

Box Turtle Kincaid Peddles Distorted Orthodoxy Test While Promoting Immorality

Part 2: Jesus' Distance Healing of an Official's "Boy" and Kincaid's Bogus Charge of My "Unorthodox Approach to Doctrine"

by Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D.

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA 15206-2596

gagnon@pts.edu

August 2, 2008

© 2008 Robert A. J. Gagnon

The second example that Timothy Kincaid, blogging for the homosexualist website "boxturtlebulletin.com," gives where my alleged "homophobia trumps written witness" is in my critical analysis of whether the story of Jesus' distance-healing of a Gentile centurion's "boy" implies Jesus' acceptance of homosexual practice (<http://www.boxturtlebulletin.com/2008/06/24/2266>).

In an article, "Did Jesus Approve of a Homosexual Couple in the Story of the Centurion at Capernaum?" (<http://robgagnon.net/articles/homosexCenturionStory.pdf>), I offered seven reasons why the story cannot support a homosexualist interpretation that Jesus was condoning sex between the centurion and his "boy" (*pais*). In the sixth reason, I argue that if one wants to use the story in Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10 to reconstruct what the "historical Jesus" believed about homosexual practice, then one should recognize that the earliest recoverable version of the story, which takes account of the parallel in John 4:46b-54, probably did not contain the requisite elements for a homosexualist spin; namely a *Gentile* centurion and his *slave*. Rather, the historical evidence suggests that Jesus encountered a *Jewish* official petitioning on behalf of his *son* (see the arguments in online article cited above).

Kincaid labels this suggestion "reading what isn't there" and "ignoring what is present." The irony escapes him of his charging me with "reading what isn't there" while entertaining for himself the view that Jesus was endorsing an alleged homoerotic relationship between the centurion and his "love slave" or "boy-toy." If Jesus were endorsing such a union, he would have been endorsing

not only a homosexual relationship but also one of the most exploitative forms of homosexual practice in antiquity: a coercive relationship between a master and his male slave that often involved castrating one's slave as a means of prolonging his youthful appearance. The argument is absurd (see VI.2 below).

I. The relationship between historical criticism and inspiration

While Kincaid's interpretation of the story is certainly a case of "reading what isn't there," my interpretation is not, inasmuch as I don't argue that Matthew or Luke reads the story as a story about someone other than a Gentile centurion. I read exactly "what is there" in these stories (i.e., what is there in Matthew and what is there in Luke). Asking questions about what actually happened in the life of Jesus, however, goes beyond issues of "what is there" in the respective *written* texts to the prehistory in *oral* transmission.

Kincaid seems to know little or nothing about historical-critical methodology or its integration with theories of scriptural inspiration. Theological readings and historical narratives are often mixed together in Gospel accounts. In all four Gospels the Earthly Jesus and Risen Christ merge to some extent. Sometimes the concerns of the post-Easter church manifest themselves in revised versions of Jesus traditions. For example, Matthew turns the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:15-24 [Q]) into a thinly veiled allegory about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans where, after "those who had been invited to the [king's] wedding banquet" killed the king's slaves who were bringing the invitation, the king "sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city" (Matt 22:1-10). Although I believe that the Gospels provide an accurate overall portrait of what the earthly Jesus said and did, it is clear that God had no problem with the Spirit of the Risen Christ—who is no less real than the earthly Jesus—speaking to the post-Easter church's needs through the recasting of earthly Jesus traditions.

II. Did Jesus meet the centurion directly or only through intermediaries?

This idea of speaking to the special circumstances of the post-Easter church through a fusion of the message of the Risen Christ into the stories and sayings of the Earthly Jesus, leading to alterations in the "historical memory" of the narrative, is also clear from a comparison of the versions of the centurion story in Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. In Luke's version Jesus never actually meets the centurion. Instead, the centurion sends first a delegation of Jewish elders and then a delegation of friends. In Matthew's version the encounter with the centurion is direct. No mention is made of the double delegation. How does one resolve this difference in a way that honors the inspiration of Scripture? Suggesting that Jesus had two different encounters with a centurion with

virtually identical punch lines would be foolish. Jesus would have had quite a *déjà vu* experience. No, either Jesus met the centurion directly or he didn't. Either Matthew truncated the story by eliminating the double delegation or Luke expanded the story to include a double delegation. To argue one or the other alternative is not to "read what isn't there" or "ignore what is present," as Kincaid confusedly thinks, but rather to make historical and theological sense of different accounts of the same event in a way that takes seriously each scriptural account.

Some have suggested that Matthew telescoped the account of the double delegation. However, I have argued in a series of articles published in blind-peer-review scholarly journals (*New Testament Studies*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, *Novum Testamentum*), and members of International Q Project subsequently came to the same conclusion, that Matthew more likely represents the "Q" story behind Matthew and Luke at this point.

[Note: Most scholars, including evangelical scholars, think that Matthew and Luke each independently use a common written source, consisting mostly of sayings, in addition to Mark's Gospel; namely, "Q" (from German "Quelle" meaning "source"). The verbatim agreements in *Greek* are too extensive not to posit a literary relationship. Most also recognize that the centurion story was in Q, again because of the extensive verbatim agreement in Greek.]

First, the idea that the centurion never met Jesus stands in tension with the request that Jesus "come" to the centurion's house (still preserved even in Luke). Second, nowhere else does Matthew make such a wholesale omission of major characters from a story. Third, the amount of narrative that the Lukan version contains goes well beyond the amount of narrative that appears anywhere else in the sayings source Q. Fourth, the vocabulary and syntax of the double-delegation motif in Luke's version is thoroughly infused with "Lukanisms."

Fifth, we can see how the double-delegation motif fits beautifully theological interests that are prominent elsewhere in Luke-Acts: (1) conforming the portrait of the centurion here to that of the God-fearing Gentile centurion Cornelius in Acts 10-11 and offering an apologia against Jewish accusations before Roman authorities that Christian communities hate the Jewish people; and (2) emphasizing the theme of patronal humility (i.e., giving without expecting a patron's due), here with the centurion viewing himself as unworthy not only to have Jesus come under his roof but even to meet him. So the original Q version of the story almost certainly spoke of a direct encounter between Jesus and the centurion. Luke (or the circles in which he operated) expanded the story to make it relevant for a new audience with a different set of interests. We can choose to see this development as guided by the Spirit, especially since the theology behind the changes are consistent with the Spirit's work elsewhere in the pages of Scripture.

One might add that Matthew has also made changes to the Q source. In particular, he imports from a different location in Q a saying about "the sons of

the kingdom” being thrust outside and “many coming from the east and west” being brought into the messianic banquet (Matt 8:11-12; compare Luke 13:28-29). He apparently does so in order to make this a foundation story that justifies the new Gentile mission of his community, announced in the Great Commission at the end of his Gospel.

III. Is John 4:46b-54 telling the same basic story?

It would be intellectually and apologetically unhelpful to ignore the close similarities between the Q (Matt/Luke) centurion story and the story of the royal official in John 4:46b-54. The two stories share the following common elements:

- An official ...
- “upon hearing” of Jesus’ arrival ... (Luke/John)
- in Capernaum ...
- came “to him” and requested healing for his “boy” (*pais*) ...
- who “was sick” and “about to die” (Luke/John).
- Jesus healed the boy from a distance ...
- saying, “Go” and making a declaration of the cure (Matt/John).
- The official, returning home, found the boy healed (Luke/John) ...
- “in that hour” (Matt/John).

Granted, the identity between the two sets of stories, Q and John, is not as strong as the identity between the account in Matthew and the account in Luke. But we should not expect it to be. Matthew and Luke are editing a common written source. Q and John, however, represent two independent strata of tradition that originally circulated orally. John shares a number of stories in common with stories in the Synoptic Gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke); for example, elements of the story about John the Baptist’s preaching, the naming of Simon as “Rock,” the cleansing of the temple, the feeding miracle, Jesus walking on water, the anointing of Jesus by a woman before his Passion, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and a number of stories in the Passion Narrative. Nearly all the parallel accounts contain significant “historical” details that cannot be harmonized if by “harmonized” we mean reconstructing a historical account that preserves all these differences. Nor does an “orthodox approach to doctrine” require us to harmonize in this sense (contrary to what Kincaid alleges). A reading of a number of Church Fathers and even some Reformers demonstrates this point, who explain these divergences in ways other than an assumption of every last detail in the Gospel accounts occurred during Jesus’ earthly ministry in precisely this way.

Given these things, the number of similarities between the Q account and the Johannine account is striking. Even the Church Father Irenaeus seems to have identified the stories, referring to the “son of the *centurion*” when speaking of

John 4:46-54 (*Adv. Haer.* II 22:3; note that John refers only to a “royal official”). It is hardly “unorthodox,” then, to suggest that the same event is in view, told in two different ways.

IV. Did the original historical event involve a distance healing for a Gentile centurion’s slave or a Jewish official’s son?

The conclusion that John 4:46b-54 (minus editorial additions of the Fourth Evangelist, of course) and the Q story behind Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10 are probably telling the same basic story has ramifications for assessing a homosexual reading of the centurion story. For the latter depends, for its starting point, on the assumption that Jesus encountered *a Gentile* requesting healing for *his slave*. The Johannine version, though, states that Jesus encountered a nondescript *royal official* (i.e., someone in the employ of Herod Antipas, without any indication that he is a Gentile) requesting healing for *his son* (*pais* [“boy”] in John 4:51 = *huios* [“son”] in 4:46-47, 50, 53). If the Johannine version is closer to the circumstances of the actual event at these two points, then there is no possibility of arguing for a homosexual relationship between the one requesting the healing and the person for whom it is requested. Although normally Synoptic Gospel accounts are given historical priority over accounts in John, I argue in my online article that in this case John’s account is more likely to reflect the historical event behind the retelling, at least as regards the official’s ethnicity and the identity of the one being healed. Here are the arguments that I put forward:

1. The *pais* (boy) was originally a son, not slave, of the official. In favor of this conclusion are the following considerations (here I build on my earlier online treatment):

a. *The fact that John clearly characterizes the pais, “boy,” as a huios, “son,” in John’s version.*

b. *The fact that the “boy” is identified as a slave only at the latest stage of the tradition.* While Luke clearly glosses *pais* with *doulos*, “slave” (7:2-3, 10), Matthew uses only the ambiguous *pais*, which is likely to reflect the wording in Q. Had Q also read the more specific *doulos* there would have been no reason for Matthew to move toward increasing vagueness. That the tradition at its earliest stages referred only to an ambiguous *pais* explains why one trajectory of the tradition moved in the direction of “son” (John), another remained outwardly ambiguous (Q, Matt), while a third moved in the direction of “slave.” The unambiguous interpretation of *pais* as “slave” represents the latest stage of the tradition within the canonical corpus, since most scholars recognize that the Johannine account is making use of an earlier “Signs Source.”

c. *The fact that Luke had motive for altering an original story about a son to a story about a slave.* Luke had a theological motive for construing the *pais* as a

slave rather than as a son: He wanted to show that the centurion embodied his ideal of a patron who was kind and humble. Not only did the rich centurion not lord himself over others in an uncaring way (compare the saying in Luke 22:24-27)—Luke alone identifies the centurion as rich enough to build the Capernaum synagogue for the Jews there (7:5)—but also he went so far as to treat as “precious” even his slave, earnestly petitioning for healing on his behalf even though it meant lowering himself in relation to the Jewish miracle worker. Any father would intercede for his child; but this centurion did so even for his slave. Elsewhere Luke shows himself willing to alter the Q version in order to emphasize the centurion’s humility; namely, in having him refuse even to meet Jesus directly: “Therefore, I did not consider myself worthy even to come to you” (7:7). This leads him to change the story from a direct encounter with Jesus to a mediated encounter. Luke’s identification of the *pais* with a slave may also have been facilitated by the mention of a slave in the core Q saying (“I say ... to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it”) and perhaps by hearing of a tradition of the story similar to the Johannine version that speaks of the official being met en route to his home by “his slaves.”

d. *The fact that Q is likely to have understood pais in the sense of “son.”*

First, *the Q text* behind Matthew and Luke *refers to* the centurion defining his authority as one who can say “to *my slave*, ‘Do this,’ and he does it,” alongside of a statement about the authority he exercises over his soldiers. Given that this statement is made *without any hint that “my slave” is to be identified with the “boy” (pais)* for whom he is requesting healing suggests that the Q account did not identify the *pais* as the centurion’s slave.

Second, I have argued that *all the major differences between the Johannine version and the Q account can be explained by a pre-Johannine version of the story coming into contact with the story of the Syrophenician woman and her daughter* (Mark 7:24-30)—particularly the identification of the official as a Gentile, the petitioner’s acknowledgement of unworthiness and surprising response, and the acclamation of the petitioner’s great faith. If so, this would argue for Q’s identification of the “boy” as the Gentile’s son since the Syrophenician woman intercedes for her daughter. Some (including myself) think that the Q community was only an earlier stage of Matthew’s community. Matthew heavily reworks the story of the Syrophenician woman, playing up the great salvation-historical distance between this Jewish savior and a “Canaanite” woman and adding significant material about the resistance of Jesus’ disciples and even Jesus himself to the woman’s pleas (Matt 15:21-28). This appears to have been a story very important to Matthew’s community before Matthew’s Gospel was written (thus explaining Matthew’s willingness to redact Mark’s account so heavily). Perhaps already in the Q-stage of the community’s history—but late in Q’s literary development given that the narrative genre is a bit out-of-place in this sayings source and, moreover, given that the pro-Gentile theme of the story may reflect developing openness to Gentile mission—a version similar

to what we now see in John (minus Johannine editorial additions) was reworked in light of the similar story of the Syrophoenician woman.

This last point about the story of the Syrophoenician woman also introduces a third point: *There appears to be a "family of traditions" about distance healings that involve petition for one's child.* We see this not only in John 4:46b-54 and the story of the Syrophoenician woman but also in the history-of-religions parallel of a first-century Galilean (Hanina ben Dosa) who also healed from a distance a rabbi's *son*. In all cases the stories involve a parent and child. Moreover, all other healing stories about persons who have died or are on the verge of doing so are about blood relations, whether one's child (Jairus' daughter: Mark 5:21-24, 35-43; the widow's son at Nain: Luke 7:11-17) or one's brother (Mary's and Martha's brother Lazarus: John 11).

e. *The fact that Matthew appears to have understood the pais as a son.* The arguments for why the Q community likely understood the *pais* as a son apply also to Matthew, especially given Matthew's keen interest in the story of the "Canaanite" woman (15:21-28). Matthew's probable insertion of *pais* in the miracle story of the epileptic boy/son in Matt 17:18 (cf. 2:16 where he also uses *pais* of a "boy" or "child") also points in this direction. It is true that in 14:2 (Matthean editing of Mark) and possibly also in the citation of Isa 42:1 in Matt 12:18 Matthew uses *pais* in the sense of "servant" or "slave." However, these uses have nothing to do with a person being healed and so are rather remote as parallels. Josephus, another first-century Palestinian Jewish historian, normally uses *pais* and *huios* (son) as equivalent terms.

Collectively these arguments make it likely that the earliest recoverable version of the story involved a healing of the official's son, not slave.

2. The petitioner was originally a Jew. The argument for identifying the ethnicity of the official as originally Jewish rather than Gentile is twofold.

a. *John's account likely refers to a Jew.* Like the Judean Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman before him (John 4:1-42), the Galilean official is initially a representative of his region's shallow sign faith. In the new setting which the Fourth Evangelist gives the story, it is evident that he intends the reader to view the royal official in light of his introduction to the story: as representative of the "Galileans" who "had seen everything that Jesus did in Jerusalem at the [Passover] festival, for they too had gone to the festival" (4:45). At the festival "Jesus would not entrust himself to them (i.e., to the 'many' who 'believed in his name because they were seeing the signs that he was doing') because of him knowing ... what was in humans" (2:23-25). It is this role played by the royal official, the role of a Galilean with shallow sign-faith, that explains Jesus' abrupt chastisement of the official in 4:48 ("unless you see signs and wonders you will certainly not believe"). This role also suggests that the Fourth Evangelist did not perceive the official as a Gentile but as a Jew (or, at most, a nondescript representative of all Galileans, not Gentiles per se). The trilogy of 'Nicodemus - woman at the well - royal official' is not the ethnic one of

'Jew - Samaritan - Gentile' but the regional one of 'Judean - Samaritan - Galilean.' John reserves Gentile contact with Jesus until after his glorification in the cross/ascension. When at a later Passover festival the request is made to see Jesus by "Greeks" (Gentiles or at least all non-Palestinians) this signals the "hour" for the Son of Man to be "lifted up from the earth" so that he may "draw all people to" himself (12:20-24, 32-34). There is no reason to believe that John understood the story differently from his source. As Robert Fortna noted in his important work, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988): "It is far more likely that in its original form, or at least as known to SG [i.e. the Signs Gospel that the Fourth Evangelist used as a source], the man had not been identified as to nationality but could be presumed to be a Jewish official, living as he does in the Jewish town of Capernaum" (58 n. 131).

b. Transforming a story about a Galilean (Jewish) official into a story about a Gentile centurion is historically more probable than the reverse. In Q, Matthew, and Luke the centurion is indeed identified as a Gentile. However, a story exalting Gentile faith is more likely to be a later creation than a story that leaves ambiguous the ethnic status of the petitioner, precisely because the trend in the church as it became increasingly Gentile was to maximize in the tradition Jesus' involvement with Gentiles. As noted above, the differences between the (pre-)Johannine version and the version in Q can be explained by the impact that exposure to the story of the Syrophenician woman would have had in converting a story about a nondescript royal official into a story about a Gentile whose exhibition of faith and acknowledgement of Gentile unworthiness leads to a distance-healing from Jesus for the petitioner's child. The very image of a distance healing could have prompted hearers to think of the distance in salvation-history between a Jewish Messiah and a Gentile supplicant. It is very difficult, however, to imagine a scenario that would have led church circles eager to establish the legitimacy of Gentile mission to convert a story about the triumph of Gentile faith with its attendant bridging of the distance between Jew and Gentile into a story about a Jew who receives a distance healing but who did nothing particularly remarkable to provoke it.

The weight of historical evidence thus decisively favors a core historical narrative behind John 4:46b-54, Matt 8:5-13, and Luke 7:1-10 involving a distance healing of a Jewish official's son. Such a reconstruction does not read something that "is not there" in the text or "ignore what it is there." It rather reads the different versions of the same event and decides which features in each version are most likely to reflect the historical event that provoked the various retellings. Recognizing that John 4:46b-54 is an independent telling of the same story as the one lying behind Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10, with its own prehistory in oral transmission prior to incorporation into John's Gospel, buttresses the historical veracity of the core story; namely, that Jesus dramatically healed a Jewish official's son by simply speaking it into existence from a great distance.

V. The Shape of Inspiration in the Story of the Capernaum Official

How then do we deal with issues of inspiration? Any doctrine of scriptural inspiration has to start with what is in Scripture, not with what one wishes the Scripture to say. We cannot say, for example, that the doctrine of inspiration dictates that every event in Jesus' life mentioned in a given Gospel happened at precisely the chronological sequence that the Gospel portrays it as happening. For we encounter numerous instances where the Gospels put traditions at different places in the narrative sequence of Jesus' ministry. For example, Matthew constructs his "Sermon on the Mount" in chs. 5-7 using as a nucleus a core set of sayings found in Q (compare Luke's "Sermon on the Plain," 6:20-46) and splicing in material from his special source and other parts of Q (as well as a couple of short pieces from Mark's Gospel) to produce a carefully crafted, programmatic summary of Jesus' message (with everything structured in three's or multiples of three). Calvin recognized that Jesus did not say all these things in a single setting "on the mount"; that Matthew was responsible for the ordering of the whole. Even the setting "on the mount" appears to be a Matthean literary touch, portraying Jesus as a New Moses of Word. Similarly, in chs. 8-9 Matthew brings together ten miracles from various parts of Mark's Gospel and Q in order to present Jesus as a New Moses of Deed: Mark 1:40-44; Q/Luke 7:1-10; Mark 1:29-31, 32-34 (interlude: Q/Luke 9:57-60); Mark 4:35-41; 5:1-20; 2:1-12 (interlude: Mark 2:13-22); Mark 5:21-43 [2 miracles]; Mark 10:46-52; Q/Luke 11:14-15 (note: Moses did 10 signs before Pharaoh). The sequence is not a true *historical* sequence but a true *theological* sequence.

In the same way, differences in narrative detail cannot be suppressed by a preconceived notion of what inspiration should look like. What inspiration means when applied to narrative material in Scripture must take its cue from what exists in the text. This is an orthodox approach to interpreting Scripture. In the specific case of Jesus' distance healing of an official's son, the Q source behind the story in Matthew and Luke and its subsequent embellishment in Matthew and Luke tell us what Jesus would have said had he encountered a Gentile in the time of the post-Easter church. The Christian who relies on the authority of Scripture can understand changes made in the narrative as a true theological witness to what the Risen Christ now says. Luke's spin in identifying the *pais* of the centurion as a slave and the centurion as a rich person presents a "true" ideal image of the God-fearing Gentile who becomes a Christian, a person who is humble in dealing with others of significantly lower status.

So to put the matter as Kincaid does—Gagnon "says that the authors of the books of Matthew and Luke made a mistake and told the story incorrectly" so that "God's divine inspiration got it wrong"—shows significant (willful?) misunderstanding and misinformation. Matthew and Luke each told the story through the lens of, and speaking to, the post-Easter situation, informed by their own communities of faith. And the Spirit oversaw this process. However, inspiration does not mean—and never did mean for the majority of Church

Fathers—that everything recorded in every Gospel narrative happened in the ministry of the earthly Jesus precisely as recorded.

Kincaid closes by saying: “And those who are looking for a less word-for-word approach to doctrine are already capable of finding within the message of Christ an extravagant welcome that includes gay and lesbian Christians.” There is an extravagant welcome to all persons, irrespective of felt impulses (for we all continue to experience sinful impulses), to repent, turn one’s life over to Christ in faith, receive the benefits of his amends-making death, and walk in the power of his Spirit, which means “taking up one’s cross,” “denying oneself,” and “losing one’s life.” God’s “extravagant welcome” does not mean that people with intense polysexual urges can continue to live out of them, even in adult-committed unions. Persons who find themselves in love with a close blood relation cannot act on such desires, even in adult-committed unions. Persons experiencing same-sex attractions cannot engage in same-sex intercourse, even in adult-committed unions. Kincaid’s gospel is a severely truncated gospel and therefore no gospel. Holding to a male-female prerequisite for sexual unions is not a minor part of the teaching on sexual ethics in Scripture. It is presumed as foundational in every narrative, law, proverb, metaphor, and poetry that has anything to do with sexual behavior.

Kincaid talks of my allegedly “unorthodox approach to doctrine” while inviting people to affirm a form of behavior that Scripture regards as a foundational violation of sexual ethics, homosexual practice. This is a behavior that (to use Paul’s language) dishonors our creation as “male and female,” as sexual complements and counterparts designed not for sexual pairing with someone of the same sex but rather, if sex is to be had, with a true sexual complement. The logic of a two-sexes pairing is that the two halves of the sexual spectrum come together to form a single sexual whole. One integrates with what one isn’t, with what one lacks on the sexual spectrum. One is attracted to what one lacks in oneself on the sexual spectrum, not aroused by the distinctive features of one’s own sex. The self-degrading logic of a same-sex pairing is that each participant is only half his or her own sex: two half males making a single full male; or two half females making a full female. The closest analogue to adult-committed homosexual practice is adult-committed incest, another instance of sexual intercourse between persons who are too much alike formally or structurally (incest on the level of familial relation, homosexual practice on the level of biological sex). There is no comparison between taking seriously the narrative differences that exist in different Gospel accounts, on the one hand, and advocating for what Scripture consistently deems as an egregious instance of sexual immorality.

VI. What If the “Historical Jesus” Did Do a Distance Healing for a *Gentile Centurion’s Slave*?

I believe the historical reconstruction that I have presented above marshals a very strong case for an original encounter between Jesus and a Galilean Jewish official in which Jesus does a distance healing for the official’s son. I recognize, however, that not everyone will agree because people may decide these questions on grounds other than where the historical evidence leaves (some on the basis of an erroneous preconceived view of what inspiration means, many more simply because they are ideologically committed to denying the biblical witness against homosexual practice).

It bears mentioning that if even just one of the two positions that I outline above is acknowledged, the homosexualist reading of the centurion story remains negated. On the one hand, if the official were Gentile but the “boy” were his son, a sexual relationship between the two would constitute incest; obviously not something that Jesus could have condoned and not something that even a Gentile would likely engage in. On the other hand, if the “boy” were his slave but the official a Jew, a known sexual relationship between the two would be impossible in first-century Jewish Palestine, given the views that prevailed everywhere in Second Temple Judaism about homosexual practice and the capital punishment that would have been threatened.

For the sake of discussion, let’s suppose that both of my historical contentions were false and the “historical Jesus” did in fact perform a distance healing for a *Gentile* centurion and his *slave*. What then? Would there still be a strong case against any assumption that Jesus was tacitly endorsing homosexual practice? In my opinion the evidence for this would still be insurmountable. Here I will repeat the other arguments in my earlier online treatment, then respond to the negative comments appended to the Kincaid article at boxturtlebulletin.com by a certain “Patrick Casanova,” who flatters himself that he is an adept critic of my work, and by Kincaid himself.

(1) ***Sex with male slaves not a universal phenomenon.*** Not every provincial or Roman officer was having sex with his slave so Jesus could hardly have assumed such behavior was going on. This is especially true in Luke’s version where the centurion is portrayed as a paradigmatic “God-fearer.”

Patrick falsely characterizes this argument as: “Because sex with male servants was not a universal phenomenon, this one obviously did not do it.” Rather: Since the whole premise of the homosexualist interpretation of the story cannot be granted—namely, that Jesus *must have assumed* that a homosexual relationship was going on so that his silence can only be read as approval—the homosexualist interpretation is invalid. What the homosexualist interpretation argues would have been assumed could not in fact have been assumed. Moreover, the homosexualist reading is based entirely on *Luke’s* identification of the “boy” as a slave. But Luke also presents the centurion as a paradigmatic God-fearer, comparable to the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10-11. *No Gentile*

commonly recognized as a God-fearer among first-century Jews would have been accepted as such had it been known that he was engaging in homosexual practice. To argue otherwise is as absurd as arguing that the centurion could still have been viewed as a God-fearer if he were having sex with his mother or sister in an adult-committed union.

(2) ***Jesus would have had to have been endorsing rape in this case.***

We know that the form which much master-slave homoeroticism took in the Greco-Roman world included not only coerced sexual activity but also forced feminization, up to and including castration. By the reasoning of those who put a pro-homosex spin on the story, we would have to conclude that Jesus had no problem with this particularly exploitative form of same-sex intercourse inasmuch as he did not explicitly tell the centurion to stop doing it.

Patrick responds: Gagnon assumes rape here "even though the text said the Centurion dearly loved his servant." Kincaid makes a similar comment in the comments section:

To a Christian, the question is not whether both halves of the relationship were free men. Indeed, there were probably no relationships of equal partners; women were to a great extent the property of their husbands. (In fact, Christians are instructed not to place importance on whether someone was free or a slave.) ... The scripture makes clear that the Centurian [*sic*] greatly prized the *pais*.

Kincaid even encourages another person in the comments not "to get bogged down in the 'sex slave' aspect of this"!

The text literally says that the slave "was precious to him." Patrick and Kincaid fail to understand that sex with a slave is necessarily coercive. If the relationship were a genuine relationship of mutual sexual love, a covenant relationship establishing fictive kinship ties across bloodlines, the master would be obliged to free the slave and to treat the slave as kin (of course, there would have been no allowance in ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity for engaging in sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex, committed or otherwise). If the master retained the slave as a slave in the context of having intercourse with him, then he retained the right to coerce the intercourse, as well as the right of forced feminization. If Jesus were approving of a sexual relationship between a centurion and his slave, he would be approving, by definition, an exploitative sexual relationship.

Kincaid's claim that ancient Jews and Christians saw no distinction between the status of slave and the status of wife, or between slave status and free status, is insupportable. Why does he think that Paul told Philemon that Onesimus's departure happened in God's plan "in order that he might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother, ... both in the flesh and in the Lord," that is, not only in an ethereal-spiritual sense but in the concrete realities of everyday life (Phlm 15-16)? If being slave or free made little difference there would be no point in Paul expressing a desire for

Onesimus's freedom and contrasting the status of slave with the status of brother.

Kincaid's allusion to 1 Cor 7:21 as indicating that "Christians are instructed not to place importance on whether someone was free or a slave," then using this description as a pretext for claiming that it doesn't matter whether a master has sex with his slave, is a misrepresentation of Paul's point. Paul says in 1 Cor 7:21: "Were you, a slave, called? Don't let it be of concern to you. But if also you can become free, use (it) [i.e. your freedom] the more [or: rather]," that is, to serve the Lord. Here Paul is saying to believers who cannot become free that they shouldn't think that the condition of servitude prevents them from being able to do the Lord's work or depreciates their worth in God's eyes. This was intended as solace for those who could do nothing about their slavery. But Paul doesn't carry through completely his general principle in the chapter, a principle that he applied to the immediately preceding example of circumcision (7:18-20); namely, to remain in the condition that they find themselves at the time of their call (7:17, 18, 24). On the contrary: He says if one can become free, one should take the opportunity but for the purpose of maximizing one's service to the Lord, not merely for the crass purpose of pleasing oneself and maximizing gratification of sinful fleshly urges. There is absolutely nothing in these remarks to buttress the claim that it doesn't matter if a master engages in sexual intercourse with a slave so long as he regards the slave as "precious." Similarly, Gal 3:28 "there is in (Christ) no slave nor free," is not a statement that endorses slavery, much less sex with a slave, but an assurance that in the body of Christ a slave will be treated as well as a free person.

As an aside, a certain "Evan," who cites Gal 3:28 to support Kincaid's point, says that Paul in the same verse removes all distinctions between "male and female" in sexual relationships when he alludes to Gen 1:27 with the words "there is in (Christ) no 'male and female.'" He then says that Paul "didn't differentiate like Mr. Gagnon does" and describes the idea that homosexualist activists are afraid to debate me as a load of "crap." For the record, Evan, they are afraid, not because I am anything great but because the evidence of Scripture's clear and absolute opposition to homosexual practice is so overwhelming. Stacy Johnson of Princeton Seminary has used the same argument about Gal 3:28 that Evan uses. I have written a critique of that view, which wasn't hard to do. Briefly, the evidence we have at Corinth and subsequent interpretation of "no 'male and female'" in the early church indicates two distinct uses: (1) When applied to women's roles in the church it means a movement to equalizing male and female. (2) When applied to sexual activity it means "no sex" or celibacy. Paul partially implements the first and holds in abeyance the second until we receive our resurrection bodies. The second can only be implemented as optional prior to the eschaton (i.e., a male-female prerequisite remains but one can choose celibacy as the only optional alternative). The Church Fathers felt the same way. The end of sexual differentiation, when applied to sexual desires, spells the end of sexual

intercourse (thus Jesus' neither-married-nor-given-in-marriage statement about angels and heaven). So Gal 3:28 provides no justification whatsoever for legitimizing homosexual unions. So much for Evan's observation: "All of these anti-gays seem to have logical fallacy and circular reasoning in common, actually. I don't know whether it speaks to their own mental acuity or the low regard they have for their intended audience." Neither, Evan: The gaps in logic, reasoning, and knowledge here lie with your own analysis.

The OT itself clearly recognizes a significant difference between slave and free status, cautioning Israelites not to treat fellow Israelites as slaves, setting up mandatory release dates, allowing redemption by kin at any time, forbidding the return of runaway slaves, etc. Kincaid's attempt to assert that being a wife in a relationship of submission to a husband is akin to being a slave, such that Christians would not have recognized a significant difference between having intercourse with one's wife and intercourse with a slave (whether male or female), is untenable.

(3) ***Jesus' fraternization with tax collectors and sexual sinners does not suggest support for their behavior.*** The fact that Jesus healed the centurion's "boy" (*pais*) in Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10 communicates nothing in the way of approval of any potential sexual intercourse that the centurion may have been engaging in, whether with his "boy" or anyone else. Jesus also reached out to tax collectors. Yet he certainly was not commending their well-deserved reputation for collecting more taxes from their own people than they had a right to collect. Jesus reached out to sexual sinners. Yet, given his clear statements on divorce/remarriage, he certainly was not condoning their sexual activity. Why should we conclude that Jesus' silence about the centurion's sexual life communicates approval?

Patrick responds: "Gagnon argues that Jesus' silence should not be interpreted as condoning. But Gagnon has argued that Jesus' silence should be interpreted as condemning—even if he interacted with homosexuals and remained silent." No, I am not arguing that Jesus' silence proves Jesus' *disapproval* of any homosexual relationship that the centurion may have been engaged in. Rather, I am arguing here only that Jesus' good deed for the centurion does not convey *approval* of whatever sinful behaviors the centurion may have committed. I establish Jesus' disapproval of homosexual practice on other grounds. The homosexualist interpretation rests on two assumptions: The centurion must have been in a sexual relationship with his slave (see my point 1 above) and Jesus' healing of the centurion's slave conveys acceptance of that relationship. Since neither assumption is sustainable, the centurion story is of no help to those attempting to use it to make Scripture supportive of homosexual unions. The centurion story is not a text that I go to in order to prove Jesus' opposition to homosexual practice. It is a text that I assess in order to show that it provides no support for homosexual practice. Patrick misses the point completely.

(4) ***The Jewish elders in Luke 7 could not have supported a homosexual relationship.*** Luke adds the motif that Jewish elders interceded on the centurion's behalf (7:3-5). Should we argue that these Jewish elders had no problem with same-sex intercourse, when every piece of evidence that we have about Jewish views in the Second Temple period and beyond is extremely hostile to such behavior (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 159-83)?

Patrick responds: "Gagnon argues the Jewish leaders would not have supported the Centurion, even though he was generous to their cause, because they were supposedly fully aware of what he did behind closed doors." No, I am not arguing that the Jewish elders were "fully aware of what he did behind closed doors." I am arguing that within the storyline, since they were commending the centurion to Jesus, they knew the centurion better than Jesus did. Had they been aware of a sexual relationship between the centurion and his slave or had they *assumed* that such a relationship existed (the homosexualist interpretation presumes that this would be obvious to all), they would *not* have recommended him to Jesus, saying, "Worthy is he to whom you should grant this (request)." He would not have been viewed as "loving our nation," through the building of the synagogue for them, if he was a known participant in homosexual practice. Jesus went with them only *after* he had received the commendation from the Jewish elders (in Luke this conveys the point that Jewish Christians have not stirred up trouble among the Jews through Gentile mission). Jesus could assume, based on the elders' recommendation, that, so far as was known, the centurion was not engaged in homosexual practice of any sort. Therefore, Jesus' action in aiding the centurion cannot be construed as in any way condoning homosexual practice. In early Judaism Gentile God-fearers minimally worshipped the God of Israel exclusively and adhered to basic moral standards, including the sexual prohibitions binding on even resident aliens in Leviticus 18 (cf. v. 26). At or near the top of the list would be the absolute prohibition of man-male intercourse. In short the endorsement of the Jewish elders is a sure indication that Luke wants to portray the centurion is a Gentile God-fearer who did not engage in sexually immoral behavior, including homosexual practice.

(5) ***Q, Matthew, and Luke did not interpret Jesus' healing as support for same-sex intercourse.*** There can be no question of Matthew or Luke reading into the story a positive view of same-sex intercourse on the part of Jesus. The same holds for the Q source before them (i.e. the sayings source consistent of sayings of Jesus common to Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark). If even Paul, the most vigorous Jewish proponent in the Bible of the abrogation of the Mosaic law, was strongly opposed to same-sex intercourse, what chance is there that Matthew, the most vigorous proponent in the New Testament of the retention of the Mosaic law, would have recognized in this story a pro-homosex element? Even less likely would be a positive spin on same-sex intercourse by the Q community—still more conservative on the question of the law than Matthew's community. Luke's reference to the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15, with its prohibitions drawn from those enjoined on the resident alien in

Lev 17-18, including the one against *porneia* (sexual immorality), could not have read an affirmation of homosexual behavior in the story. So if three of the earliest extant interpreters of the story, those in closest proximity to Jesus' views and time, did not detect any pro-homosex content in it, it is likely that contemporary interpreters who do are reading their own biases into the story.

Patrick does not even bother responding to this point, a point that is decisive for establishing that the *narrators* of the centurion story did not interpret it as in any way condoning homosexual practice. It is against the backdrop of Patrick's futile counterarguments that one must assess his overall evaluation of my arguments: "Since reading his first book I've been a fan of Gagnon's consistent circular reasoning and logical fallacies. He does it again in brilliant fashion.... Gagnon is nothing if not consistent in his logical fallacies." I think that we have seen with whom the logical fallacies lie.

In conclusion, there is absolutely no basis for arguing that the centurion story provides evidence for Jesus' support of homosexual practice. Even if the earthly Jesus actually encountered a *Gentile* centurion petitioning for healing of his *slave*, the evidence is overwhelming that the narrative does not in any way suggest Jesus' support for homosexual practice.

What evidence do we have that the "historical Jesus" would have opposed homosexual practice? Briefly, the evidence includes:

1. Jesus clearly predicated his restriction of two persons in a sexual bond, whether concurrently (polygamy) or serially (divorce and remarriage), on the sexually dimorphic character or 'twoness' of the sexes, "male and female he made them" (Mark 10:6-9). Similarly, the Essene community at Qumran rejected "taking two wives in their lives" (polygamy) because "the foundation of creation is 'male and female he created them' [Gen 1:27]" and because "those who entered (Noah's) ark went in two by two into the ark [Gen 7:9]" (CD 4.20-5.1). A male-female prerequisite was thus central to Jesus' sexual ethics.
2. Jesus' retention of the Law of Moses even on relatively minor matters such as tithing, to say nothing of a foundational law in sexual ethics; and his view of the Old Testament as inviolable Scripture, which Scripture was absolutely opposed to man-male intercourse.
3. Jesus' intensification of the Law's sex-ethic in matters involving adultery of the heart and divorce (Matt 5:27-32), suggesting a closing of remaining loopholes in the Law's sex-ethic rather than a loosening and, in his saying about cutting off body parts, warning that people could be thrown into hell for not repenting of violations of God's sexual standards (5:29-30).
4. The fact that the man who baptized Jesus, John the Baptist, was beheaded for defending Levitical sex laws in the case of the adult-incestuous union between Herod Antipas and a woman who was both the ex-wife of his half-brother Philip and the daughter of another half-brother.

5. Early Judaism's univocal opposition to all homosexual practice.
6. The early church's united opposition to all homosexual practice (completing the circle and underscoring the absurdity of positing a pro-homosex Jesus without analogue in his historical context: cut off from his Scripture, from the rest of early Judaism, from the man who baptized him, and from the church that emerged from his teachings).
7. Jesus' saying about the defiling effect of desires for various forms of sexual immoralities (Mark 7:21-23), which distinguished matters of relative moral indifference such as food laws from matters of moral significance such as the sexual commands of his Bible and connected Jesus to the general view of what constitutes the worst forms of *porneia* in early Judaism (same-sex intercourse, incest, bestiality, adultery).
8. Jesus on the Decalogue prohibition of adultery, which in its Decalogue context and its subsequent interpretation in early Judaism as a rubric for the major sex laws of the Old Testament presupposed a male-female prerequisite for valid sexual bonds.
9. Jesus' saying about Sodom which, understood in the light of Second Temple interpretations of Sodom (Matt 10:14-15 par. Luke 10:10-12), included an indictment of Sodom for attempting to dishonor the integrity of the visitors' masculinity by treating them as if they were the sexual counterparts to males.
10. Jesus' saying about not giving what is "holy" to the "dogs" (Matt 7:6), an apparent allusion to Deuteronomic law (Deut 23:17-18) and texts in 1-2 Kings that indict the *qedeshim*, self-designated "holy ones" identified as "dogs" for their attempt to erase their masculinity by serving as the passive-receptive partners in man-male intercourse.
11. Jesus' comparison of "eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven" with "born eunuchs" (persons who are asexual and/or homosexual), a comparison that presumes that "born eunuchs" are not permitted sexual relationships outside a man-woman bond (Matt 19:10-12).
12. The fact that Jesus developed a sex ethic that had distinctive features not shared by the love commandment (love for everyone does not translate into having sex with everyone), reached out to tax collectors and sexual sinners while simultaneously intensifying God's ethical demand in these areas, insisted that the adulterous woman stop sinning lest something worse happen to her (i.e., loss of eternal life; cf. John 8:3-11; 5:14), appropriated the context of the "love your neighbor" command in Lev 19:17-18 by insisting on reproof as part of a full-orbed view of love (Luke 17:3-4), and defined discipleship to him as taking up one's cross, denying oneself, and losing one's life (Mark 8:34-37; Matt 10:38-39; Luke 14:27; 17:33; John 12:25).

In short, the case for Jesus' opposition to homosexual practice is as strong as the case for Jesus' opposition to adult-committed incest—another instance of

sexual immorality for which we have no Jesus saying but concerning which there is no doubt about Jesus' view. Kincaid says in a comment attached to his posting:

If it were to be accepted that this was a same-sex couple, this would be evidence of Christ's implicit blessing of a same-sex couple which could revolutionize the way that Christians view gay couples. Frankly, I don't know if that interpretation is correct. But I do know that Gagnon has to leap in circles to avoid that interpretation.

Leap in circles? Refuting every bad argument for a homosexualist interpretation of the centurion story with a mountain of cumulatively irrefutable counterarguments, does not constitute "leaping in circles to avoid [a homosexualist] interpretation."

VII. Kincaid's Tone

Finally, a comment about Kincaid's tone. Kincaid whines: "Gagnon is, characteristically, dismissive. Insulting, one might say." What Kincaid experiences as "dismissive" and "insulting" is a strong, detailed argument that shows the beliefs that he holds to be without merit. Showing this does not constitute "insulting" language. If I were merely "dismissive," I wouldn't give homosexualist arguments the attention that I do. I cannot be blamed for how bad most of these arguments are, including the one that I address in this article. If the result is that people realize how truly bad homosexualist arguments are, which in turn leads them to dismiss the arguments, then so be it. I guess what Kincaid wants is for me not to spend the time to show this while he spends most of his waking moments attacking what he terms "anti-gays."

Of course the great irony of Kincaid's complaint is that he specializes in rhetoric that is dismissive and insulting. He does not take the time to understand my argument as he labels it "tortured logic," an instance of "homophobia trump[ing] written witness" (including that of Scripture), "peculiar theological notions," and a "leaping in circles" (thanks for not being dismissive), all the while offering for his part a very poor defense of his allegations. He refers to me as "anti-gay" and states that I provide the fodder for "homophobic rants." He declares, falsely, that I believe that "homosexuality is the worst of all possible sins" (it is certainly a high sexual offense, comparable to having sex with one's parent or worse, though not as severe an offense as bestiality; and I can think of some worse non-sexual offenses). And, of course, I "blather on."

Actually his treatment of me, disrespectful and distorted as it is, is one of Kincaid's "kinder and gentler" moments. Elsewhere (here I peruse only a few of his articles) we frequently encounter such descriptions as "astonishing ignorance," "nutbaggery," "frothing lunacy," "lunatic ranting," "homophobe," and "bigot." He calls Peter LaBarbera of Americans for Truth "Porno Pete." After

reading such characterizations and many more one can go to the "[principles](#)" that are suppose to govern the "boxturtlebulletin.com" site and get a good laugh: 1. "We are compassionate." 2. "We are tolerant." 3. "We are civil." (I'm not making this up!) 4. "We are honest." 5. "We are hopeful." I guess they forgot to leave out: 6. "We are modest." And finally: 7. "We are self-deceived."