take on alternate readings, they misunderstand or misrepresent the arguments and/or of the historical and literary context of Scripture. Third, they show an apparent determination (whether conscious or not) to bend Scripture to conform to an ideology that had been reached on other grounds. .

Myers and Scanzoni more or less admit that they would never have come to the conclusion that Scripture might be open to committed homosexual unions from anything in Scripture itself. In their first chapter they tell readers that they changed their thinking about homosexual practice when “we tested some of our earlier ideas about sexual orientation against the emerging evidence and the whole of Scripture. Research, reason, and people’s life stories challenged us to revise our understandings.”<sup>179</sup> Essentially, they learned that a homosexual orientation is very difficult to change and has significant congenital causation (scientific and philosophic reason) and they heard and witnessed the “life stories” of homosexual persons in caring, committed unions (experience). It wasn’t Scripture that caused them to rethink their views on homosexual practice

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<sup>179</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 8.

but “(scientific) research, reason, and people’s life stories.” They mention that they tested their evolving ideas against “the whole of Scripture” but, as we have seen, they don’t offer readers any persuasive arguments in their book that “the whole of Scripture” is any more affirming of homosexual practice than, say, Lev 18:22 and 20:13 and Rom 1:26-27.

Now there is nothing wrong with allowing questions and tentative insights drawn from reason and experience to drive one to a reexamination of Scripture in matters of faith and practice. Indeed, it is commendable. What is problematic, however, is when the quality of the investigation suggests that one is going back to Scripture not so much to allow it the role of critic and ultimate authority as to neutralize it and thereby render it harmless to one’s own newfound views. This kind of approach poses a problem for those who insist that they “stake [their] lives on a biblically defined perspective” and live by the motto “ever-reforming according to the Word of God.”<sup>180</sup> I don’t say this to single out Myers and Scanzoni. Their journey is really quite typical of those who claim that Scripture is their ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice but who nonetheless advocate for ecclesiastical and cultural validation of homosexual unions. At the same time, since they are publishing about the sacred Scriptures of the church, Myers and Scanzoni have a special obligation as leaders in the church and as scholars to do well their homework on what the Bible says in its context and to take care not to manipulate it to achieve a desired end.

### B. Manipulative Rhetoric?

Myers and Scanzoni have produced a book that is well written from the standpoint of style and rhetoric. The authors work hard to create a unified textual *persona* that is generous, inviting, faithful, and reasonable, often just before or after going on the offensive. They work hard on both an *ethos* appeal (establishing their good character) and a *pathos* appeal (engaging the readers’ emotions). At least one of the authors (David Myers) is obviously, as a renowned psychologist, very skilled in knowing how to present himself and his views to achieve maximal effect.

Yet a number of the deliberate rhetorical strategies utilized by Myers and Scanzoni come off as a bit manipulative. I am thinking in particular of four rhetorical moves: (1) their repeated assurance to readers of their fidelity to all “the big-ticket items” of the faith; (2) their repeated call to an “uncertain humility” especially as regards anyone claiming to know for certain what Scripture says about homosexual practice; (3) their insistence that they are not out to “win arguments” with their book; and (4) their claim that a stance that

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 7.

promotes committed homosexual unions bridges the divide between “liberals” and “conservatives” and produces a “win-win” situation for all.

### 1. Assuring readers of their faithfulness on “the big-ticket items”

That Myers and Scanzoni want to dodge the charge of being unfaithful to Scripture is obvious from their repeated assurances to readers that they are big supporters of marriage and are faithful Christians.<sup>181</sup> Readers are also told: “We Christians come in many varieties. . . . But on the big-ticket items we are discussing here, followers of Jesus pretty much agree. Whatever our differences, we stand on common ground.”<sup>182</sup> With all due respect to the authors, this conclusion is premature, unsubstantiated, and self-serving. It is premature inasmuch as Myers and Scanzoni make it before they even discuss the biblical witness on homosexual practice. It is unsubstantiated inasmuch as their presentation of the biblical witness thirty-plus pages later is poorly done and unconvincing. Finally, the claim is self-serving because it seeks to exonerate the authors from the charge that their support for homosexual unions is a serious violation of Scripture.

An assertion that the Bible’s two-sex requirement for marriage and corresponding opposition to same-sex intercourse is not a “big-ticket item” must be proven, something that Myers and Scanzoni fail to do. It is nice that the authors seek to assure those with whom they disagree that “we have empathy for our friends and colleagues who . . . are good-hearted people who *desire to be faithful to Scripture* and supportive of marriage and who are concerned for the well-being of gays, but who have not come to the same conclusions as we have.”<sup>183</sup> Frankly, the only ones who have any real difficulty in demonstrating fidelity to Scripture on the matter of homosexual practice are Myers/Scanzoni and those who share their viewpoint, *not* those who disagree with such a viewpoint. If the Corinthian Christians had expressed empathy for Paul’s “desire to be faithful to Scripture” in the matter of adult consensual incest or man-male intercourse, the expression would have rung a bit hollow.

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<sup>181</sup> For example, in the opening “Personal Letter to Our Readers” on pp. xi-xii: “We believe in marriage. We want to see it strengthened. . . we take marriage seriously. . . . We not only take marriage seriously, we also take our Christian faith seriously”; in ch. 1, “The Great Divide”: “the two of us are kindred spirits as active Christians who care about compassion, love, and justice in the lives of all persons, regardless of sexual orientation” (p. 5) and “**We are committed to marriage and marriage renewal**” (boldface original), followed by a listing of credentials to prove the point (p. 6); in ch. 5, “Understanding Sexual Orientation”: “We also . . . generally [?] agree that truth is revealed through God’s word (Scripture) and God’s works (nature). . . . we welcome marriage-supporting media and economic policies, and we celebrate the co-nurturing of children by adults who are committed to each other and to their children’s welfare” (p. 54).

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 134 (emphasis added).

Just two sentences prior to the remark about “big-ticket items” Myers and Scanzoni acknowledge that among such items is the conviction “that sexual fidelity and covenantal relationships are biblically supported and conducive to well-being.”<sup>184</sup> Elsewhere they indicate to readers that prohibiting marriage to more than two persons at any one time and to close blood relations (incest)—whether or not the participants in such unions are committed and show love—are also among the big-ticket items that Christians should agree on.<sup>185</sup> Presumably, Myers and Scanzoni would not remain members of any denomination that encouraged sexual promiscuity and infidelity, or “responsible” polyamory and incest.

And yet, from Scripture’s (including Jesus’) perspective and from the perspective of natural law, the two-sex character of marriage is the foundation for the call to marital monogamy and indissolubility, while the rejection of too much structural sameness among sex partners establishes, by analogue, the grounds for rejecting too much structural sameness among close blood relations. The two-sex foundation is more, not less, significant than the sexual standards that derive from it. Scripture portrays the violation of the sexually dimorphic character of marriage as a great sacrilege to the Creator, comparable on the horizontal dimension to idolatry on the vertical dimension as a suppression of the truth about the Creator and creation (Rom 1:24-27). The reactions to same-sex intercourse of any sort in ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity give unequivocal indication of the degree of severity of the offense. If Myers and Scanzoni concur that other sexual offenses are “big-ticket items,” then they have no scriptural grounds for concluding something different about the significance of a two-sex sexual prerequisite. It too is a “big-ticket item.”

Given Paul’s handling of a case of adult, consensual incest in 1 Cor 5-6, it is evident that promotion of any form of sexual behavior that risks disinheritance from God’s kingdom for its participants (1 Cor 6:9) is not something that Paul (or Jesus, in whose name he acted) would have taken lightly. Of such acts Paul says astonishingly: “You didn’t rather mourn so as to remove from your midst the one who did this deed?” (1 Cor 5:2).<sup>186</sup> And, later: “I fear that I may have to mourn over many who have continued in their former sinning and did not repent of the sexual uncleanness (*akatharsia*), sexual immorality (*porneia*), and licentiousness (*aselgeia*) that they practiced” (2 Cor 12:21). The mourning, of course, is over the prospect of the unrepentant offender’s forfeiture of eternal life.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 125-26.

<sup>186</sup> The aim of this action is to give the offender a wake-up call in the hope that his “spirit might be saved on the Day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:5) and that, after repentance, the community to which he belongs might quickly forgive him, comfort him, and reaffirm their love for him (“in order that we might not be cheated [defrauded, taken advantage of] by Satan”; 2 Cor 2:5-11; cf. 7:8-13).

To promote behavior that leads to the spiritual downfall of those “for whom Christ died” is to “sin against Christ” (1 Cor 8:12).<sup>187</sup>

Jesus spoke of the danger to any who cause a fellow follower of Jesus to stumble to his or her spiritual ruin – something about it being better if a millstone were hung around such a one’s neck and such a one were thrown into the sea (Mark 9:42 par. Matt 18:6-7). In Mark (and Matthew) this saying is connected to the saying about cutting off body parts that threaten one’s downfall, lest one’s whole body be thrown into hell (Mark 9:43-48 par. Matt 18:8-9). The same saying appears in Matt 5:29-30 sandwiched between sayings regarding sexual offenses. Can one give assurance *from the teaching of Jesus and from Scripture generally* that the millstone-saying necessarily excludes persons whose support of homosexual unions might lead to the spiritual ruin of believers with same-sex attractions?<sup>188</sup> It seems to me that one could only do so if one first established from Scripture that repetitive, unrepentant participation in “faithful” same-sex intercourse could never lead to exclusion from God’s kingdom. But it is precisely this point that Myers and Scanzoni have failed to establish in any convincing way.

There is, consequently, a kind of manipulative quality to the claims made by Myers/Scanzoni and others that we all agree on the “big-ticket items” of Scripture and that all sides of the homosexuality issue desire to be faithful to Scripture. It sounds like a magnanimous gesture until one realizes how devastating is the scriptural case against all homosexual practice. To agree with the premises of Myers and Scanzoni is to concede, and falsely so, that the church should not make too big a deal of what Scripture might have to say about homosexual practice.

## 2. Repeated calls to humility regarding appeals to Scripture

The same manipulative feel to the presentation of Myers and Scanzoni occurs in the oft-repeated encouragement to show “humility” in what one thinks one can say about Scripture’s views on homosexual practice. For example:

The life of faith is a dance on the boundary between conviction and humility. Our *conviction* follows our leap of faith: we stake our lives on a biblically defined perspective. . . .  
Our *humility* follows our conviction that we are not God. . . The reformers’ motto – “reformed and ever-reforming according to the Word of God” – was

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<sup>187</sup> This verse makes the point with respect to encouraging weak Christians to eat idol meat in an idol’s temple but it is surely applicable to any occasion in which one encourages a believer to engage in acts, especially sexual acts, that could lead to the latter’s destruction. As in Rom 1:18-27, there are a number of parallels between Paul’s discussion of sexual immorality in 1 Cor 5-7 and idolatry in 1 Cor 8-10. Cf. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 446-504 passim, esp. p. 474.

<sup>188</sup> I.e., by causing such believers to engage in behavior that puts them at risk of being excluded from God’s kingdom.



mindful that none of us (and certainly not this book's authors) have a corner on God's truth. . . . Thus we need to hold all our ideas with a certain tentativeness. . .

Sometimes the faith-mandated testing of our ideas *strengthens* them. . . .

Other times, the open-minded testing of our ideas *changes* our thinking. So it happened for us as we tested some of our earlier ideas about sexual orientation against the emerging evidence and the whole of Scripture. Research, reason, and people's life stories challenged us to revise our understandings. If change is discomfoting, as it has been for us at times, we can reassure ourselves. . . . Christian humility mandates the very opposite of fanaticism. (Fanatics, it has been said, are people who can't change their minds and won't change the subject.) . . .

What follows on these pages must be similarly subject to challenge and change. If all truth is God's, then we can all comfortably welcome . . . change. That's what enabled the ages-long process by which the church has reformed its understanding of slavery, of women's roles, . . . and even of marriage. Most people . . . will not share their ancestors' Scripture-quoting support for arranged marriages and male headship, or their contempt for interracial couples and for those who have suffered divorce. With time, understandings change. . . .

As faith-based people, we can perhaps agree that by adopting that ever-reforming and dialogue-supporting spirit of humility we are taking the first step in bridging our divide.<sup>189</sup> . . .

When torn between self-certain conviction and uncertain humility, let us err on the side of humility.<sup>190</sup>

Initially the appeal to humility sounds balanced. Myers and Scanzoni speak of the importance of "conviction" regarding a "biblically defined perspective" and even state that the conclusions of their book are also subject to change. However, there are problems.

First, many of the authors' unqualified conclusions do not sound tentative; for example, the following categorical conclusion about Scripture, "Scripture does not speak to naturally disposed same-sex orientation, nor does it speak to loving, committed homosexual relationships"; or the following categorical conclusion about nature and social effects: "[T]he dominoes of same-sex marriage on the one hand, and of polygamy and incest on the other, are ten feet apart" and "logically unrelated."<sup>191</sup> They also don't sound tentative, and rightly so, about convictions that are genuinely Christian: the lordship of Jesus Christ and a rejection of sexual promiscuity, infidelity, polyamory, and incest. And they don't sound tentative about their view of the necessity of tentativeness and humility.

Secondly, why do Myers and Scanzoni define humility solely in times of tentativeness of one's views and willingness to change, especially as regards one's use of Scripture? Doesn't humility more often entail *not* changing a

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<sup>189</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 7-10.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 135. For other calls to humility, see pp. xii, 52, 54, 150, 154.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 103, 126.

conviction in a desire to be faithful to the overwhelming witness of Scripture? When a disciple of Jesus is obedient to the commands of the Lord and adheres steadfastly to Lord's views, in spite of a desire to think otherwise or in spite of intense biological urges to do otherwise, that disciple is showing humility: taking up one's cross, denying oneself, losing one's life, and resolutely following Jesus. Humility often means acknowledging the overwhelming witness of Scripture when that witness disagrees with our own preconceived notions and the prevailing cultural wind. Indeed, humility in Scripture has to do with thinking of others as more important than oneself, *not* with holding the commands of God in Scripture in a tentative mode, much less subverting those commands. Moreover, *change* in Jesus' ministry on sexual matters meant *intensifying* demands in sexual ethics (based on the two-sex model of marriage as found in God's creational intent for human life), not loosening them, and doing so in the context of an active and loving outreach to violators.<sup>192</sup>

Thirdly, while Myers and Scanzoni talk about their willingness to change the conclusions in their book, their own narrative is that they have *already* changed by moving from an original position opposed to all homosexual practice to their current position in support of "gay marriage." This change from a "traditional" reading of Scripture<sup>193</sup> to one that accepts allegedly new ideas based on "research, reason, and people's life stories" is held up as a model for readers: "Other times, the open-minded testing of our ideas *changes* our thinking. So it happened for us. . . ." Furthermore, when they talk about a willingness to change, they cite as analogues only those changes that are commonly given by supporters of homosexual unions for deviating from Scripture on homosexual practice: slavery, women's roles, divorce, arranged marriages, male headship, and interracial marriages. This underscores that Myers and Scanzoni are not really aiming the humility/change argument at themselves.

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<sup>192</sup> Since the mainline churches do not usually discipline members who engage in homosexual practice in a serial, self-affirming manner, perhaps change means now a willingness to implement the kind of loving discipline that Paul commends in the case of the incestuous man (1 Cor 5) and that Matthew commends generally (Matt 18:15-17). Could that too be a change born of humility, since it runs against the grain of many persons' desire to avoid conflict and tension? Or should we be completely closed off to this new way of doing things? Don't Myers and Scanzoni tell us that "Fanatics . . . are people who can't change their minds" (p. 9)? Of course, discipline of the type that Paul refers to in 1 Cor 5 would be implemented only when the member both persists in engaging in same-sex intercourse and steadfastly affirms the rightness of the offense. It would not be applied to the mere experience of same-sex attractions. Moreover, the church would have to consider prayerfully whether forestalling discipline was more likely to (1) lead to the offender's repentance and restoration or (2) convey acceptance of the offender's behavior to the offender and to the community.

<sup>193</sup> I put "traditional" in quotes because the view that Scripture is adamantly opposed to homosexual practice is not just a product of conservative or traditional biases. Opposition to homosexual practice is *the* one and only scriptural view, not just a "traditional" perspective on what Scripture says. There is no credible case for arguing, or at least in the last 2500 years no credible case has been made, that Scripture is ambiguous on the question.

If there were still any doubts in readers' minds about where "change" and "humility" should take Christians, Myers and Scanzoni remove the veil completely at the end of their book when they say: "When torn between self-certain conviction and uncertain humility, let us err on the side of humility." This call follows closely on the heels of a call to "conservatives" to "agree that, yes, it's getting and keeping people married, not keeping gays *un*married, that really matters." Since, too, (1) "self-certain conviction" is associated in their book with maintaining "their ancestors' Scripture-quoting" opposition to committed homosexual unions and (2) "uncertain humility" with being open to change what were once thought to be scriptural positions (slavery, women's roles, divorce, etc.), Myers and Scanzoni are obviously interpreting the call to "humility" as a call to embrace committed homosexual unions. To be humble is by their definition of things to say: "I don't really know for certain whether Scripture is opposed to committed homosexual unions; and I really should major in grace and love rather than in judgment and contempt for such unions."<sup>194</sup>

Of course, the irony is that Myers and Scanzoni are no less certain of their stance favoring "gay marriages" than those opposing such a stance, even though they have no credible grounds from Scripture for having this conviction. To truly "err" on the side of "uncertain humility" – as Myers and Scanzoni wrongly characterize humility – would entail Myers and Scanzoni giving up on their own advocacy for gay marriage. But the very fact that Myers and Scanzoni have produced an advocacy book for homosexual marriage is testimony to the fact that they are not willing to "err" on the side of "uncertain humility" over "certain conviction."<sup>195</sup> So it is hard not to view the oft-repeated refrain to humility in this book as a manipulative tool to undermine appeals to a strong scriptural witness against homosexual practice.

### 3. This book "is not about winning arguments"

The book also has a manipulative feel in the authors' opening claim ("A Personal Letter to Our Readers") that their discussion "is not about winning arguments, nor is it about some abstract concept. It is about human beings."<sup>196</sup> After reading the book, it seems to this reviewer that the book is about all of the above: They are trying to persuade readers currently opposed to "gay marriage" to be supportive of such, or at least to have enough doubts about an anti-homosex

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<sup>194</sup> The remark preferring "uncertain humility" over "self-certain conviction" is inserted between "When torn between judgment and grace, let us err on the side of grace" and "When torn between contempt and love, let us err on the side of love" (p. 135).

<sup>195</sup> Even if Myers and Scanzoni were even-handed in their call for "uncertain humility" among Christians and other people of the Book, it would still play into the hands of supporters of homosexual unions since currently the people of the Book are the primary cultural opponents to civil endorsement of homosexual unions. If that witness is muted, one can hardly count on others to withstand the demands of an aggressive, homosex-affirming lobby in the United States.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

position that they don't stand in the way of the extending marriage to same-sex couples. Myers and Scanzoni repeatedly offer conceptual arguments—faulty, to be sure, but conceptual arguments nonetheless—for why readers should adopt a certain view of persons who desire to enter committed homosexual unions:

- Marriage produces wonderful benefits and so should be available to all who want to marry, irrespective of sexual orientation (chs. 2-4).
- Sexual orientation is in a significant way the product of “biological influences” and rarely, if ever, can be changed, leading to the conclusion that society should strive to nurture responsible homosexual unions (chs. 5-6).
- The Bible doesn't speak against committed homosexual unions entered into by homosexually oriented persons (ch. 7).
- Arguments for male-female complementarity are essentially about subordinating women to men (ch. 8).
- “Gay marriage” is a “healthy way to satisfy the human need to belong” and is a matter of “equal rights,” while seven arguments that the authors have identified against gay marriage have nothing to commend them (ch. 9).

Their stated objective, expressed at the beginning of their book, is given as follows: “We aim to show why we marriage supporters can . . . suppor[t] the aspirations of gay and lesbian persons.”<sup>197</sup> Given the discrepancy between what they say (i.e., this “is not about winning arguments”) and what they do (i.e., they try to win an argument), it seems that Myers and Scanzoni mean that they don't want *others* to mount arguments against their book that are too vigorous. There is some irony, though, in the fact that, despite their best efforts, they have certainly lost the argument about what Scripture asserts regarding homosexual practice. In losing that argument, they have also lost the argument about what is best for persons who experience same-sex attractions.

#### 4. Claiming a “third way” that “bridges the divide” and is “win-win”

Also having a manipulative air are the repeated attempts by Myers and Scanzoni to characterize *their own* position as a unifying middle between two opposite and extreme poles. For example, at the beginning of their book they write:

##### **Bridging the Divide**

Across the polarized church and nation, the debate rages. On one side are those who vigorously support marriage and marriage renewal. On the other are those who vigorously support everyone's right, regardless of sexual orientation, to seal love with commitment and to fully participate in the life of church and society.

We propose a third way, one that affirms, with evidence and conviction, *both* views. First, we aim to show why pro-marriage voices are right. . . . [C]hildren, adults, and communities thrive where marriage abounds. . . .

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 4.

Second, we aim to show why we marriage supporters can at the same time comfortably join many other heterosexual Christians in supporting the aspirations of gay and lesbian persons – and why we can do so not despite, but *because of*, our eagerness to renew marriage. . . . By so doing we hope to offer a bridge across the divide.<sup>198</sup>

At the very end of the book they state:

#### Changing Win-Lose to Win-Win

Today's marriage war is a clash of those rightly concerned about marriage and the well-being of children versus those eager to encourage committed bonds and associated rights for gays and lesbians. Might it not be possible to say that *both* are right. . . ?

Might liberals agree that, yes, marriage is conducive to health and well-being, and as a culture we should therefore resolve to do a much better job of supporting it. . . .

Might conservatives agree that, yes, it's getting and keeping people married, not keeping gays *unmarried*, that really matters to us? . . .

The church is like a bird. It has a left wing and a right wing. . . . God may be teaching the church to soar upward using both wings.

Might we then come together in honest, open dialogue?<sup>199</sup>

It is a little too convenient that the views of the authors just happen to coincide with their self-defined middle-ground that can "bridge the divide" between the two main camps and "change win-lose to win-win" for all. The spectrum of views is contrived. One can easily redefine the two extremes to come up with a very different "middle position." For example, one could say:

Liberals are concerned that gays and lesbians be treated with love and respect.

Conservatives are concerned that the Bible's opposition to homosexual practice be upheld.

The view that will best bridge this divide and result in a win-win situation is to maintain a two-sex prerequisite for marriage while reaching out in love to reclaim those who engage in homosexual practice – showing empathy for the difficulty of living with persistent same-sex attractions, readily forgiving every back-step that is repented of, eagerly restoring such a one to the community of faith, providing support groups for mutual encouragement, and meeting needs for intimacy and affirmation from persons of the same sex through close same-sex, non-erotic friendships.<sup>200</sup>

This middle ground much more closely approximates the pattern of Jesus' response to sinners than does the model put forward by Myers and Scanzoni.

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-35.

<sup>200</sup> For a discussion of three scriptural principles for counseling persons with same-sex attractions, see my "Scriptural Perspectives on Homosexuality and Sexual Identity," esp. pp. 301-3.

Myers and Scanzoni offer the readers no rationale for why their stance is more of a middle position than the one that I offer above. I can offer a rationale for regarding my proposal as the true middle ground. It is in agreement with the historic position of the church, a position that remains the overwhelmingly dominant position of Christianity worldwide and even the majority position among the members of most mainline churches in North America. Moreover, it is *the* New Testament position. It models Jesus' witness: balancing God's revealed ethical demands with God's self-sacrificing outreach to forgive and transform sinners.

Myers and Scanzoni, of course, may claim that their position also balances this concern inasmuch as they uphold principles of sexual fidelity, love, and commitment in homosexual unions. Yet homosexual practice is not indicted in Scripture, or the two-sexness of marriage upheld, on the grounds that same-sex sexual unions can never manifest fidelity, love, and commitment. In supporting homosexual unions, even of a committed sort, they violate the reason that God opposes homosexual unions: the attempted merger of persons who are not sexual counterparts but sexual sames. Being for fidelity does not cancel out the anti-scriptural character of being for homosexual unions. The same logic would hold if one advocated for "responsible" polyamorous or incestuous unions while claiming that one was still upholding God's revealed ethical demands in the teaching of Jesus and the apostolic witness.

It is not credible for Myers and Scanzoni to characterize liberals, especially liberals in the church, as not inclined to support marriage — and all the more since Myers and Scanzoni declare that James Dobson, the Family Research Council, and the American Family Association, on the one hand, and Hillary Clinton, the Children's Defense Fund, and Planned Parenthood, on the other hand, are equally advocates for "the benefits of marriage and co-parenting."<sup>201</sup> Only by mischaracterizing liberals, and liberal Christians in particular, as generally unsupportive of the institution of marriage can Myers and Scanzoni create the mirage that they balance the views of liberals and conservatives.

If one adopts the problematic nomenclature of "liberal" and "conservative" embraced by Myers and Scanzoni, but does so more accurately, then the position espoused by Myers and Scanzoni is just the "liberal Christian" position. It is not in the middle. To label their views as "bridging-building" and "win-win" is a manipulative way of marginalizing the scriptural, church-historic, and worldwide-majority position against homosexual practice. It should be exposed for what it is. In addition, it converts what should be a theological concept into a

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<sup>201</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 35.

purely sociological one. Building a bridge to a position that is ultimately anti-scriptural is not a win-win situation for anyone.

Let us suppose one of the Corinthian “strong” believers who supported the incestuous union mentioned in 1 Cor 5 had put forward a “third way” on man-(step)mother incest that would try to take the best of the Corinthians’ concerns and the best of Paul’s concerns; namely, an insistence that the incestuous man commit himself fully to a monogamous, lifelong union with his stepmother. Would that be a credible “bridging of the divide” between Paul and the Corinthian church and a “win-win” situation for all sides? No, obviously it would be a warmed-over restatement of the original incest-tolerating position and an instance of audacious manipulation of the true facts of the case. I wonder how the similar kind of claim made with respect to homosexual practice is substantively different.

### Conclusion

I don’t doubt that David Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni are nice people who sincerely believe that their stance on committed homosexual unions is faithful to God’s will in the larger sense. Although I have never met either of them, I am sure that they are wonderful parents, exemplary figures in their community, and compassionate persons. So are probably most persons in the church who do not support homosexual practice. None of that really matters, though, in terms of deciding the question of whether church and society should promote the marriage of two persons that are sexually aroused by each other’s sexual sameness. No one is arguing against intimate, non-erotic relationships between persons of the same sex – what our culture simply refers to as “close friendships.” The issue, rather, is whether introducing an erotic or sexual component into a same-sex bond introduces an element into the relationship that is contrary to core values in Scripture’s sexual ethics, at odds with the Creator’s will that only sexual counterparts be sexually paired, and more structurally or formally incongruous than even a committed incestuous union or a committed sexual union between three persons.

So much of the rhetoric of their book comes across as designed to divert readers’ attention away from the glaring fact that the authors have not done their homework well in understanding Scripture’s stance on homosexual practice in its exegetical, contextual, and hermeneutical dimensions. Myers and Scanzoni are more skilled at this rhetorical strategy than most others but it is not by any stretch unique to them. I have seen this strategy at work among most of the proponents of committed homosexual practice throughout the mainline denominations debating this issue (Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian).

Rather than making lots of noise about how faithful, humble, or balanced their views are, the authors might have done better to let a careful reading of what Scripture has to say do the talking. It is less important to establish that one desires to be faithful to the big-ticket items of God's word than to show that one's position actually is faithful to what Scripture itself assesses to be major concerns. It is less important to establish the principle of "uncertain humility" in one's appropriation of Scripture than to assess whether Scripture itself manifests uncertainty about the matter in question. It is less important to claim the high ground of not trying to "win an argument" (when one clearly is trying to do just that) than to show through careful, calm discussion that the strongest arguments do indeed support the position that one is espousing. Finally, it is less important to situate oneself in a "middle" of one's own making than to show that one's stance can be safely situated among the core values of Scripture. In short, make your best case and forget most of the rhetorical window dressing.

I would submit, based on the discussion put forward in this article, that the position that is faithful to the big items in Scripture's sexual ethics, "humble" in the sense of "taking every thought captive for obedience to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5), and "bridge-building" in the sense of bridging God's loving demand with human response is the position that (1) upholds a two-sex prerequisite for valid sexual unions, (2) strives to meet non-erotic intimacy needs among persons of the same sex, and (3) rejects attempts to validate the sexual dimension of same-sex relationships.

### C. The Science Side

Due to demands of space and time and the necessity of prioritizing what is most important (i.e., Scripture) in this article, I shall confine myself to making some scattered, but hopefully not wholly disconnected, remarks about how Myers and Scanzoni treat the science side of the homosexuality debate in the church. Readers interested in a fuller presentation of my overall view may wish to consult the sections of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* that deal with this issue, as well as a lengthy and more recent online discussion.<sup>202</sup> Already in this critique of Myers/Scanzoni I have presented some aspects of science's contribution, particularly under "The Nature Argument" (II.B., pp. 30-46) and "The Use of Other Analogies" (II.F., esp. pp. 98-101).

#### 1. The shape of Myers' discussion of science

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<sup>202</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (2001), 395-432 (the question of causation), 452-60 (reasons for the dearth of lifelong, monogamous homosexual relationships), 471-85 (the negative effects of societal endorsement of homosexual practice); and "Immoralism, Homosexual Unhealth, and Scripture: A Response to Peterson and Hedlund's 'Heterosexism, Homosexual Health, and the Church': Part II: Science" (Aug. 2005; 40 pages; at <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoHeterosexismRespPart2.pdf>). Cf. also, more briefly, the second half of my article "Why 'Gay Marriage' Is Wrong," pp. 5-8.



Myers and Scanzoni — but almost entirely Myers<sup>203</sup> — treat what science has to say about homosexuality primarily in ch. 5 (“Understanding Sexual Orientation,” 52-68) and ch. 6 (“Changing Sexual Orientation,” 69-83), with additional material scattered in ch. 9 (“Gay Marriage,” 114-30, esp. 121-25, 128). By far the best section in the book is their discussion of influences on sexual orientation on pp. 58-68, which briefly treats (and largely dismisses) environmental influences and concentrates on biological influences (genes, brain structures, prenatal hormones, comparisons with same-sex attraction in animals). However, even this section has some significant flaws. Readers would do well to balance their treatment of the scientific data with the following: Stanton L. Jones and Alex W. Kwee, “Scientific Research, Homosexuality, and the Church’s Moral Debate: An Update.”<sup>204</sup> This article, as the title suggests, is an update of scientific research on homosexuality that has come out since the publication of the 2000 book by Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse entitled *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate*.<sup>205</sup>

The first one-third of Myer/Scanzoni’s book (until p. 52) — apart from the introduction on pp. 1-10 (“The Great Divide”) — is also focused on science but not on what science has to say about homosexuality. It rather deals with what science has to say about the benefits of marriage generally. As such it has only a loose bearing on the case for “gay marriage.” The point that Myers and Scanzoni want to make is: If marriage is good for heterosexuals, it must be good for homosexuals. However, as we shall see, the logic here is flawed (cf. the illogic of the following made-up statement: “If marriage is good for heterosexuals, it must be good for polysexuals, pedosexuals, and those who experience attractions for a close blood relation”). Moreover, more careful observations made in this opening section are sometimes left by the wayside when Myers and Scanzoni later argue their case for homosexual marriage.

For example, in ch. 9 they present their two main positive arguments for “gay marriage”: (1) Marriage offers homosexual persons “a healthy way to satisfy the human need to belong”; and (2) marriage achieves “equal rights” for homosexual persons.<sup>206</sup> The second point is not much of an argument because it begs the question of what “equal rights” means for an institution that has formal or structural prerequisites that necessarily exclude some arrangements, even those linked to a sexual orientation. A person with an intense polysexual (polyamorous) drive does not have the “equal right” to a marriage of more than

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<sup>203</sup> Cf. the similarities between the science discussion in *What God Has Joined Together?* and Myers’ online article “Accepting What Cannot Be Changed.”

<sup>204</sup> In: *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 24 (2005): 304-16.

<sup>205</sup> Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press. Myers and Scanzoni do not even bother to cite, let alone interact with, this carefully done and balanced treatment.

<sup>206</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 116-19.

one partner at the same time. A person with a deeply engrained pedosexual orientation does not have an “equal right” to marry a child. Put differently, everyone has an “equal right” to marriage but the formal prerequisites must first be met. The first point is already answered in part by Myers and Scanzoni in ch. 2:

The covenant relationship called marriage exists because human beings were not meant to be alone. . . . But not everyone will experience such a “one flesh” relationship throughout their adult lives—or even at all. It’s important, then, to remember that romantic, erotic love isn’t the only kind of love, nor is it the only way to meet the yearning to belong. The word *intimacy* derives from a Latin term for “close friend.” The emotional closeness we can experience in deep friendships offers the possibility of “one soul” relationships when “one flesh” relationships are not an option.<sup>207</sup>

Marriage is an important vehicle for experiencing a sense of belonging; but it is neither necessary nor sufficient for experiencing this sense. If all other things were equal and homosexual unions did not violate foundational expectations for recreating a sexual whole from the two complementary sexual halves, then marriage with a person of the same sex would indeed be an acceptable route for beginning to attain a sense of belonging. But all other things are not equal. It is odd that this fine observation in ch. 2 plays no role in the subsequent discussion of Myers and Scanzoni.

## 2. What if Myers and Scanzoni got everything they want from science?

Most of the case for “gay marriage” made by Myers and Scanzoni is staked on the main points in chs. 5-6. In ch. 5 they seek to minimize possible environmental factors in the development of homosexuality and maximize possible congenital influences so that they can categorically state that sexual orientation is not a choice. In ch. 6 they likewise maximize whatever evidence exists for asserting that homosexual orientation cannot be changed and minimize the evidence for reorientation so that homosexual persons can “accept with serenity what cannot be changed”;<sup>208</sup> that is, embrace their homosexuality as a gift from God to be exercised responsibly.

Let’s imagine for a moment a most unlikely, best-case scenario for Myers and Scanzoni. Let’s imagine that homosexual orientation is completely determined at birth and in no sense can be changed. Would Myers and Scanzoni, then, have established their case for acceptance of homosexual unions? No, they would not have done so.

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 83.

First, they would not have dealt with the witness of Scripture, whose ethical demands do not depend for their validity on people losing all innate desires to violate these demands. Christians are not to remain slaves to their passions, no matter how deeply ingrained and persistent such passions might be. As we have already seen, neither an orientation argument (I was born with this desire) nor a non-exploitation argument (I will not harm another with this desire) is ignored in ancient and scriptural critiques of homosexual practice. These arguments are not radically new and so do not constitute an adequate basis for reevaluating the scriptural stance. They are not adequate grounds for violating God's two-sex prerequisite for marriage, or any other consistently held, structural prerequisite for sexual activity in Scripture. The existence of a homosexual orientation might affect the pastoral response, inculcating greater sensitivity, patience, and compassion as one recognizes the persistent character of sexual urges and the need for long-term oversight if effective management of these urges is to be achieved. Yet it should not change the evaluation of homosexual practice as structurally narcissistic, self-deceptive, and dysfunctional.

Secondly, as even two secular researchers supportive of homosexual unions have acknowledged, biological causation does not determine morality: "No clear conclusions about the morality of a behaviour can be made from the mere fact of biological causation, because all behaviour is biologically caused."<sup>209</sup> Myers and Scanzoni, too, at one point state that while "*science, rightly interpreted, has much to offer*" in terms of informing "our understanding of sexual orientation," "*science cannot . . . resolve values questions*. Even if science someday explains *why* people differ in sexual orientation, we still have to decide whether to regard a homosexual orientation as a normal variation . . . or as an abnormality to be corrected."<sup>210</sup>

Myers and Scanzoni seem to forget this point when they contend later and repeatedly in their book that homosexual persons who cannot change their "orientation" should "accept what cannot be changed" by entering into committed homosexual unions. Their whole argument drowns in the common but anti-Christian conviction that, if a person cannot eradicate same-sex attractions, then church and society have to open the door to homosexual practice. The presumption here is that if desires are unchangeable they cannot continue to be viewed as inherently sinful. By the same reasoning, should a person with intense polysexual urges, who cannot be "cured" of such urges, "accept what cannot be changed" by entering into responsible, poly-faithful marriage? Or, even worse, what should society expect of a person with an exclusive or predominant pedosexual orientation? The more scriptural approach,

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<sup>209</sup> Brian S. Mustanski and J. Michael Bailey, "A therapist's guide to the genetics of human sexual orientation," *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18:4 (2003): 432.

<sup>210</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 55 (emphasis original with the authors).

faithful to Jesus, is to advocate that persons with persistent sinful desires of whatever sort not gratify the desires at all; but if they do ever gratify such desires, they should repent and renew their intent to take up their cross and follow Jesus, even if the cycle of sin and repentance becomes a regular occurrence (Luke 17:3-4).

As believers in Christ who are called to be “new creations” and to die daily to ourselves that we might live for God, we must recognize that our identity does not consist of the sum total of our biological urges, no matter how intense those urges may happen to be.<sup>211</sup> Our identity is being constructed from what God is making us to be in Christ, not from any ingrained sexual orientation to do things that God expressly forbids.

Thirdly, *change* usually does not mean the elimination of all intensely felt, unwanted impulses. It most often means active obedience to the will of God in the face of *contrary* passions of “the flesh” (to use a good Pauline term for sin-controlled humanity apart from the Spirit).

But I say: Walk by the Spirit and you shall certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh—for these things are opposed to each other—so that you may not do whatever you want. But if you are being led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality (*porneia*), sexual uncleanness (*akatharsia*, cf. Rom 1:24-27), lack of sexual self restraint (i.e., with respect to keeping God’s commands; *aselgeia*). . . , which I told you about previously, just as I told you previously that those who are doing such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:16-21)

One gets the sense in reading Myers and Scanzoni that a change of behavior that is borne of an obedient heart—a heart exercising faith in the promise of God that Christ offers something better than gratification of a particular sinful impulse and surrendering itself to the life-giving power of the Spirit—is somehow not a real or significant change unless it is accompanied by a complete eradication of the sinful desire.<sup>212</sup> In truth, however, this is the greatest change of all. Even unregenerate persons can do God’s will when they do not have to battle internally strong, contrary desires. What credit is there to God in that? It is when one takes up one’s cross, loses one’s life, denies oneself, and follows Jesus anyway that the angels in heaven rejoice (cf. Luke 6:32-34 par. Matt 5:46). When

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<sup>211</sup> Cf. my “Scriptural Perspectives on Homosexuality and Sexual Identity.”

<sup>212</sup> This is the general thrust of ch. 6 (“Changing Sexual Orientation”). They consider it a devastating knock-out blow to the anti-homosex cause when, for example, they cite Bob Davies as saying that the main focus of a person who seeks help from Exodus International and other ex-gay organizations should not be to change one’s sexual orientation but rather to get support for living in obedience to Scripture’s prohibition of all homosexual practice. Yet this is precisely the Christian worldview; it is an example of the unreformed mind to think otherwise.

Paul said with regard to "men who lie sexually with a male," as well as men who seek to transform their maleness into femaleness ("the soft men"), that such were some of his Corinthian readers but that they had now washed themselves off, been made holy, and been put right "in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:9-11), he did not mean that such persons had necessarily lost all attractions for members of the same sex. Much less did he mean that they should now find some more responsible way of engaging in same-sex intercourse – the very thing that Myers and Scanzoni are promoting. Paul meant that, irrespective of the persistence of such impulses, they no longer needed to live their lives as slaves to such. As he wrote later from Corinth to believers at Rome: "Thanks be to God that, though you were once slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to the imprint left by the teaching [of the gospel],<sup>213</sup> which you were given over to, and having been freed from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness" (Rom 6:17-18). The very fact that Paul had to continue to urge believers at Rome not to "offer the members of your [body] as slaves to sexual uncleanness (*akatharsia*)" (the term used earlier in Rom 1:24-27 for the sin of same-sex intercourse) shows that Paul did not assume that same-sex attractions came to an end upon conversion to Christ.

Was it easy for Jesus to die on the cross? Was it easy for Paul to get up every morning, knowing that he might be beaten in the synagogues, in the councils, or on the road; that he would be poorly clad, poorly sheltered, poorly fed; that he would be in constant anxiety for his churches; and that he would be nothing more than scum in the world's eyes? Yet Paul could say: Become imitators of me. The greatest miracle of Paul's life was not some removal of a "thorn in the flesh." It was his realization of, and attendant obedience to, the truth that God's grace is sufficient for us in our moment of deprivation and that God's power is used to the fullest extent (i.e., perfected) in the midst of that human weakness (2 Cor 12:8-9).

As with Alcoholics Anonymous the primary goal of change is management of the problem impulses, not "cure." With this management, one may also in time experience a reduction in the intensity of such impulses. The goal of Christian life is, first and foremost, to conform one's way of thinking to God's and to present one's body to God as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2). Because God bought us at the cost of the precious life of his Son, we are to "flee" the sexual behaviors that God has clearly revealed in the consistent testimony of Scripture to be against his will. We are not our own any longer; we belong to God body and soul (1 Cor 6:18-20). If, in due course, God lessens, removes, or even reorients the unwanted impulse in question, so much the better. But obedience does not

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<sup>213</sup> For this reading, see my "Heart of Wax and a Teaching That Stamps: TYPOS DIDACHES (Rom 6:17b) Once More," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993): 667-87.

depend on this—for any of us. For we all face different kinds of deprivations, pains, and disobedient impulses.

### 3. Can culture affect the incidence of homosexuality in a population?

As it is, Myers and Scanzoni cannot get everything they want from science. No scientific discovery has established a deterministic model for homosexual passions in humans, nor is any likely to do so. Moreover, not a single one of the traits or conditions that Myers and Scanzoni say that science connects with homosexual persons (including male birth order, fingerprint patterns, handedness, hearing, spatial ability)<sup>214</sup> is either characteristic of *all* self-identified gays and lesbians or non-existent in the heterosexual population.

While Myers and Scanzoni do a good job in maximizing the data that is congenial to the interpretation that they want to reach, they are less zealous to present data that conflict or qualify this desired interpretation. Here I am referring to what they call “environmental influences.” I will make no attempt to be exhaustive. For important qualifications of what they report concerning brain structures, “gay sheep” and “gay fruit flies,”<sup>215</sup> fraternal birth order research, and Spitzer’s 2003 study regarding the possibility of sexual-orientation change, I refer readers to the Jones/Kwee “Update” on scientific research cited above.

a. **Social and demographic variables.** I observed in the discussion of “The Nature Argument” (II.B., pp. 30-32) that when Myers and Scanzoni cite the work of Laumann et al. regarding the significantly higher rates of homosexual men in urban as compared to rural areas, they attribute the difference solely to a migration theory. What Myers and Scanzoni don’t tell readers is that Laumann et al. also lean in the direction of another theory; namely, that “an environment that provides increased opportunities for and fewer negative sanctions against same-gender sexuality may both allow and even elicit expression of same-gender interest and sexual behavior.” They also don’t cite the significant correlation between education levels and lesbian self-identification reported by Laumann et al. Moreover, despite the fact that even Myers and Scanzoni admit in ch. 5 that “women’s sexual orientation also tends to be less strongly felt and potentially more fluid and changeable than men’s,”<sup>216</sup> they appear to forget that fact in ch. 6 when they treat claims to change with great skepticism. They also don’t tell readers about the greater susceptibility that adolescents have to sexual

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<sup>214</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 64-66.

<sup>215</sup> Ironically, Myers and Scanzoni began their paragraph on “same-sex attraction in animals” by referring to “gay” penguins, including the penguins named Silo and Roy at the Central Park Zoo (p. 60). At the time that they wrote this they could not know that in mid-Sept. 2005 reports would surface in the news media announcing that, alas, Silo had left Roy for a young female named Scrappy. I guess male penguins, at least, can change.

<sup>216</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 67.

orientation shifts. A 1992 study of nearly 35,000 Minnesota junior and senior high school students concluded that “responses to individual sexual orientation items varied with age, religiosity, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. . . . The findings suggest an unfolding of sexual identity during adolescence, influenced by sexual experience and demographic factors.”<sup>217</sup> This seems to contradict a conclusion of Myers and Scanzoni; namely, that “sexual orientation is not reversed by experimentation” – a conclusion stated as fact, for which Myers and Scanzoni provide absolutely no documentation.<sup>218</sup> One might contrast conclusions reached by psychiatrists Paul R. McHugh and Phillip R. Slavney in a standard textbook on psychiatry published by Johns Hopkins Press in 1998:

Genetic factors play some role in the production of homosexual behavior, but . . . sexual behavior is molded by many influences, including ‘acquired tastes’ (or learning) closely related to the culture in which the individual develops. . . . It is possible . . . to picture a future in which homosexual behavior will be so much in the cultural experience of every individual that the genetic contribution will become undetectable. . . . What may be inherited may not be a mechanism specific to a behavior but rather something related to qualities of that person that render him or her more vulnerable to social influences. . . . That genes have a role in behavior can be demonstrated; that behaviors are influenced by other forces is also certain, particularly learning through models, instructions, and rewards from the sociocultural environment.<sup>219</sup>

**b. Early childhood experiences.** Myers and Scanzoni reject the notions that a child’s perception of a distant same-sex parent or early childhood experiences with sex could be risk factors in the development of homosexuality, citing the findings of the Kinsey Institute (1981).<sup>220</sup> However, this summary dismissal appears to be premature. For example, I cite above two studies by the noted researcher on child sexual abuse Kurt Freund that purport to show that homosexual “teleiophiles” (homosexual males attracted to other adult males) differ from homosexual pedophiles in that the former reported “significantly poorer father-son relations” (1983, 1987). Some youth might have a higher risk factor for homosexual development if they perceive themselves as different and distant from same-sex peers (i.e., a peer-factor and not, or not just, a parental-factor). Even Myers and Scanzoni appear not to rule this possibility out entirely when they refer, without negative comment, to Daryl Bem’s “Exotic Becomes Erotic” theory.<sup>221</sup> A number of studies in the last 15 years also suggest that

<sup>217</sup> G. Remafedi, et al., “Demography of sexual orientation in adolescents,” *Pediatrics* 89:4 (Apr. 1992): 714-21 (quote from the abstract).

<sup>218</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 71.

<sup>219</sup> *The Perspectives of Psychiatry* (2d ed.), 184-86 (cited in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 402).

<sup>220</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 58; cf. also pp. 72-73.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 68. “Perhaps, theorizes Cornell psychologist Daryl Bem, genes carry a code for prenatal hormones and brain anatomy, which predispose temperaments that lead children to prefer gender-typical or gender-atypical activities and friends, which preference then directs their sexual orientation. If experience does play a role in programming sexual orientation, it’s just an alternate method for shaping the brain.” Yes, but without the experience, the brain might not be so shaped. Moreover, a shaped brain might be at least partly reshaped; and, if not reshaped, still not necessarily creating a deterministic result.

childhood same-sex experience may be a risk factor for some homosexual development. For example, Laumann et al. found that among the category of respondents who as children had been sexually touched by an adult, 7.4% of the men and 3.1% of the women identified as homosexual or bisexual. Yet self-identified homosexuals/bisexuals accounted for only 2.8% of the men and 1.4% of the women in the survey.<sup>222</sup>

**c. Studies of identical twins.** To their credit Myers and Scanzoni acknowledge that identical twin studies in the early 1990s, which led many to believe that roughly half the time that an identical twin self-identified as non-heterosexual the co-twin likewise self-identified, may have been flawed. "New studies using more diverse samples of Australian and American twins, have found somewhat lower rates of sexual similarity."<sup>223</sup> However, the acknowledgment is a bit muted. The Australian Twin Register study, conducted by the same person who did most of the major studies in the early 1990s, found that of 49 identical twin pairs in which at least one twin self-identified as non-heterosexual, only 6 had a co-twin that was also non-heterosexual. The authors' conclusion: "Concordances from prior studies were inflated due to . . . [sample] bias. . . . [A]ny major gene for strictly defined homosexuality has either low penetrance or low frequency" (i.e., minimal influence).<sup>224</sup> Myers and Scanzoni don't even mention a significant twin study in 2002 that works against their conclusions: Peter S. Bearman (of Columbia University) and Hannah Brückner (of Yale University), "Opposite-Sex Twins and Adolescent Same-Sex

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<sup>222</sup> Laumann, et al., *The Social Organization of Sexuality*, 297, 344. A 2001 study of nearly 1000 nonclinical adults found that 46% of homosexual men and 22% of lesbian women reported childhood homosexual molestation as compared to 7% of the heterosexual men and 1% of the heterosexual women. Homosexual men were thus six to seven times more likely to report molestation than their heterosexual counterparts (M. Tomeo et al., "Comparative Data of Childhood and Adolescence Molestation in Heterosexual and Homosexual Persons," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 30: 535-41). A 1997 telephone probability sample of 2881 urban men who have sex with males found that one-fifth reported child sexual abuse, "primarily by non-family perpetrators," and that these experiences were "characterized by high levels of force (43% involved physical force/weapons) and penetrative sex (78%; 46% reported attempted or actual anal intercourse)" (J. P. Paul et al., "Understanding childhood sexual abuse as a predictor of sexual risk-taking among men who have sex with men: The Urban Men's Health Study," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 25 [2001]: 557-84). The 1995 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, which surveyed over 4000 high school students, did not ask the students about sex with an adult but it did find that 27% of GLB [gay, lesbian, or bisexual] youth had had sex before the age of *thirteen*, compared to only 7.4% of non-GLB youth; moreover, that one-third of GLB youth had sexual contact against their will as compared to only 9% of non-GLB youth ("R. Garofalo et al., "The association between health risk behaviors and sexual orientation among a school-based sample of adolescents," *Pediatrics* 101 [1998]: 895-902). A British study of homosexual and bisexual men published in 1992 reported that 25% of the participants had their first sexual experiences with a man by the age of 12; 50% by the age of 14 (P. Weatherburn et al., *The sexual lifestyles of gay and bisexual men in England and Wales* (Project SIGMA, London, 1992).

<sup>223</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 61.

<sup>224</sup> J. Michael Bailey, et al., "Genetic and Environmental Influences on Sexual Orientation and Its Correlates in an Australian Twin Sample," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78 (2000): 524-36 (quotes from pp. 533-4).



Attraction.”<sup>225</sup> Using an enormous and nationally representative sample of adolescents (30,000), they found no significant difference in concordance rates for non-heterosexuality among identical twin pairs (6.7%) and fraternal twin pairs (7.2%), even though the latter are no more genetically ‘identical’ than non-twin siblings. Moreover, they found that opposite-sex twins were twice as likely to report same-sex attraction as same-sex twins; and that males without older brothers among opposite-sex twins were twice as likely to report same-sex attraction (18.7%) than their male counterparts with older brothers (8.8%). They concluded that “less gendered socialization in early childhood and preadolescence shapes subsequent same-sex romantic preferences.”

**d. No change in rates?** Myers and Scanzoni claim: “Even today’s more tolerant and accepting environment seems not to have altered rates of sexual orientation.”<sup>226</sup> Yet a 2002 study by John E. Anderson (of the Centers for Disease Control) and Ron Stall reports that surveys collected from 1996-2000 showed that 3.1-3.7% of men reported having sex with another man in the previous year, a significant increase from the figure of 1.7-2% reported for the years 1988-1994.<sup>227</sup> The authors hypothesize, without evidence cited in their article, that the difference is due entirely to underreporting in earlier years. But there is also the possibility that the increase in acceptance of homosexuality led to an increase in the actual incidence of male-male intercourse, which in turn might be partly attributable to altered rates of sexual orientation.

**e. Adoption.** Myers and Scanzoni contend that children raised by homosexual parents are no more likely to experience a proclivity to homosexuality than children raised by heterosexual parents. They use this as an argument for asserting that environmental factors do not seem to alter rates of sexual orientation.<sup>228</sup> But things are not as straightforward as Myers and Scanzoni would like readers to believe. A 2001 analysis of prior research by two University of California sociologists strongly apologetic for homosexual causes, Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, acknowledged: “Children of lesbian parents appear . . . more likely to be open to homoerotic relationships” than children with heterosexual parents.<sup>229</sup> Citing a 1996/7 study they note that “a significantly greater proportion of young adult children raised by lesbian mothers . . . reported having had a homoerotic relationship [24%]” and “having considered same-sex relationships [64%].” Although the authors of the 1997 study concluded that “there was no statistically significant difference between young adults from lesbian and heterosexual family backgrounds with respect to sexual orientation,”

<sup>225</sup> *American Journal of Sociology* 107.5 (2002): 1179-1205.

<sup>226</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 59.

<sup>227</sup> “Increased Reporting of Male-to-Male Sexual Activity in a National Survey,” *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* 29:11 (2002).

<sup>228</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 59, 122.

<sup>229</sup> “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?,” *American Sociological Review* 66:2 (Apr. 2001): 159-83, quote from p. 176 (<http://www.e-noah.net/ASA/MO/articles/stacey.pdf>).

Stacey and Biblarz note that the study was working with an overly strict definition of sexual identity: the young adults not only had to self-identify currently as bisexual/lesbian/gay "but also to express a commitment to that identity in the future." Thus,

a more nuanced measure or a longer period of observation could yield different results. . . . This reading, while technically accurate, deflects analytic attention from the rather sizable differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors that the study actually reports. The only other comparative study we found that explores intergenerational resemblance in sexual orientation is Bailey et al. (1995) on gay fathers and their adult sons. This study also provides evidence of a moderate degree of parent-to-child transmission of sexual orientation.<sup>230</sup>

Myers and Scanzoni also declare as "fact" that "children of two-parent lesbian homes appear to develop normally and to be advantaged over the children of single heterosexual parents."<sup>231</sup> Yet they make no mention of the numerous methodological problems with studies that make such claims, including non-representative, non-random samples of homosexual parents and their children and inadequate control groups.<sup>232</sup>

f. **The example of New Guinea tribes.** Myers and Scanzoni briefly state: "Even in a tribal culture in which homosexual behavior is expected of all boys before marriage, heterosexuality prevails. As this example illustrates, homosexual behavior does not always indicate a homosexual orientation."<sup>233</sup> What they don't tell readers is the Etoro tribe and the Sambia tribe in Melanesian New Guinea may well be an instance of the reverse point: heterosexual behavior does not always indicate a heterosexual orientation.<sup>234</sup> As David F. Greenberg points out in his massive study, *The Construction of Homosexuality*:<sup>235</sup> "Where social

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 170-71 (also Table 1 on p. 169). Cf. Susan Golombok and Fiona Tasker, "Do Parents Influence the Sexual Orientation of Their Children? Findings from a Longitudinal Study of Lesbian Families," *Developmental Psychology* 32 (1996):3-11; Fiona L. Tasker and Susan Golombok, *Growing Up in a Lesbian Family* (New York: Guilford, 1997); J. Michael Bailey, et al., "Sexual Orientation of Adult Sons of Gay Fathers," *Developmental Psychology* 31 (1995): 124-29.

<sup>231</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 122.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. George Rekers and Mark Kilgus, "Studies of Homosexual Parenting: A Critical View," *Regent University Law Review* 14:2 (Spring 2002): 343-84 ([http://www.regent.edu/acad/schlaw/academics/lawreview/articles/14\\_2Rekers.PDF](http://www.regent.edu/acad/schlaw/academics/lawreview/articles/14_2Rekers.PDF)). Rekers is a reputable scholar in neuropsychiatry. He was recipient of the 2000 Sigmund Freud Award for Pioneering Research, editor of *The Handbook of Child and Adolescent Sexual Problems*, and author of 100 scholarly journal articles. See also: Patricia Morgan, *Children as Trophies? Examining the Evidence on Same-Sex Parenting* (Newcastle: Christian Institute, 2002).

<sup>233</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 58.

<sup>234</sup> All boys in the Etoro and Sambian tribes (among others) participate in a homosexual relationship with a man. When they become men it is their turn to enter into a sexual relationship with a boy. At a certain point in life (for the Etoro, the age of 40; for the Sambian when they marry) they give up all homosexual relations.

<sup>235</sup> Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988 (following quote from p. 487). Cf. his remarks on p. 492: "To some, the social-constructionist position has seemed troublesome because of its political implications. When heterosexual chauvinists have told homosexuals to change, essentialist theories have provided a ready response: I can't. When parents have sought to bar homosexual teachers from the classroom lest their

definitions of appropriate and inappropriate behavior are clear and consistent, with positive sanctions for conformity and negative ones for nonconformity, virtually everyone will conform irrespective of genetic inheritance and, to a considerable extent, irrespective of personal psychodynamics." How do Myers and Scanzoni, or anyone, know that the childhood same-sex experiences have not affected the orientation of some in the tribe? Heterosexual behavior in adulthood could just as well be due to pressures to conform after developing homosexual desire as to retention of heterosexual impulses that preexisted same-sex sexual acts. There is evidence that the residual pull of male homosexuality in the tribes manifests itself in an ongoing aversion to women even after homosexual relations are eliminated.<sup>236</sup>

#### 4. Why "gay marriage" is not good for society

In the end, the argument that Myers and Scanzoni make boils down to this: "Gay marriage" is a win-win situation for everyone. I beg to differ. There are at least six problems with the view that "gay marriage" will be good for society as a whole. Here I bring together some previous observations and wrap up this article.

**a. Overlooking the core structural problem.** The first and most significant problem is that it overlooks the core problem with homosexual unions, namely, their same-sexness: an erotic attraction for what one already is as a sexual being and a denial of the reality that man and woman are the two complementary halves of a sexual whole. As noted above, increasing the commitment to such a bond merely increases the commitment to a form of union that is contrary to nature and, from a scriptural perspective, contrary to God's revealed will in creation. Whatever gains might be made in reducing the number of partners lifetime or in relational longevity (which would be minimal at best, as noted in

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children (horror of horrors!) become homosexual, essentialist theories have provided a seemingly authoritative basis for denying the possibility. The present study . . . cannot make concessions to such opportunistic considerations. It should be pointed out, though, that nothing in the social-constructivist position legitimates the denial of rights. . . . Assertive gay liberationists have argued that it may be strategically wiser to concede the possibility that a few students might be influenced to become gay by having an openly gay teacher as a role model, and to say, "So what?"

<sup>236</sup> Heterosexual relations are prohibited for 260 days out of the year and must take place in the woods far from the village (i.e., not at home). Husbands and wives normally have separate sleeping quarters. The limited contact with women that does exist is generally hostile. And it is reinforced by a metanarrative of beliefs. Semen is viewed as a source of masculine vitality; to put too much of it in a woman's body threatens to shift the balance of power, sapping men of their courage and their ability to be good hunters and warriors and leading to female domination. And yet sexual relations with women must be undertaken because it is necessary for procreation. These are hardly the trappings of a robust heterosexuality. Why then do men ever give up homosexual relations? Men have a responsibility for transferring their masculine life-force to boys in their care, ideally his wife's younger brother. Unless this happens, a boy will not mature into a man. When this responsibility is discharged, continued homosexual activity would only debilitate his vitality to no essential purpose. But, for the Etoro at least, the system of ritual and belief still provides a warrant for homosexual activity for most his life (ages 10 to 40).

the next point) would be bought at the cost of violating an even more foundational requirement of sexual relationships.

**b. Misunderstanding the root cause for measurable harm.** While it is possible that “gay marriage” might bring some moderate improvement in monogamy and longevity to a fraction of homosexual relationships, evidence to date does not encourage the view that a fundamental shift of behavior would occur. Men in combination with other men will continue to behave like men. Women in combination with other women will continue to behave like women. The different problems experienced by male homosexual unions and by female homosexual unions, already discussed, provide ample testimony to the significance of male-female differences and hence to the healthy balancing effect of a male-female pairing on the excesses of each sex.<sup>237</sup> To continuously call

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<sup>237</sup> We have already noted on pp. 35-36 above that disproportionately high numbers of sex partners on the part of homosexual males, even relative to homosexual females, is due largely to the excesses of male sexuality (and Myers/Scanzoni appear to concur). The same applies to significantly higher rates of sexually transmitted disease through penile-anal and oral-anal contact as well as high numbers of sex partners. As regards mental illness concerns (mood disorders, anxiety disorders), proponents of homosexual unions have typically attributed higher rates of problems among homosexual persons exclusively to the pressures of societal homophobia. However, this may not be the case. A 2001 study of homosexual and heterosexual men and women in the Netherlands concluded that homosexual men were about three times more likely than heterosexual men to experience in the past year mood disorders (39%) and anxiety disorders (32%) and to have two or more DSM-III-R diagnoses (38%), while homosexual women were almost five times more likely than heterosexual women to experience substance abuse disorders (26%) (T. Sandfort, et al., “Same-Sex Sexual Behavior and Psychiatric Disorders: Findings From the Netherlands Mental Health Survey and Incidence Study (NEMESIS),” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 58.1 [2001]: 85-91, [www.lesben-gegen-gewalt.de/material/studie\\_sandfort.pdf](http://www.lesben-gegen-gewalt.de/material/studie_sandfort.pdf)). Why are these findings significant? As the authors of the study note: “Compared with other Western countries, the Dutch social climate toward homosexuality has long been and remains considerably more tolerant” (p. 89). Yet, despite this significantly greater tolerance, the wide disparities between homosexual and heterosexual persons remain. Bailey also alludes to the Netherlands study (without explicit citation) as the reason for suggesting that “societal stigma” as the primary cause for greater psychological problems among homosexual persons “might not be true” (*The Man Who Would Be Queen*, 82).

The Sandfort study raises the additional question of what special problems are faced by homosexual females. Homosexual females were significantly more likely to experience mood disorders (49%) such as major depression (44%) than homosexual males (39%/29%; compare rates for heterosexual females [24%/20%] and heterosexual males [13%/11%]). Studies to date also suggest that female homosexual unions are of even shorter-term duration than male homosexual unions. For example, a 2004 study of divorce rates for same-sex registered partnerships in Sweden from 1995 to 2002 indicates that female homosexual couples were twice as likely to divorce as male homosexual couples (Gunnar Andersson, et al., “Divorce-Risk Patterns in Same-Sex ‘Marriages’ in Norway and Sweden,” [http://www.uni-koeln.de/wiso-fak/fisoz/conference/papers/p\\_andersson.pdf](http://www.uni-koeln.de/wiso-fak/fisoz/conference/papers/p_andersson.pdf)”; cf. also the discussion in the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, [www.marriageandpublicpolicy.com/pdf/SSdivorcerisk.pdf](http://www.marriageandpublicpolicy.com/pdf/SSdivorcerisk.pdf)). According to Terry Stein in *Kaplan and Sadock’s Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* (eds. B. J. Sadock and V. A. Sadock; 7th ed.; Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2000): “From 8 to 14% of lesbian couples and from 18 to 25% of gay male couples report that they have lived together for more than 10 years” (p. 1624; Stein has served as a Director of the AIDS Education Project at Michigan State University, Chair of the American Psychiatric Association’s Committee on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues, Associate Editor of the *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy*, and President of the Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists). In other words, lesbian couples fare only half as well as male homosexual couples, who fare poorly. How do we explain these two special problems associated with lesbian relationships, shorter-term relationships and higher levels of mood disorders such as major depression? An explanation that takes into consideration basic

marriage what almost certainly will not be monogamous *and* of twenty-years duration or more (let alone lifelong) can only have a long-term cheapening effect on the institution of marriage.

**c. Eroding resistance to other sexually deviant behaviors.** As already argued, this cheapening effect on the institution of marriage would be reinforced by the effective elimination of formal or structural prerequisites for marriage that transcend both mutual commitment and an inability to prove inherent, measurable harm. This would leave society with little justification for holding the line against other forms of committed sexual relationships for which at most only a disproportionately high level of harm, but not universal harm, could be surmised: various kinds of polyamorous relationships, incest, adult-adolescent relationships, and perhaps even adult-child relationships and bestiality. Proponents of homosexual marriage may protest that they are not advocating such unions. Yet the logic of their position moves to that ultimate outcome.

**d. Misunderstanding the data to date.** The little information that currently exists regarding the cultural effects of homosexual marriage does not encourage much optimism. First, the rate of homosexual persons taking advantage of current domestic partnership laws or even civil marriage is too small to effect a significant change of behavior in the homosexual population. For example, although homosexual activists had been clamoring for “gay marriage” for over a decade in the Netherlands, only 3% of adult homosexual persons and only one out of ten homosexual couples were married in the first three years that homosexual marriage was available (2001-2004). Whatever the motivations of its proponents, “gay marriage” ends up being more about validating the homosexual life than about strengthening marriage or domesticating homosexual unions.

Second, a series of articles, mostly published in *National Review*, in 2004 by Stanley Kurtz, a Harvard-trained social anthropologist and fellow at the Hoover Institution, show that the introduction of same-sex registered partnerships or homosexual marriage in Scandinavia and the European lowland countries has

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biological/psychological differences between men and women probably provides the answer—consistent with the fact noted above that mood disorders and anxiety disorders are also twice as high among heterosexual women as among heterosexual men. On average women tend to expect significantly more of a sexually intimate relationship than do men in terms of communication and relational responsibilities (does anyone not know this?) and thus place greater demands on a partner to meet personal needs. John Gray has made a bundle of money on this common recognition of a male-female difference in his aptly titled book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993). To have two women with this higher needs index in a sexual relationship puts additional strains on the relationship, which probably contributes markedly to more problems and breakups that then impact mental health.

coincided with a sharp rise in out-of-wedlock births.<sup>238</sup> This is not surprising given that the validation of homosexual unions depends on rhetoric that ultimately decouples marriage from the raising of children. Myers and Scanzoni briefly argue against Kurtz's conclusions, in part by pointing out that "Norway and Scandinavian countries don't, as of this writing, offer gay marriage. They offer what we argue against—a "marriage lite" substitute: civil-union-like 'registered partnerships.'"<sup>239</sup> However, this argument overlooks the situation in the Netherlands. Since the introduction of registered partnerships in the Netherlands in 1997, out-of-wedlock births have increased annually there by two percentage points—double the average annual increase of the previous 15 years. The passage of official (not just de facto) same-sex marriage in 2000 did nothing to slow this national increase in 2001, 2002, and 2003.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Cf. "The End of Marriage in Scandinavia: The 'conservative case' for 'same-sex marriage' collapses." *The Weekly Standard* 9:20 (Feb. 2, 2004), <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/003/660zypwj.asp>; "Slipping toward Scandinavia: Contra Andrew Sullivan," *National Review Online* (Feb. 2, 2004), <http://www.nationalreview.com/kurtz/kurtz200402020917.asp>; "Deathblow to Marriage: Gay marriage has real implications," *National Review Online* (Feb. 5, 2004), <http://www.nationalreview.com/kurtz/kurtz200402050842.asp>; "The Marriage Mentality: A reply to my critics," *National Review Online* (May 4, 2004), <http://www.nationalreview.com/kurtz/kurtz200405040841.asp>; "Unhealthy Half Truths: Scandinavia marriage is dying," *National Review Online* (May 25, 2004), <http://www.nationalreview.com/kurtz/kurtz200405250927.asp>; "Going Dutch? Lessons of the same-sex marriage debate in the Netherlands," *The Weekly Standard* 9:36 (May 31, 2004), <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/004/126qodro.asp>; "No Explanation: Gay marriage has sent the Netherlands the way of Scandinavia," *National Review Online* (June 3, 2004), <http://www.nationalreview.com/kurtz/kurtz200406030910.asp>; "Dutch Debate: Despite a challenge, the evidence stands: Marriage is in the decline in the Netherlands," *National Review Online* (July 21, 2004), <http://www.nationalreview.com/kurtz/kurtz200407210936.asp>. The most important articles are the two in *The Weekly Standard*; however, the *National Review Online* articles provide helpful responses to critics of the two *Weekly Standard* articles. Would that Myers and Scanzoni had gone beyond the first *Weekly Standard* article (the only one that they cite on p. 173 n. 45) to explore the issue more thoroughly.

<sup>239</sup> *What God Has Joined Together?*, 128.

<sup>240</sup> "Going Dutch?" Myers and Scanzoni add two other arguments against Kurtz's work: "Moreover, reports the economist Lee Badgett, Scandinavia's rising cohabitation rates preceded the advent of partner laws. Scandinavian cohabitation also functions differently than it has in the United States. After having a child, most Scandinavian couples marry—which explains why although in Norway half of children are born to unmarried parents, four out of five couples with children are married" (*What God Has Joined Together?*, 128-29; citing M. V. Lee Badgett, "Prenuptial Jitters: Did gay marriage destroy heterosexual marriage in Scandinavia?" *Slate* (May 20, 2004), <http://www.slate.com/id/2100884/>). Kurtz responds to Badgett's critique of "The End of Marriage in Scandinavia" in "Unhealthy Half Truths." After Kurtz's "Going Dutch?" came out, Badgett responded with a second critique: "Will Providing Marriage Rights to Same-Sex Couples Undermine Heterosexual Marriage? Evidence from Scandinavia and the Netherlands," Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (July 2004), <http://www.iglss.org/media/files/briefing.pdf>. Kurtz responded with "Dutch Debate," which I quote at length:

In Scandinavia, that decline began before same-sex registered partnerships were established, but has continued apace ever since. In the Netherlands, marital decline accelerated dramatically, in tandem with the growing campaign for gay marriage.

e. **Encouraging an increase in homosexuality.** As noted above, there is good evidence that societal approval of homosexual practice may increase the incidence of homosexuality and bisexuality, not just homosexual practice. Since the homosexual life is characterized by a comparatively high rate of problems in terms of sexually transmitted disease, mental health issues, nonmonogamous behavior, and short-term unions—even in homosex-affirming areas of the world—an increase in homosexuality and bisexuality will mean more persons affected by such problems.

f. **Encouraging civil and religious intolerance.** Although supporters of homosexual unions preach tolerance and diversity, the political and religious agenda of most in the movement suggests otherwise. Developments in northern Europe and in Canada indicate that civil approval of homosexual relationships

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The strategies for evading these hard truths don't work. Gay-marriage advocates regularly cite steady or improving rates of marriage and divorce in Scandinavian countries to prove that all is well. I've shown repeatedly that these numbers are misleading. Scandinavian marriage numbers are inflated by remarriages among the large number of divorced, for example. Scandinavian divorce numbers omit legally unrecorded breakups among the ever-increasing number of cohabiting parents. Total family dissolution rates in Scandinavia are actually up. . . .

Most cohabiting parents eventually marry, Badgett emphasizes. Because of that, if you look at the number of Norwegian children who are actually living with their own married parents, it is 61 percent. Well, . . . a number that low hardly means that Norwegian marriage is strong. And . . . in Norway's pro-gay-marriage north, the numbers of Norwegian children actually living with their own married parents is now almost certainly at or below 50 percent.

Of course, the fact that "most" cohabiting parents in Scandinavia eventually marry slides over the core point. A great many parental cohabiters break up before they ever decide to marry—and they do so at rates two to three times higher than married parents. . . .

Badgett ignores my points about the differences between Norway's socially liberal north and its more conservative and religious south. The parts of Norway where same-sex unions are most accepted have by far the highest out-of-wedlock birthrates. . . . It also helps explain why Norway's out-of-wedlock birthrate is rising more slowly now—something Badgett makes much of. Rising Norwegian out-of-wedlock births have hit a wall of resistance in the recalcitrant, religious south. . . . [T]he slow but steady increase in Norway's already high out-of-wedlock birthrates . . . shows that even the resistant and conservative south is beginning to accept parental cohabitation. . . .

So the real question raised by Badgett's comparison is why Holland should be virtually the only traditionally low out-of-wedlock birthrate country in which couples have easy access to birth control where out-of-wedlock birthrates are now "soaring?" . . . Demographically, we have a kind of Dutch exceptionalism—and the key difference is that the Dutch added gay marriage to their precarious balance between socially liberal attitudes and traditional family practices. . . .

Badgett . . . claim[s] that the increase in non-marital births began before Dutch registered partnerships took effect in early 1998. That is a weak argument, since an increase of two-percentage points in the out-of-wedlock birthrate for seven consecutive years is rare. . . . But the deeper point is that the meaning of traditional marriage was transformed every bit as much by the decade-long national movement for gay marriage in Holland as by eventual legal success. That's why the impact of gay marriage on declining Dutch marriage rates and rising out-of-wedlock birthrates begins well before the actual legal changes were instituted.

can bring along a wave of intolerance toward those who publicly express disapproval of homosexual practice.<sup>241</sup> Penalties for publicly expressing disapproval of homosexual practice in some Western countries already range from fines, to loss of employment, to even incarceration. Christian colleges, universities and seminaries that have policies against homosexual practice will risk losing their tax-exempt status, access to national grants and student loans, and ultimately accreditation itself. Public schools will intensify their indoctrination of children into the acceptability of homosexual unions from kindergarten on and single out for marginalization and ridicule any who question this agenda. Parents' rights in instilling moral values in their children will be abridged. Indeed, the state could one day remove, on the pretense of "child abuse," self-professed gay and lesbian children from parents who publicly express moral disapproval of homosexual practice. Mainline denominations will comply with societal trends by refusing to ordain "heterosexist" candidates for ministry and even disciplining heterosexist clergy. Since approval of homosexual practice can only occur at the cost of marginalizing Scripture, the trend will be toward a hard-left radicalization of mainline denominations.

### Conclusion

So we end by answering the question-title of this book by David Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni: *What God Has Joined Together?* No, God has not joined together persons erotically aroused by their own sex. Scripture is absolutely unequivocal on this point. There appears to be no reasonable basis for disagreeing over what Scripture meant and what it still means for us today as regards the inviolable two-sex character of marriage. And there is no basis for assuming that Jesus took a different view of the matter. It is time for Christian proponents of homosexual unions to accept the fact that Scripture is not merely being given last place in their descending hermeneutical scale. It is being given no significant place at all because there is nothing in Scripture that can be made contextually serviceable to such a position. Even more, there would appear to be no credible basis in philosophic reason (nature), scientific reason, or experience, properly interpreted, for overriding that overwhelming witness. Let us love those with whom we disagree and speak truth for the sake of God, the church, and offenders. So much is at stake.

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<sup>241</sup> Cf. Alan Sears and Craig Osten, *The Homosexual Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003). See also my discussions: "An Open Letter Regarding the Current Hate Crime Amendment" (<http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoHateCrimesAmendment.pdf>), "The Threat of the Homosexual Agenda to Your Freedoms" (<http://www.robagnon.net/HomosexualAgenda.htm>), and pp. 10-18 of "Bearing False Witness: Balch's Effort at Demonization" (<http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoBalchFalseWitness.pdf>).