

# How Bad Is Homosexual Practice According to Scripture and Does Scripture's View Apply to Committed Homosexual Unions?

A response to R. Milton Winter's *Perspectives* article:  
"Presbyterians and Separatist Evangelicals"

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[*Author's note, 2/10/07*: On Jan. 29, 2007 this article was submitted to the editor of *Perspectives*, Sharon Youngs. I received a response from Ms. Youngs on Feb. 1 rejecting my article. Ms. Youngs's excuse was: "The next two issues of *Perspectives* will include a two-part response to the Winter article. Beyond that, we will want to shift the focus to other issues facing the PC(USA) and its witness in society."

The response is not surprising. Having published Winter's lengthy (32-page!) attack piece against evangelicals, the Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick and the Office of General Assembly (which puts out *Perspectives*) were not about to allow a point-by-point refutation of all or any part of Winter's article. This is clear enough in the Stated Clerk's correspondence with the author of the two-part response, Rev. Winfield Casey Jones, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Pearland, Texas. (Note that although "two-part" sounds like a lot, in fact the division of the response into two parts was based not on length but on the fact that Rev. Jones had to leave for a 12-day trip to Wales and had only three days to write a response for the February issue.) Rev. Jones's short, part-one response has now appeared in the February issue (<http://www.pcusa.org/oga/perspectives/feb07/response-and-invitation.htm>). According to Rev. Jones, the Stated Clerk asked him to write "'a positive article obviously in response to Mr. Winter's article' but 'not as a point-by-point rebuttal.' He requests that it address the 'contributions of the evangelical movement to the peace, unity, and purity of the church'" (emphasis added).

In other words, Rev. Dr. Winter is allowed to write a lengthy, detailed attack piece on evangelicals while evangelicals are told to keep things "positive" and not defend themselves "point-by-point." Moreover, they can only speak to their "contributions . . . to the peace, unity, and purity of the church"; that is, an evangelical response must not stray into questioning whether recent actions of the General Assembly and Stated Clerk might be to blame for evangelicals and others wanting to leave the PCUSA and indeed provide some reasonable justification for departure. Is this evidence of fair play by the Office of the General Assembly or, rather, evidence of self-serving bias? Let the reader decide. Would the Stated Clerk and editor Youngs ever be willing to commission an article for *Perspectives*, similar to Dr. Winter's article (though better on facts), on how the PUP Task Force and its supporters (liberals and those who like the power that comes from being liked by liberals) have created an ecclesiastical crisis through their deceptive distortion of the clear meaning of texts in the *Book of Order* and in Scripture? And if not, why not—apart, that is, from self-serving interests?

In a letter to Presbyweb posted on Jan. 25, 2007 (<http://www.presbyweb.com/2007/Letters/012501.htm>), just four days before I submitted my article to Ms. Youngs, Ms. Youngs reminded us all of the purpose statement of *Perspectives*: "*Perspectives* offers an exploration of issues facing the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its witness in society through reflective and *provocative* analysis of our life

together as a denomination, and the lenses of Scripture, Reformed theology, cultures, and a constitutional and confessional framework” (emphasis added). She added that they are “always seeking balance.” Apparently, articles can only be “provocative” from one perspective. Evangelicals can respond but that response should not extend to critiquing at length those who critique them at length, much less to questioning whether the PCUSA has so strayed from core values in sexual ethics as to warrant a serious discussion about dissolution. The “balance” appears to be a bit truncated.]

*Perspectives*, the online magazine published by the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has published in its Jan. 2007 issue a 32-page article by Rev. Dr. R. Milton Winter entitled “Presbyterians and Separatist Evangelicals: A Continuing Dilemma” (<http://www.pcusa.org/oga/perspectives/jan07/presbyterians-evangelicals.pdf>). Rev. Dr. Winter, who holds a Ph.D. in church history from Union Theological Seminary (Virginia), pastors the 77-member First Presbyterian Church in Holly Springs, Miss. His article, which generated a storm of protest on [www.presbyweb.com](http://www.presbyweb.com) (from Jan. 19, 2007 on), so misrepresents evangelicals that it has an almost McCarthyesque quality (replace communist-baiting with evangelical-baiting).

Just about everything that Winter accuses so-called “separatist evangelicals” of doing, Dr. Winter does himself. This includes his contention that evangelicals are characterized by “strident interpretations,” “black and white theology,” “disregard for history,” “a quest for dominance,” and, most ironically, the following feature: “Evangelicals adopt an ‘ends justify the means’ type of action, which compels evangelical leaders to play ‘fast and loose’ with facts” (p. 16). Winter distinguishes himself from such charges only in this sense: He cloaks his observations under the guise of being “mainstream” and “middle”—false rubrics for both the content and style of his arguments (note the subtitle: “Mainstream Reflections”). This is not serious scholarship. It is propaganda driven by ideology rather than by the facts.

Having neither the space nor time (nor, frankly, interest) to respond to the plethora of inaccuracies in his article, I shall focus my analysis on his section on “Gay ordination” where I am referenced (pp. 21-23). However, in doing so, I believe that I can get at the heart of one of Dr. Winter’s major criticisms of “separatist evangelicals,” namely, that they are in egregious error for contemplating leaving a denomination that has now made it possible for presbyteries to ordain unrepentant, homosexually active candidates.

### ***Creating inaccurate direct quotations***

In the original version of Dr. Winter’s article posted by *Perspectives*, Dr. Winter wrote:

Addressing the New Wineskins Convocation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, July 21, 2006, Robert J. Gagnon, a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary declared, “Homosexual practice is the ultimate moral failing—a more serious violation of Scripture’s sexual norms than even incest, adultery, plural marriage, and divorce.” He stated, “It is a soul-destroying rejection of the Creator God.”

This Confessing Movement's declaration makes no room for the question raised by biblical scholars whether the type of homosexuality condemned in Scripture is the same as that practiced by those committed, same-sex couples who plead for the church's tolerance.

In a footnote Winter attributed his "quotation" to a report of my talk available on the *Presbyterian Layman* website by Parker T. Williamson ("Gagnon: 'Our souls are in torment,'" July 21, 2006). Half of what Dr. Winter originally attributed to me as a direct citation was not in fact a direct citation. Indeed, the opening line "Homosexual practice is the ultimate moral failing" was *Winter's own editorializing* masquerading as a direct quote from me. He apparently took his own characterization of my position and accidentally put words into my mouth. And the final "direct quote," "It is a soul-destroying rejection of the Creator God," is not put in quotation marks in the *Layman* article but rather was a characterization of what I said.

In an e-mail to Dr. Winter I notified him of these errors and told him, "The problems of your argumentation I will deal with later." He acknowledged the errors, apologized for them, and asked Sharon Youngs, editor of *Perspectives*, to input his corrections in a revised version of the article. Since then I have supplied him with a transcript of my relevant remarks at the New Wineskins gathering (below) and he has made corrections once more. All this is good since to do otherwise would have been embarrassing to Dr. Winter when I publicly pointed them out. However, that such elementary errors could appear in his original article at all raise serious questions and seem to epitomize the loose application of facts in the article as a whole. We will see below two other instances of this in just his "Gay ordination" section alone: one involving a false inference about my own work and another involving a misreporting of a recent court case in the Methodist church.

What I actually said at the New Wineskins gathering on the subject matter that Dr. Winter originally "quoted" was as follows:

How important is the two-sex prerequisite for marriage? Scripture treats it as a foundational matter that takes precedence even over fidelity, monogamy, and non-incestuous bonds. In other words, homosexual practice is regarded by Scripture as an even more serious violation of sexual norms than incest, adultery, plural marriage, and divorce. Would you stay in a denomination that approved any of those forms of behavior? . . . .

[Paul] says in 1 Corinthians 5 that the Corinthians, rather than *tolerating* the behavior of the incestuous man and accommodating it, should have *mourned* because this person is at risk of being excluded from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-11). So take the following action that his life might be spared on the Day of the Lord; namely, temporary exclusion from the life of the community in order to bring the offender to his senses. That's true love. It's not the Corinthians who love the incestuous man. It's Paul who loves the incestuous man.

So don't tell me that affirming homosexual practice is all about love. Homosexual practice is an even greater violation than incest because the reason

why incest is wrong is predicated on the assumption that “you shall not have sex with the flesh of your own flesh” (Lev 18:6), that is, with someone who is already a same on a *familial* level. That’s sex with yourself, not with a complementary “other.”

The need for complementary otherness is felt even more deeply in the matter of *sexual* otherness, which is more clearly ensconced in the creation texts than incest. Genesis 2:21-24 posits an original, sexually undifferentiated human split down the “side” (not “rib”). *The fact that one flesh becomes two sexes grounds the principle that these two sexes may become one flesh.* When Paul talks about homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9 he echoes Gen 1:27 and 2:24. He’s a good “learner” or disciple of Jesus because when Jesus talked about sexuality in Mark 10 the two texts that he pinpoints as normative and prescriptive for all matters involving human sexual ethics are these very two texts, Genesis 1:27, “male and female He made them,” and Genesis 2:24, “for this reason a man may become joined to a woman and the two become one flesh.”

The whole basis for predicating marital monogamy—the twoness of the sexual union at any one time or serially—is Genesis 1:27, “God made us male and female,” the twoness of the sexes. If we eliminate that sexual standard then there will be no other Scripture-based, logic-based, or nature-based reason by which you might proscribe committed sexual unions involving three or more persons—*according to Jesus.* That doesn’t mean that polyamory (i.e., multiple partners in a consensual, committed sexual bond) is worse than homosexual practice. It is *less* worse because the basis for proscribing polyamory is the two-sex prerequisite given in marriage.

An audio of the entire talk is available at <http://www.robagnon.net/RGagnon.wma>. A full transcript will be posted shortly on my website.

### ***Ignoring arguments for Scripture’s absolute stance against homosexual practice***

The only thing that Dr. Winter correctly quoted in the original version of his article was my remark that “homosexual practice is regarded by Scripture as an even more serious violation of sexual norms than incest, adultery, plural marriage, and divorce.” I stand by this statement completely. Winter responded to it by saying that this

declaration makes no room for the question raised by biblical scholars whether the type of homosexuality condemned in Scripture is the same as that practiced by those committed, same-sex couples who plead for the church’s tolerance.

I leave aside the characterization “who plead for the church’s tolerance,” which is more benign-sounding but less accurate than the following: “who demand the church’s full approval and blessing of their unions as marriages and who equate those who disagree with racists and bigots.” *Dr. Winter’s main point*, namely that I “make no room” for the possibility that Scripture might not have been condemning committed homosexual unions, *makes it sound like I have not even considered the possibility. In fact, I have not*

only considered this but also heavily and repeatedly critiqued it in numerous publications dating from 2000 to 2006. I have shown point-by-point why such a hypothesis cannot stand up to historical-critical scrutiny. Neither Winter nor anyone else has rebutted these points; indeed, these arguments have been largely ignored and treated as if they never existed.

My first and second books make these points throughout: *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Abingdon, 2001; 500 pages); and, with Dan O. Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Fortress, 2001). So do a number of mostly more-recent published articles:

- “The Old Testament and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of the Case Made by Phyllis Bird,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117 (2005): 367-94.
- “Sexuality,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (eds. K. J. Vanhoozer, et al.; Baker Academic, 2005), 739-48 (esp. 744-48).
- “A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture, Part 2*,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25 (2003): 179-275 (esp. 186-265) (also online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoBalchHBTRReview2.pdf>)
- “Does the Bible Regard Same-Sex Intercourse as Intrinsically Sinful?” *Christian Sexuality: Normative and Pastoral Principles* (ed. R. E. Saltzman; Minneapolis: Kirk House, 2003), 106-55.
- “Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts? A Critique of Walter Wink’s Views on the Bible and Homosexuality,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24:1 (June 2002): 72-125 (also online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoWinkHBTRResp.pdf>)

Most recently still, Dr. Winter can see two extensive online discussions:

- “Why the Disagreement over the Biblical Witness on Homosexual Practice? A Response to David G. Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together?* in *Reformed Review* 59.1 (2005): 19-130 (esp. pp. 55-83 for the witness of Paul; online: <http://www.westernsem.edu/wtseminary/assets/Gagnon2%20Aut05.pdf>)
- My series of online critiques of Jack Rogers’s book, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality* (which Winter cites in n. 52), especially my third installment at <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/RogersBookReviewed3.pdf>, pp. 3-15 (focusing on the witness of Paul)

Neither Myers/Scanzoni nor Rogers has even attempted a rebuttal of my critique of their use of an exploitation argument, let alone mounted an effective rebuttal. Indeed, in his book Rogers shamelessly tells readers that I “*simply assert, with no supporting evidence,*” that Paul and Scripture generally reject homosexual relationships absolutely (pp. 83-84; emphasis added). Rogers then proceeds to ignore the arguments, with their supporting evidence, that I do make, apparently in the hope that he will have so successfully slandered my work as to leave readers disinclined to examine my work for themselves.

I have attached below a summary of some of these arguments (Appendix 2), so that Winter and others can begin to read my work or at least cease the pretense to others that a

strong, indeed overwhelming, case for Scripture's opposition to all homosexual practice has not already been made. A more honest statement by Winter than saying that I have not "made room" for the possibility that the Bible was opposing only exploitative homosexual relationships would have been to say: "Gagnon in his numerous writings on the subject has developed a comprehensive series of arguments to buttress the assertion that the Bible's opposition to homosexual practice was intended as absolute, that is, inclusive of loving homosexual relationships. As of yet, no one has effectively rebutted these arguments." I have also attached below a brief summary of why I contend that "homosexual practice is regarded by Scripture as an even more serious violation of sexual norms than incest, adultery, plural marriage, and divorce" (Appendix 1).

Hopefully, Dr. Winter and others will begin to examine such arguments before they assume that no significant case has been made that the Bible was not indicting committed homosexual unions.

### ***Why not executing homosexual offenders doesn't logically lead to ordaining them***

Winter's next argument is that since we don't execute any more persons who engage in homosexual practice the way may now be clear, in "grace," to ordain such persons to the high offices of the church.

Moreover, in neither the Hebrew nor Christian Testaments is there evidence that homosexuals were ever as stringently punished as the texts themselves require: "they are to be cut off from the people of God," says Leviticus, while St. Paul affirms in Romans that "they shall not see the kingdom of God." . . . Having allowed for grace, therefore, the question of "how much grace" becomes a legitimate subject for debate. (p. 22)

This is a very weak argument. We will leave aside the obvious problem with Winter's contention that this is no evidence in the New Testament that "homosexuals" were ever given the punishment prescribed by Paul "in Romans that 'they shall not see the kingdom of God.'" Obviously the phenomenon of failing to inherit the kingdom of God is not something any of us have yet been given the opportunity to see, much less implement. A minor detail but another example of carelessness in citation is that, contrary to Winter, Paul never used the phrase "see the kingdom"—rather, "inherit the kingdom"—and the latter appears in connection with homosexual practice in 1 Corinthians, not Romans.

Leviticus 20 groups sexual sins by severity and places in the category of capital offenses adultery, the worst forms of incest (sex with one's mother or child), male-male intercourse, and bestiality. Now what persons engaged in any of these acts in an active, unrepentant manner do we now ordain—other than, perhaps, those engaged in serial, unrepentant homosexual practice?

In the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery Jesus prevents the crowd from imposing a capital sentence (i.e. stoning). However, he does not act as he does because the woman's adulterous acts are of minor consequence. On the contrary, he tells the

woman to stop committing adultery lest something worse happen to her; namely, exclusion from God's eternal kingdom (John 8:3-11; compare 8:11 with 5:14). Jesus overrides capital sentencing to give the woman an opportunity to repent. Obviously Jesus didn't struggle with Winter's self-inflicted conundrum of "how much grace."

Neither did Paul in the case of the Christian man who was in a sexual relationship with his stepmother (1 Corinthians 5). Indeed, Paul demanded "in the name of the Lord Jesus" that the man be temporarily put out of the community until he came to his senses and repented. He also advocated speedy full forgiveness and loving restoration of repentant offenders "in order that we might not be taken advantage of by Satan" (2 Cor 2:5-11). He did not advocate the capital sentencing mandated in Lev 20. But he was certainly not in a quandary over whether the man should be installed in a leadership position while he was still in an active incestuous bond—even if the bond were a "caring and committed" one.

Winter's remark about "how much grace" in connection with overlooking serial unrepentant sin shows a serious misunderstanding of the scriptural concept of grace. Paul, no slouch as regards the meaning and application of grace, understood grace to include freedom through the Spirit from the primary control of sin operating in the human members (Rom 6:14-7:6; 8:1-14). Paul construed continuance in the self-dishonoring practice of same-sex intercourse as a continuance under God's wrath (Rom 1:18, 24-27; 3:19-20; 6:21, 23a; 7:5; 8:6, 13), not a continuance under grace. On the contrary: "Sin shall not exercise lordship over you precisely because you are not under law but under grace" (6:14). By advocating that the church be an accomplice in the homosexual behavior of its leaders and members, Winter is consigning them to wrath (albeit unwittingly), not grace.

God's answer to Paul's thorn-in-the-flesh prayer, "My grace is sufficient for you; my power will be brought to completion in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9), underscores this concept of grace as a power that enables us to be obedient in the difficult circumstances of life.

### ***Why the distinction between inclination and behavior is not a problem for ordination***

Winter then gets muddled about "an artificial distinction between inclination and practice" (p. 22). Although he formally presents the discussion as points that others debate, the entire drift of his remarks indicates where his own sympathies lie. In effect, he alleges that, since a distinction between inclination and behavior is too difficult to make and would result in "the specter of public interrogation of potential nominees and candidates for ordained office," the church should do away with any standard of restricting the sexual activity of ordained officers to the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. He refers to Jesus' statement about adultery of the heart as scriptural confirmation (Matt 5:27-28).

One wonders why Winter doesn't follow through this "logic" in order to contend for the ordination of persons actively engaged in unrepentant adultery, incest, or consensual polyamorous behavior. Why is it that the PCUSA, to date at any rate, has no problems

distinguishing between inclination and behavior in such matters? And why is it that the PCUSA has not construed Jesus' adultery-of-the-heart saying as allowing the ordination and retention of officers actively and unrepentantly engaged in adulterous acts? Why does Winter and the PCUSA not argue that, since the vast majority of men at some point in their Christian lives have entertained adulterous thoughts, ordaining bodies should do away with obstacles to ordaining candidates engaged in actual adulterous affairs? I suspect the reason is that most sensible people rightly perceive that turning Jesus' adultery-of-the-heart saying into a license for ordained officers to engage in unrepentant immoral sexual activity is nothing short of perverse. It was obviously not Jesus' intention with this saying to excuse sexually immoral behavior but rather to stress that God's demand also reaches into the interior life.

The relationship between inclination and behavior is really not difficult to resolve on a theological level. The mere experience of an impulse to do what God expressly forbids does not make one an accomplice to the sinful impulse. Actively entertaining such impulses in one's conscious thought-life and behavior does make one morally culpable. While willful thought is not beyond the jurisdiction of God, willful behavior adds another level of severity to the offense. There is absolutely no barrier in the PCUSA to ordaining a person with a homosexual, polysexual, or pedosexual orientation. The issue is, and has always been, not whatever innate and intense urges an individual experiences but instead what the individual does with such urges. Winter's attempt at throwing up the false scenario of a candidate being questioned about his "sexual orientation" isolated from issues of intent and behavior is nothing more than a diversionary tactic.

In the end, Winter complains that the church is being asked to do a rigorous ordination examination. This is an odd complaint. The very PUP Task Force Report that he supports had been arguing that we don't make the ordination examination rigorous enough. Of course, this was always double-speak since what the PUP Task Force really set out to do was not to make the examination more rigorous but rather less so by allowing presbyteries to disregard the implementation of the sexuality standard in G-6.0106b. Still, it is interesting to see the contradiction surface in Winter's article, as elsewhere.

In another instance of misinformation in Winter's article, he states in a footnote that:

It should be noted that the parallel Confessing Movement in United Methodism—allied with Asbury Seminary in Kentucky—has successfully pursued judicial decisions in that communion, which allow pastors to exclude homosexual persons from membership in congregations on the basis of *orientation not practice*. (p. 22 n. 53; emphasis added)

Contrary to Winter's attempt to scare others through misinformation, the Methodist Church's Judicial Council did *not* address sexuality and church membership. It ruled only that pastors have discretion about who is ready for church membership. Moreover, the particular pastor in question was troubled by a prospective church member's homosexual *practice*, not by his professed orientation.



### *Faulty use of analogical reasoning over allegedly single-issue concerns*

Winter's final attempt at demoting the two-sex prerequisite for sexual bonds (i.e. that God made us "male and female") to a nonessential is a flawed attempt at analogical reasoning. He argues:

Evangelicals might ask, for example, what of such pressing concerns as abortion, euthanasia, stem-cell research, cloning, civil rights, prayer in the schools, gambling and substance abuse, domestic violence, divorce on non-biblical grounds, and any number of other controverted ethical issues in the church to-day? Why is an issue that involves a small segment of the population and probably a much smaller proportion of Presbyterians, being elevated to such importance and being made the test of ecclesiastical fellowship in our day? It seems that abortion, which is a life and death matter to evangelicals, would be of greater concern than homosexuality. . . . (p. 23)

His reasoning is faulty, for the following three reasons.

*First, he lumps together offenses that some are promoting in the church and offenses that no one is promoting in the church. Is there a lobby in the PCUSA for promoting racial segregation, gambling and substance abuse, or domestic violence? I haven't seen it.*

But there is a vigorous lobby for accepting as a "civil rights" issue the validation of homosexual unions. Indeed, there are several organizations like the so-called "More Light" Presbyterians and "Covenant" Network whose primary purpose is to foist on the church acceptance of what Scripture clearly and unequivocally regards as immorality. So there obviously has to be a vigorous response. Otherwise, such views will be (and in some sectors already have been) coercively imposed on the church for the foreseeable future. It's like an endangered species. Governments target some species for special protection because they are in danger of extinction, not necessarily because they are intrinsically more valuable (though pandas are cute). Scripture's strong and unequivocal insistence on a man-woman prerequisite is just such an "endangered species" in denominational polity. Accordingly, it deserves the attention it gets.

*Second, none of the other issues he puts forward possesses, from a scriptural standpoint, a comparable degree of clarity or severity as the matter of homosexual practice. Prayer in the schools? Where is that mentioned in Scripture? At any rate dropping an official time for prayer from the public schools, however wrong the action may or may not be, doesn't lead in a straight line to anyone committing an immoral act. Cloning and stem-cell research obviously are not addressed with the kind of clarity that Scripture addresses homosexual practice. Similarly, Scripture's clarity on the issue of euthanasia does not approach its clarity on adultery, incest, and same-sex intercourse. (I think of Saul asking his armor-bearer to thrust his sword into him "so that these uncircumcised may not come and thrust me through, and make sport of me" [1 Sam 31:4 NRSV].). Moreover, there is a question of incidence ratio. I don't think Dr. Kevorkian should be ordained into ministry while he continues to practice euthanasia but how many candidates for ordination in the PCUSA regularly practice euthanasia on patients? It's basically a non-issue from that standpoint.*

That leaves divorce on non-biblical grounds and abortion on Winter's list. Divorce is not a more serious concern than homosexual practice; it is less so. Jesus predicated the twoness of the sexual bond on the twoness of the sexes: "male and female he made them" (citing Gen 1:27). A rule cannot be more important than the foundation on which it is based. So it is absurd to argue that any license as regards ordaining divorced persons gives complete license to ordaining persons in "committed" homosexual unions. Who would argue that, because the church has loosened somewhat standards on ordaining divorced persons, we should embrace all candidates no matter what sexual offenses they commit in an ongoing, self-affirming way? I hazard to say: almost no one, certainly not Dr. Winter. That is because we recognize that some sexual offenses are more severe than divorce. The dissolution of a natural union does not rise to the level of severity of the active entrance into an inherently unnatural union of an extreme sort (e.g., incest). Moreover, divorce does not tend toward high rates of repetitiveness. And when it does, it likely excludes an individual from ordination. I doubt that a candidate has a hope of being ordained who comes before an ordaining body in the PCUSA saying: "I've been divorced and remarried seven times and I plan to continue the cycle with the fewest negative side-effects." Yet Dr. Winter tells us that a person should be able to say "I've engaged in acts of same-sex intercourse dozens of times and plan to continue to do so—in a committed relationship of course—with the fewest negative side-effects" and still be ordained in the PCUSA. So Winter's divorce analogy doesn't work.

Abortion is a similar matter. What ordained person in the PCUSA has had even half a dozen abortions and expresses a desire to continue having them at a high rate? I doubt that there is a single such person in the church. It doesn't tend to be a serial offense, certainly not at a high rate. Any past sin can be forgiven. What is at issue here is the active and repetitive continuance in sin by ordained officers of the church.

Particularly alarming is that the subtext for Dr. Winter's form of analogical reasoning appears to be: There is something virtuous about being more consistently disobedient to the will of God, and in more severe and repetitive ways. I don't agree that this is a virtue.

*Third, Winter's argument ignores the fact that he and the PCUSA generally already single out some ethical issues as more important, or at least deserving more attention, than others.* The PCUSA won't even ordain candidates for ministry who do not concur with women's ordination. What is that but the singling out of a particular issue? If this can be singled out, why can't the issue of homosexual practice? I haven't noticed Dr. Winter applying his analogy to this issue. But even if he did, one could easily point to other behavioral issues over which he would certainly draw a line in the sand of ordination: virulent racism, adultery, incest, etc. In fact, there are so many such "single issues" for all of us that there ceases to be a "single-issue" phenomenon, whether among evangelicals or anyone else.

If powerful forces in the denomination were pushing hard for the ordination of persons committing loving incest or polyamory, adultery, embezzlement, racism, or any other form of blatant and unrepentant sinful acts, the Confessing or New Wineskins movements would be justified in highlighting opposition to these acts and affirmation of

the converse in their theological identity. I would hope that Dr. Winter would do the same. It is a shame that any group today has to identify itself by its refusal to endorse a denominationally sanctioned, foundational violation of God's sexual standards for leaders of the church. But such is the sad state of affairs that we now live in.

### ***Conclusion***

Dr. Winter argues that the issue of homosexual practice doesn't rise to a level of significance that would justify separation from a denomination that affirms such behavior. But he has not made any kind of reasonable case to support this supposition. Indeed, he has ignored all the main arguments for such a conclusion and produced only poor counterarguments.

**Here's what the whole issue boils down to: *Does Scripture generally or the New Testament in particular indicate that the offense of same-intercourse rises at least to the same level of severity as, if not more so than, adultery, consensual incest of the worst sort, and polyamory?*** If it does, then Winter and all other persons who argue for "tolerance" of homosexual relations must decide whether members of a denomination should be bound indefinitely to stay if their denomination decided to promote the ordination of persons actively and unrepentantly engaged in adultery, incest, and/or polyamory. I don't know about Dr. Winter, but I personally do not know anyone who would seriously make an argument that such a person would be bound to that denomination indefinitely.

So in order for Winter to conclude accurately that ecclesiastically sanctioned ordination of persons who engage in active and unrepentant homosexual behavior does not justify separation from this or any denomination, he must demonstrate one or more of the following:

1. Ecclesiastical "tolerance" of active and unrepentant adultery, man-mother incest, and faithful polyamorous unions does not justify severing official ties from said denomination.
2. Scripture generally or the New Testament specifically does not regard same-sex intercourse as an offense *at least* as severe as adultery, the worst forms of consensual incest, and faithful polyamory.
3. Scripture's indictment of homosexual practice was entirely limited to an indictment of particularly exploitative forms of same-sex intercourse (pederasty, sex with slaves, sex with prostitutes).

When Dr. Winter develops the arguments to substantiate one or more of the points above, responding clearly and convincingly to each of the arguments that I have raised (see below), then he will have made a credible case. Until he does, he at best has contributed little of significance to this discussion and at worst has only added to the unfortunate confusion and disinformation.

## Appendix 1

### How Bad Is Homosexual Practice According to Scripture?

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

It is my contention that *homosexual practice is a more serious violation of Scripture's sexual norms than even incest, adultery, plural marriage, and divorce.* (The reader will note that I did not mention bestiality because the evidence from ancient Israel and early Judaism suggests that bestiality is a worse offense than same-sex intercourse.)

#### I. Different Degrees of Severity as regards Sin

At the outset there will be some readers who contend that it is both unscriptural and un-Reformed to argue that any sins are more severe than any other sins. However, no one really believes such a claim. In fact, most people in the mainline churches today who want to see some sort of accommodation made to committed homosexual unions do so because, they rationalize, even if it is not God's ideal it is nevertheless "not that bad of a sin" or at least a lesser evil than, say, promiscuous homosexual behavior. Proponents of homosexual unions often recoil in horror at the thought of any comparison with consensual incest or with adultery (to say nothing of bestiality) precisely because they operate with a notion that some sexual sins are truly more severe than others.

Whatever concessions have been made to fornication and divorce in the church, I still see the mainline churches in the West holding reasonably consistent positions against sexual unions involving more than two partners and certainly incestuous unions of a first-order severity (e.g., incest with one's parent, full sibling, or child), to say nothing of bestiality, sex with prostitutes, and sex with prepubescent children. Are we being unreasonable in giving precedence to some sins over others? Should we concede these other matters as well and be more consistently disobedient to the will of Christ? I don't think so. Failing in some areas does not justify failing in more foundational matters. The church's current practices tacitly acknowledge a different weight given to different sins.

It is true that any sin, including sexual sin, can get one excluded from the kingdom of heaven if merit is the means of entrance. In that specific sense, all sins are equal. And there are certainly other sins, including sexual sins, that the apostle Paul indicates create a risk factor for the exclusion of Christians from the kingdom of God if they persist in such behavior in a serial, unrepentant way. Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 5-6 incest, adultery, and sex with prostitutes alongside same-sex intercourse.

Yet none of this means that the church should regard all sexual sins, let alone all sins of any type, as basically of equal import or even that God views all sins as equally abhorrent. I am confident that few Christians, at least when hooked up to a lie detector or

given truth serum, would assert that God views the taking home of a company pen as endangering the eternal destiny of the Christian perpetrator in the same way that, say, raping and eating children (thinking here of the serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer). The image is offensive, I grant. In fact, if you, the reader, feel any offense, this merely confirms my point: you don't really believe that all sins are equally heinous, either to God or to us.

In short, *it is not true that all offenses to God are in all senses equally offensive to God.*

For those from the Reformed tradition it should be noted that such a view is “reformed.” For example, the *Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) states the obvious: “All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others” (7.260; elaboration in 7.261; cf. the *Shorter Catechism* 7.083).

The claim that Scripture does not support the notion of different weights of sins is also inaccurate, in my view. To take a few examples:

1. In the Old Testament there is a clear ranking of sins. For instance, when one goes to Leviticus 20, which reorders the sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 according to penalty, the most severe offenses are grouped first, including same-sex intercourse. Of course, variegated penalties for different sins can be found throughout the legal material in the Old Testament.
2. Jesus also prioritized offenses, referring to “weightier matters of the law.” For instance, healing a sick person on the Sabbath takes precedence over resting.
3. Paul’s attitude toward the case of incest in 1 Corinthians 5 also makes clear that he differentiated between various sexual offenses, with some being more extreme than others. This is clear both from the horror in his tone at the case of incest but, even more, from the fact that he has to arbitrate between competing values when he condemns the incest. If there were no ranking of priorities, how could Paul reject out of hand a case of incest that was monogamous and committed? If the values of monogamy and commitment to longevity were of equal weight with a requirement of a certain degree of familial otherness, Paul could not have decided what to do. Would commitment to a monogamous, lifelong union cancel out the prohibition of incest? Obviously, this was not a difficult matter for Paul to decide. He knew that the incest prohibition was more foundational.

## **II. Why Homosexual Practice Is One of the Most Severe Sexual Sins**

Having established the principle that some offenses are more heavily weighted than others, both by Scripture and by the church, the question arises: How big a violation does Scripture view same-sex intercourse? I believe that Scripture indicates that the only sexual offense more severe is bestiality. Here are three main reasons why:

1. *It is the violation that most clearly and radically offends against God’s intentional creation of humans as “male and female” (Gen 1:27) and definition*

*of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24).* According to the story in Genesis 2, the differentiation into man and woman is the sole differentiation produced by the removal of a “side” (not “rib”) from the original human. It is precisely because out of one flesh came two sexes that the two sexes, and only the two sexes, can re-merge into one flesh (2:24). Since Jesus gave priority to these two texts from the creation stories in Genesis when he defined normative and prescriptive sexual ethics for his disciples, they have to be given special attention by us. Paul also clearly has the creation texts in the background of his indictment of homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27 and 1 Cor 6:9.

2. ***Every text that treats the issue of homosexual practice in Scripture treats it as an offense of great abhorrence to God.*** This is so from (a) the triad of stories about extreme depravity, Ham, Sodom, and Gibeah (which incidentally are no more limited in their implications to coercive acts of same-sex acts than is an indicting story about coercive sex with one’s parent limited in its implications only to coercive acts of adult incest), to (b) the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic legal and narrative materials that rail against the homoerotic associations of the *qedeshim* as an “abomination” or “abhorrent practice” (men who in a cultic context served as the passive receptive sexual partners for other men), to (c) the Levitical prohibitions (where the term “abomination” or “abhorrent practice” is specifically attached to man-male intercourse), to (d) texts in Ezekiel that refer to man-male intercourse by the metonym “abomination” or “abhorrent act,” to (e) Paul’s singling out of homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27 as a specially reprehensible instance (along with idolatry) of humans suppressing the truth accessible in the material creation set in motion by the Creator, labeling it sexual “uncleanness,” “dishonorable” or “degrading,” “contrary to nature,” and an “indecent” or “shameful” act. These views are also amply confirmed in texts from both early Judaism and early Christianity after the New Testament period, where only bestiality appears to rank as a greater sexual offense, at least among “consensual” acts. There is, to be sure, some disagreement in early Judaism over whether sex with one’s parent is worse, comparable, or less severe, though most texts suggest a slightly lesser degree of severity. While Scripture makes some exceptions, particularly in ancient Israel, for some forms of incest (though never for man-mother, man-child, man-sibling) and for sexual unions involving more than two partners (though a monogamy standard was always imposed on women), it makes absolutely no exceptions for same-sex intercourse. Indeed, every single text in Scripture that discusses sex, whether narrative, law, proverb, poetry, moral exhortation, or metaphor, presupposes a male-female prerequisite. There are no exceptions anyway in Scripture.
3. ***The male-female prerequisite is the foundational prerequisite for defining most other sexual norms.*** Jesus himself clearly predicated his view of marital monogamy and indissolubility on the foundation of Gen 1:27 and 2:24, texts that have only one thing in common: the fact that an acceptable sexual bond before God entails as its first prerequisite (after the assumption of an intra-human bond) a man and a woman (Mark 10:6-9; Matt 19:4-6). Jesus argued that the “twoness”

of the sexes ordained by God at creation was the foundation for limiting the number of persons in a sexual bond to two, whether concurrently (as in polygamy) or serially (as in repetitive divorce and remarriage). The foundation can hardly be less significant than the regulation predicated on it; indeed, it must be the reverse. Moreover, the dissolution of an otherwise natural union is not more severe than the active entrance into an inherently unnatural union (active entrance into an incestuous bond would be a parallel case in point). The principle by which same-sex intercourse is rejected is also the principle by which incest, even of an adult and consensual sort, is rejected. Incest is wrong because, as Lev 18:6 states, it involves sexual intercourse with “the flesh of one’s own flesh.” In other words, it involves the attempted merger with someone who is already too much of a formal or structural same on a familial level. The degree of formal or structural sameness is felt even more keenly in the case of homosexual practice, only now on the level of sex or gender, because sex or gender is a more integral component of sexual relations, and more foundationally defines it, than is and does the degree of blood relatedness. So the prohibition of incest can be, and probably was, analogically derived from the more foundational prohibition of same-sex intercourse. Certainly, as noted above, there was more accommodation to some forms of incest in the Old Testament than ever there was to homosexual practice. Adultery becomes an applicable offense only when the sexual bond that the offender is cheating on is a valid sexual bond. Needless to say, it would be absurd to charge a man in an incestuous union or in a pedophilic union with adultery for having sexual relations with a person outside that pair-bond. One can’t cheat against a union that was immoral from the beginning.

My purpose in evaluating, from Scripture’s perspective, the severity of engaging in same-sex intercourse is not to exhort believers to hate those who engage in homosexual behavior but rather to inform love with knowledge of the truth. Many Christians have attempted to respond in love towards persons who act on homosexual urges, including ordained officers, by either “tolerating” the behavior or, worse, affirming it. If, however, same-sex intercourse is a high offense in the sexual realm toward God, then there can be no question of ordaining persons participating in such acts in a serial, unrepentant manner. To do such would only confirm the sin, leave the individual exposed to the wrath of God, and risk that one’s exclusion from an eternal relationship with God—not to mention produce deleterious effects on the community of believers (see 1 Cor 5:6-7: a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough).

It is also important to determine the relative severity of an offense because of polity decisions. Churches do not treat all sexual offenses as equal when it comes to decisions of ordination (and sometimes even membership) but rather make distinctions on the basis of the severity of the offense, its repetitive character, and whether the offender has expressed repentance. Churches will ordain persons who have and occasionally entertain lustful thoughts, though I’m not sure one will find many churches ordaining persons who affirm and promote such thoughts. They will ordain persons who have been divorced and remarried, though I know of none who will ordain persons who have had five or more divorces and remarriages and plan to continue the cycle. Some churches may even ordain

heterosexual persons in a committed sexual bond outside of marriage. However, few if any churches will ordain—at least not as of today—persons who are in committed sexual bonds involving close blood relations, more than two persons concurrently, or an adult and an adolescent or child. Few if any will ordain persons who are actively engaged in adulterous behavior. So knowing the severity of the sexual offense is an important factor in deciding what ordination decisions should be taken when violations are committed—and not only committed but committed repeatedly and, worse of all, unrepentantly.

In fact, the more severe the sexual offense, the more acute becomes the question of whether churches and individuals should stay in a denomination that tolerates or perhaps even promotes such offenses among its ordained officers. For I know of few, if any, reasonable persons who would stay in a church that tolerated or promoted repetitive and unrepentant incest, adultery, or polyamory among its ordained officers. If same-sex intercourse is treated by Scripture as equally severe or worse than these sexual offenses, then serious issues about denominational unity are posed by a denomination's toleration or affirmation of homosexual practice among its ordained officers.



## Appendix 2

### **Does Scripture's Indictment of Homosexual Practice Apply to Committed Homosexual Unions?**

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

Many claim that the Bible is opposed only to particularly exploitative forms of homosexual practice; specifically, those involving an adult and adolescent (pederasty), coercive sex with a slave, or solicitation of prostitutes. However, this claim is generally made in ignorance of the arguments that suggest Scripture's absolute (i.e. exception-less) opposition to homosexual practice. Because the arguments for this latter position are so numerous and involve many texts, I here restrict my remarks to the witness of Paul. This witness is not unique among the authors of Scripture; indeed, it is representative of the whole, including the figure of Jesus. Yet Paul makes a good test case because he says the most about the issue and provides us, among New Testament-era figures, with the broadest array of contextual information for assessing his views.

The discussion below has two parts: six synthesized arguments for why Paul's rejection of homosexual practice was total, followed by a citation of some scholars who, though supportive of homosexual unions, acknowledge that Paul's indictment is not limited to particularly exploitative instances of same-sex intercourse.

#### **I. Why Paul's Indictment of Same-Sex Intercourse Included "Committed" Unions**

Below I offer six arguments for concluding that Paul's opposition to same-sex intercourse was absolute and not limited only to particularly exploitative forms of homosexual practice. Readers can consult my two books as well as online material for further documentation. Naturally, if I had opened the scope of the investigation below to the whole range of scriptures that address the issue of homosexual practice, the length of my presentation would have increased significantly.

- (1) *Paul clearly had in view the creation texts in Gen 1:27 and 2:24 behind his two main indictments of homosexual practice, Romans 1:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9* (cf. 1 Timothy 1:10). There are eight points of correspondence, in a similar relative order, between Romans 1:23, 26-27 and Genesis 1:26-27: *human, image, likeness; birds, cattle, reptiles; male, female*. This intertextual echo back to Genesis 1:26-27 occurs within a context in Romans that emphasizes God's role as Creator and the knowledge about God and about ourselves that can be culled from observation of the material structures of creation/nature. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 6:9, in a context in chs. 5-7 that deals with sexual vices, is in close proximity to Paul's citation of Gen 2:24. These allusions to Gen 1:27 and 2:24 indicate that

Paul's first problem with homosexual practice was that it was a violation of God's will for male-female pairing established in creation, not that it was typically exploitative. Incidentally, Paul uses the same two texts that Jesus himself defined as normative and prescriptive (with proscriptive implications) for all matters of human sexual ethics (cf. Mark 10:6-9; Matt 19:4-6). So the two most important texts in Scripture for defining sexual ethics, at least in the view of Jesus—Genesis 1:27 and 2:24—were at the heart of Paul's rejection of *all* forms of male-male and female-female intercourse.

(2) *Paul's nature argument against homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27 does not lend itself to distinctions between exploitative and non-exploitative manifestations of homosexual behavior but rather to an absolute rejection of all homosexual bonds.* By "against nature" Paul meant that the evidence from the material structures of creation—here the complementary embodied character of maleness and femaleness—gives clear evidence of God's will for human sexual pairing. Some have argued that this could not have been what Paul intended by his nature argument, despite Paul's clear statement in Rom 1:19-20 that such matters are "transparent" and have been so "ever since the creation of the world . . . being mentally apprehended by means of the things made." Yet the historical context also confirms this way of reading Paul, whose views on the matter were no different from Jesus'. "Basic to the heterosexual position [against homosexual practice in the ancient world] is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other" (Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* [University of California Press, 2003], 444). "Some kind of argument from 'design' seems to lurk in the background of Cicero's, Seneca's, and Musonius' claims [against homosexual practice]" (Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* [Oxford University Press, 1999], 242). Ancient writers "who appeal to nature against same-sex *eros* find it convenient to concentrate on the more or less obvious uses of the orifices of the body to suggest the proper channel for the more diffused sexual impulses of the body" (William R. Schoedel, "Same-Sex Eros," *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture* [ed. D. Balch; Eerdmans, 2000], 46). Part of Charicles' attack on all homosexual practice in pseudo-Lucianic text *Affairs of the Heart*, a work which contains a debate about the respective merits of heterosexual love and male homosexual love, 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. . . . 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; my emphasis)

- (3) ***In Rom 1:24-27 Paul emphasizes the mutuality of the homoerotic desires*** (“inflamed with their yearning for one another,” “their bodies being dishonored among themselves”) so he is clearly not restricting his remarks to coercive, exploitative acts. Moreover, ***the wording of “exchanging” and “leaving behind” the other sex for the same sex is absolute*** and clearly inclusive of all same-sex sexual relations.
- (4) ***The indictment of lesbian intercourse in Rom 1:26 does not support the view that Scripture’s indictment is limited to exploitative homosexual acts, since lesbianism in antiquity was not generally characterized by pederasty, prostitution, or abuse of slaves.*** Indeed, Greco-Roman moralists in antiquity who argued against homosexual practice sometimes cited intercourse between women as a trump card against arguments for men-male sexual bonds (see, for example, pseudo-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart*, 28). For consistency’s sake, advocacy of male homosexual bonds necessarily entails acceptance of female homosexual bonds, something few if any men in antiquity were willing to accept. It is a way of making an absolute argument against *all* homosexual bonds, not merely against particularly exploitative ones.
- (5) ***The terms malakoi*** (*lit.*, “soft men,” but taken in the sense of men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners) ***and arsenokoitai*** (literally, “men who lie with [koite] a male [arsen]”) ***in 1 Cor 6:9 are clearly inclusive of all homosexual bonds***, as is evident from the following. With regard to malakoi note: (a) its place in a vice list amidst other participants in illicit sexual intercourse, (b) its pairing with the immediately following *arsenokoitai*, (c) Philo of Alexandria’s (a first-century Jew’s) use of cognate words to refer to the effeminate male partner in a homosexual bond, and (d) occasional Greco-Roman usage of *malakoi* (and the comparable Latin *molles*) to denote effeminate adult males who are biologically and/or psychologically disposed to desire penetration by men. With regard to arsenokoitai note: (a) clear connections of this word to the *absolute* Levitical prohibitions of man-male intercourse (18:22; 20:13), evident from the fact that the word, exclusively used in Jewish and Christian contexts until late in antiquity, was formulated directly from the Levitical prohibitions, that ancient rabbis used a parallel Hebrew term, *mishkav zakur* (“lying with a male”), to apply to all men-male sexual bonds, and that 1 Tim 1:10 explicitly connects opposition to this vice (among other vices) to the law of Moses; (b) early Judaism’s univocal interpretation of the Levitical prohibitions against men-male intercourse as allowing *only* sexual relations between a man and a woman (e.g., Josephus, Philo, the rabbis); (c) the singular use of *arsenokoites* and related words subsequent to Paul in connection with male-male intercourse per se, without limitation to pederasts or clients of cult prostitutes; (d) the implications of the context of 1 Corinthians 5-7, given the parallel case of adult, consensual incest in ch. 5, the assumption of consent in the vice list in 6:9-10, the citation of Gen 2:24 in 1 Cor 6:16 (see also 11:7-9, 12), and the presumption everywhere in ch. 7 that sex is confined to male-female marriage; and (e) the fact that the Greco-Roman milieu

considered it *worse* for a man to have sex with another adult male than with a boy because the former had left behind his “softness.”

- (6) ***A conception of caring homoerotic unions already existed in Paul’s cultural environment and yet even these unions were rejected by some Greco-Roman moralists.*** For example, in a late first-century / early second-century (A.D.) debate over heterosexual and homosexual bonds, 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). Even in the non-Jewish milieu of the Mediterranean basin, “literature of the first century C.E. bears witness to an increasing polarization of attitudes toward homosexual activity, ranging from frank acknowledgment and public display of sexual indulgence on the part of leading Roman citizens to severe moral condemnation of *all* homosexual acts” (Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, 383, emphasis added). If even some sectors of the “pagan” world were beginning to develop absolute opposition to all forms of homosexual practice, what is the likelihood that Paul would have made exceptions for committed homosexual unions, given that he operated out of Jewish Scriptures and a Jewish milieu that were unequivocally opposed to homosexual practice, and given too that he was a disciple of a figure (Jesus) who predicated his views about human sexuality on the exclusive male-female model in the creation texts?

***Historically speaking, then, the evidence is overwhelming that Paul, like all other Jews and Christians of the period, opposed homosexual practice categorically and absolutely.***

## **II. Scholars Supporting Homosexual Unions Admit Paul’s Absolute Rejection**

***The best of the scholarly proponents of homosexual practice recognize the point made above.*** Note that I do not cite such support for my own sake. I have researched the matter of Scripture and homosexual practice in its historical and hermeneutical context as much or more than the scholars below have. Rather I cite these scholars for the sake of those who can’t hear truth from the writings of someone who does not endorse homosexual practice but may hear it from those who do endorse such behavior.

For example, **Louis Crompton** in the massive *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Harvard University Press, 2003) has 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 mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian. (p. 114)

Similarly, **Bernadette Brooten**, who has written the most important book on lesbianism in antiquity and its relation to early Christianity (especially Rom 1:26), at least from a pro-homosex perspective, criticized both John Boswell and Robin Scroggs for their use of an exploitation argument:

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]. (p. 11)

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. (*Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 253 n. 106, 257, 361)

She also criticized the use of an orientation argument:

Paul could have believed that *tribades* [the active female partners in a female homosexual bond], the ancient *kinaidoi* [the passive male partners in a male homosexual bond], 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. (p. 244)

On the issue of homosexual orientation, incidentally, which many today still falsely claim to be radically new knowledge, note the following quotation from **Thomas K. Hubbard**:

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. (*Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook*, 386)

**William Schoedel** in a significant article on “Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition” 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. (*Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, pp. 67-68)

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

**Martti Nissinen**, who has written the best book on the Bible and homosexuality from a pro-homosex perspective and whose work I heavily critique in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (precisely because it is the best on the other side), acknowledges in one of his more candid moments:

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 1:24-27. . . . 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. (*Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* [Fortress, 1998], 109-12)

**Dan O. Via** also acknowledges in his response to my essay in *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Fortress, 2003) that the Bible's rule against homosexual practice is "an absolute prohibition" that condemns homosexual practice "unconditionally" and "absolute[ly]" (pp. 93-95). In his essay in *Two Views* he rightly notes:

The Pauline texts . . . do not support this limitation of male homosexuality to pederasty. Moreover, some Greek sources suggest that—at least in principle—a relationship should not be begun until the boy is almost grown and should be lifelong. . . . I believe that Hays is correct in holding that *arsenokoites* [in 1 Cor 6:9] refers to a man who engages in same-sex intercourse. . . . True the meaning of a compound word does not necessarily add up to the sum of its parts (Martin 119). But in this case I believe the evidence suggests that it does. . . . First Cor[inthians] 6:9-10 simply classifies homosexuality as a moral sin that finally keeps one out of the kingdom of God. (pp. 11, 13)

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. (“To Hell with Gays?” *Christian Century* 119:13 [June 5-12, 2002]: 32-33; at <http://www.robagnon.net/Reviews/homoWinkExchanges.pdf>, fuller responses at <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/gagnon3.pdf>, <http://www.robagnon.net/Reviews/homoWinkRejoinder.pdf>)

***In short, the notion that Paul—or, for that matter, any other author of Scripture or Jesus himself—would have been favorably disposed to same-sex intercourse in the context of a committed union shows a great misunderstanding of the texts of Scripture in their historical context.***