

REJOINDER

to Dan O. Via's Response

in *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*

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One might consider as perhaps the strongest proof of a proposition being evident the fact that even the one who contradicts it finds himself obliged at the same time to employ it. For example, if someone should contradict the proposition that there is a universal statement that is true, it is clear that he must assert the contrary, and say: No universal statement is true. Slave, this is not true, either. For what else does this assertion amount to than: If a statement is universal, it is false? (Epictetus, a first-century A.D. Stoic philosopher, in *Discourses* 2.20.1-3 [LCL])

VIA'S HERMENEUTICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

The reader can boil down Via's case for affirming homoerotic behavior to four main hermeneutical presuppositions or "unwavering commitments":

1. **There are no moral absolutes**—except the unacknowledged absolute that there are no absolutes. There will always be contextual situations that require the church to endorse some forms of every behavior that the united and strong witness of Scripture regards as intrinsically wrong. Following from this point, he believes:
2. **There are no structural prerequisites for sexual intercourse**—not for gender, number of partners, blood relatedness, age, or species. All forms of sexual arrangement must be accepted, at least (a) so long as the participants claim that they act out of consent, love, and commitment, and (b) unless it can be scientifically proven that the form of sexual union in question produces

measurable harm, such as permanent personal distress or health problems, to all participants in all circumstances.

3. **Biology equals destiny**, and destiny *must* be actualized in the gratification of biological urges.
4. **Core values in Scripture exert no special authority over the life of Christians.** Christians who give lip service to the belief that the Bible is “the highest authority for Christians in theological and ethical matters” can override values in Scripture that are pervasive, absolute, strong, and countercultural as easily as they override values in Scripture that share none of those attributes.

Beneath these four “pillars” of Via’s hermeneutics lay the ruins of Scripture and of the Christian faith generally. At stake here is not just Scripture’s stance on the particular issue of same-sex intercourse but an entire scriptural vision regarding authority, morality, the paradigm of a cruciform life, and the new creation in Christ. This is a classic example of how arguments for validating homosexual practice strike at the core of Christian belief and practice. Perhaps most astounding of all is that Via thinks that these presuppositions are justifiable on biblical grounds, even though it is historically obvious that Jesus and every author of Scripture would have categorically rejected them.

I shall have more to say about Via’s hermeneutical presuppositions after discussing Via’s efforts at limiting our engagement of the issues.

LIMITED ENGAGEMENT

It is hard to take seriously the claim that Via makes in the first sentence of his response; namely, “I appreciate the opportunity for dialogue with Professor Gagnon” (p. 93). For Via did his best to restrict such dialogue.

Via’s desire to limit interaction. Before either Via or I had begun writing our responses to each other’s essay, I requested of Michael West, editor-in-chief at Fortress Press, that we be given a 3000-4000 word ceiling for our responses—rather than 1500 words—and that we be allowed 1500-word rejoinders to the other’s response. Michael was open to these suggestions and forwarded them to Via. Via flatly rejected both opportunities. Apparently Via was interested in limiting the extent of our interaction rather than in maximizing such.

Problems with Via’s preparedness. Part of the reason may be Via’s own lack of significant engagement with the issue of the Bible and homosexuality. Via’s essay was based on two talks that he gave at an adult Christian education class in a church. The essay that he originally submitted to Fortress Press in August or September 2002 did not even make use of my book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, even though it had been out on the market for a full year. Only after it became clear that Via’s essay would be included alongside one from me did Via append some comments about my book. This explains why his use of my book is fragmentary and why a number of his flawed

exegetical and hermeneutical claims remained in his essay without adjustment—including, but not limited to, his misreading of Sodom, his claim that one need override only a “few explicit biblical texts” (p. 39), and his blatant ignoring of the strong evidence for Jesus’ embrace of an other-sex prerequisite. In fact, it is evident from the final form of Via’s essay that Via read very little of the first three chapters of my book on the witness of the Old Testament, early Judaism, and Jesus (pp. 43-228). Similarly, as regards chapter 4, “The Witness of Paul and Deutero-Paul” (pp. 229-339), Via seems to have skimmed only a few pages on Romans 1:24-27—unaware even of the discussion of intertextual echoes to the creation texts—and to have ignored entirely the material on 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. As regards chapter 5 on “The Hermeneutical Relevance of the Biblical Witness” (pp. 341-486), there is little or no indication that he read sections 1, 2, and 5 (on the exploitation argument, the misogyny argument, and “few texts” argument, respectively). I do believe that he read the last five pages of the Introduction (pp. 37-41), portions of pp. 380-432 (on the sexual orientation argument), and the last forty pages or so of my book—at most one-quarter of a book that contains 466 pages of text.

Judging from his essay, the only other discussions of the Bible and homosexuality that he read were the books by George Edwards and Robin Scroggs, the chapter treatments in Victor Furnish’s *The Moral Teaching of Paul* and Richard Hays’s *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, and some of the essays in *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture* (ed. David Balch) and in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality* (ed. Robert Brawley). That’s it—six books directly bearing on the subject, to which he belatedly and incompletely added my book. Even the books by Thomas Schmidt, Bernadette Brooten, and Martti Nissinen seem not to have been consulted. No wonder Via was not interested in more extensive engagement.

Via’s short essay. Along the same lines, although Via and I were both permitted 15,000 words for our essays, Via turned in an essay of only 12,350 words (39 pages; compare to my 52 pages plus extensive online notes). I can understand writing only that amount if the publisher imposed a limit of 12,000 words. However, it is strange indeed to impose on oneself a 12,000-word limit for a huge topic like the Bible and homosexuality—a topic that easily merits book-length treatment. It suggests that Via does not have that much to say in defense of his position.

THE EXTREMISM OF NO ABSOLUTES AND NO STRUCTURAL PREREQUISITES

Via and those who share his absolutist hermeneutical presupposition that there are no absolutes are as much extremists as conservatives who believe that everything in Scripture is to be taken absolutely. Via’s stance reminds me of Epictetus’s remarks nearly two thousand years ago (cited at the beginning of this rejoinder). In denying absolutely even the possibility that there might be moral absolutes, Via, despite himself, confirms that absolutes do exist.

The reasonableness of some absolutes. Via tries desperately to put me in the category of those who take all rules absolutely when he claims that my position is that “there are no contextual factors that can override or disqualify a rule” (qua rule, p. 94; second emphasis

mine). He adds parenthetically “—against homosexual practice,” yet his whole argument against me proceeds on the false assumption that I deny categorically a role to contextual factors in making exceptions to, or overriding, any rules. He makes the same claim in his essay, when he alleges that Hays, Jones/Yarhouse, and I subscribe to the following position: “There are no contextual situations that could override a rule [qua rule] forbidding an act that the rule, by prior determination, has designated as intrinsically immoral” (p. 21; emphasis mine). Via likes this caricature so much that he repeats it verbatim when focusing on my position (p. 27).

Via is beating a straw dummy of his own making. The truth is that my position lies between the twin extremes of “no absolutes” (held by Via, Wink, Brueggemann, Duff, and others) and “all absolutes” (does anyone actually hold this latter position?). Obviously, *some* proscriptions in Scripture do maintain absolute force in our cultural context, while *others* do not. This is also the biblical position. Even Via in the aforementioned quote from pp. 21 and 27 concedes implicitly that Scripture does designate some acts as “intrinsically immoral.” At the start of his response he acknowledges that Scripture condemns homosexual practice “unconditionally” (p. 93). He goes on to acknowledge that the Bible’s prohibition is “absolute,” that is, exceptionless (p. 94). (As an aside, in view of this admission it is surely contradictory that Via charges me in his essay with “absolutizing . . . the biblical prohibition of all same-sex intercourse” [p. 27]. How can I be charged with “absolutizing” an already absolute biblical prohibition? For a focused discussion on whether the Bible regards same-sex intercourse as intrinsically immoral, see Gagnon 2003, especially pp. 122-36.) Moreover, it is well known that Scripture modifies *some*, but by no means all, of its own rules (especially as one moves across Testaments). I understand an “absolutist view of Scripture” to be one that takes absolutely everything—or nothing—proscribed or prescribed in Scripture. Scripture itself does not take such a view. Yet that is not the same as saying that *nothing* in Scripture can be taken absolutely.

As stated in my response to Via (p. 101 and especially online notes 126-28), Via’s hermeneutical presupposition that the church is *bound* to make exceptions for approval to, or override, *all* rules in one or more circumstances leads to ethically absurd conclusions. And yet only if Via rigidly maintains this hermeneutical presupposition can he validly charge that I have necessarily erred in appropriating absolutely the Bible’s absolute proscription of homosexual practice. If it were otherwise, that is, if there were instances of rules in which *no* contextual factors would necessitate exceptions for approval (to say nothing of overriding the rule completely), then Via would have to concede that the notion of a scriptural rule without exceptions is hermeneutically sound. So Via is faced with a conundrum: either (1) concede that some rules, including sexual rules, are to be taken absolutely—in which case his main hermeneutical complaint about my position crumbles—or (2) continue to insist rigidly that there are no moral absolutes, despite obvious examples to the contrary—in which case he looks at best illogical and at worst extremist.

Considering incest on a case-by-case basis? In his response, Via assiduously avoids dealing with my reference to the analogy of adult, consensual incest, posed at length on pp. 48-50 of my essay. I can understand why he wants to avoid it. He has no publicly

acceptable answer to the question: Under what circumstances might the church approve of a man-mother sexual union?

Frankly, I am not even sure that Via would oppose incest categorically. After all, in his discussion of the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20, Via derides the concept that “completeness or perfection means that classes or categories must be kept distinct and not mixed, confused, or confounded,” even when the concept is directly applied to bestiality and incest (p. 7). Later, in criticizing my position, he claims that it is a moral “misstep” to proscribe sexual acts based on the structural incompatibility of the participants (in Via’s wording, “the confounding of categories” or “the failure to keep categories distinct”) because the “motives or intentions” of the participants are not taken into account (pp. 27-28). Via cites only three criteria for a legitimate sexual relationship: consent, love, and commitment or fidelity. The only *consistent* or *logical* conclusion that one can draw from Via’s arguments—we can at least hope that Via is inconsistent and illogical here—is that every sexual relationship between a man and mother, a man and his sister, a man and his horse, three or more humans, and an adult and child has to be considered on a case-by-case basis in our current cultural context. There are no structural prerequisites—period. If this is not an extremist position, what would count as extremist?

The difference between precluding and concluding as regards contextual factors. I do not preclude examining contextual factors in assessing whether an absolute rule in Scripture should be maintained absolutely. *Preclude* means “rule out in advance.” If I had done this I would not have bothered answering in my essay and response hermeneutical arguments advanced to discount the biblical witness. Nor would I have devoted roughly 200 pages of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* to such matters. I contend that a core value in Scripture—I think that I have conclusively demonstrated that a male-female prerequisite is a core value—necessitates on the part of “revisionists” a heavy burden of proof for espousing change. If the church’s confession of Scripture’s authority means anything, it certainly means at least that. But that is different from “ruling out in advance.” I then examine the arguments for deviating from Scripture—in more detail than Via or any other religious scholar has done—and simply find them wanting.

Do I think that the church should proscribe same-sex intercourse absolutely (i.e., without exceptions), based on (1) the heavy burden of proof established by the pervasive, strong, absolute, and countercultural witness of Scripture and (2) a critical investigation of the inadequacy of hermeneutical arguments intended to circumvent that witness (e.g., exploitation, orientation, misogyny)? Yes, guilty as charged. Yet that hardly makes me, or my tone, absolutist. In fact, I do not know of any reasonable Christian who, on hearing “absolutist” or “absolute tone,” has in mind a person who argues that there are *some* absolute values in Scripture and that these absolutes can be discerned on the basis of assessing both their importance within Scripture and the demerits of hermeneutical arguments to the contrary.

Who are the true absolutists? Via, apparently, and all those who believe that one must not only examine contextual factors but also, after such an examination, *necessarily* conclude in favor of exceptions to, or even a complete overhaul of, the biblical witness. Clearly, it is possible both (a) to consider the possibility that other circumstances might modify a strong biblical teaching and (b) to decide after a careful examination of these circumstances that they do not meet the heavy burden of proof needed to warrant such a

change. Via and those who agree with him apparently take (a) and (b) as an inherent “either-or” proposition, in defiance of both logic and ecclesiastical confession. This is bad hermeneutics. One cannot assume that new contextual factors will warrant a partial or complete deviation from the New Testament ethical witness. One has to establish, first, that the allegedly “new” circumstances are indeed significantly new; and, second, that these allegedly new circumstances speak directly to the reasons why biblical authors held to a specific position. Failing to establish both conditions results in insufficient grounds for dismissing Scripture’s authoritative stance on a core value.

As it is, Via has established neither condition. Committed homoerotic relationships lay within the conceptual field of the ancient world (even Via concedes this), as did the idea of some congenitally connected and relatively exclusive homoerotic desire. These contextual factors did not make any difference to some Greco-Roman moralists and physicians. Why, then, should they have made any difference to Paul, who incidentally was aware of the *malakoi* (often lifelong participants in homoerotic practice), rejected same-sex intercourse on the basis of the structural incongruity of homoerotic unions, and viewed sin generally as a powerful, innate impulse? Nor has Via made a convincing case that Scripture’s disapproval of same-sex intercourse is based exclusively on some flawed theological principle, such as misogyny. Via has not demonstrated that there is something wrong with the principle that an integrated and holistic sexual union requires one’s sexual “other half,” a principal beautifully illustrated in Genesis 2:18-24. Nor has Via made a case that there is nothing developmentally problematic about being erotically attracted to, and attempting sexual merger with, the sex or gender that one already is. The fact that less than two or three percent of all homosexual unions may turn out to be both lifelong (assuming a minimum duration of 40 years) and monogamous (never an outside sex partner) has no positive bearing on the acceptability of homosexual unions from a biblical perspective. *The reason is not because contextual factors do not matter (as Via misunderstands) but rather because, as with incest, Scripture’s main reason for rejecting homosexual unions does not have to do with deficiencies in longevity and monogamy.* In his response Via gives no indication that he understands this basic point, even though it is repeated over and over again in my essay. The so-called “contextual factors” that Via introduces are really not contextual factors because they do not speak to Scripture’s main reason for proscribing same-sex intercourse. Following Via’s argument, one might just as well complain that incest laws do not consider the “contextual factors” of consent, love, and commitment; or that laws against pedophilia do not factor in “contextual factors” regarding a man’s exclusive sexual orientation toward children; or, for that matter, that laws against murder do not take into account “contextual factors” concerning hygiene.

What would “prioritization of rules” have meant for Jesus and Paul? In speaking disparagingly of my alleged “prioritization of rules,” Via shows, despite his claims to the contrary, that he does not agree with me “that Jesus and Paul inseparably joined radical grace and forgiveness to the demand for radical obedience and to the judgment against sin that is intrinsic in the latter” (p. 94). Jesus conducted an intensive outreach to the lost in the context of an intensification of God’s ethical demand. He declared that those who did not do what he said would be destroyed, including, potentially, those who circumvented God’s will at creation for human sexual behavior (see pp. 24-31 of my full rejoinder to Wink at <http://www.robgagnon.net/articles/gagnon5.pdf>). Paul wrote that

what matters is “keeping the commandments of God” (1 Cor 7:19) and did so in the larger context of discussing sex rules concerning male-female marriage, adultery, fornication, incest, male-male intercourse, and sex with prostitutes (1 Cor 5-7). Like Jesus, Paul understood the creation stories, particularly Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, to provide normative and prescriptive rules for human sexual behavior (1 Cor 6:16; Rom 1:23, 26-27). He also repeatedly put persons participating in sexual vices at the beginning of lists of unrepentant offenders, Christian or not, who ran the risk of not inheriting the kingdom of God (see N31). My own book comes across as “wimpy” in comparison to some of the strong statements made by Jesus and Paul on the importance of keeping God’s moral rules (a.k.a. commandments). Yes, both Jesus and Paul—Paul more radically than Jesus—qualified the place of dietary and calendar rules. But neither Jesus nor Paul put sexual ethics on the same plane as diet and calendar. Their sex-ethic demand—Paul in reliance on Jesus—was, if anything more intense than what had gone before.

What does an inappropriate “prioritization of rules” mean in these contexts? Certainly it does not refer to holding firmly to key sexual prerequisites, established at creation and in force despite counter-claims to loving dispositions and innate desires. Inappropriate forms of rule prioritization occur when one does not suffer with those who egregiously violate God’s commands or when one does not make compassionate efforts at retrieving offenders for the kingdom of God.

Allow me to make a recommendation to pro-homosex apologists who like to criticize pro-complementarity advocates for wrongly absolutizing rules and prioritizing trans-covenantal, structural sexual prerequisites over a loving and committed disposition. Please call to mind Paul’s stance on adult, consensual, and (for all we know) committed man-(step)mother incest in 1 Corinthians 5. Please answer the following questions: Was Paul inappropriately “prioritizing rules” when he advised the Corinthians “in the name of the Lord Jesus” to disfellowship temporarily the incestuous man? Was his tone inappropriately “absolutist”? Should he have considered the couple’s consent, love, and commitment to one another before rejecting the relationship out of hand? Would Jesus have done anything differently (Paul says no)? Should Paul have gotten together with the Corinthians so that together they might have achieved a new synthesis of the truth, a “new vision” of consensual and committed incest for their time, a vision not tied to the old purity dictates of the Mosaic law? Moreover, if pro-homosex advocates think that an “orientation” makes all the difference, they should ask themselves whether an orientation toward incest—were it to be established for some persons—should make any difference to Scripture’s key incest prohibitions. They should consider recent scientific studies that indicate that men generally find monogamy a far greater challenge than do women and ask themselves whether the church should endorse non-monogamous relationships for most men. They should ask themselves whether a partial congenital basis for some pedophilia, or an exclusive sexual orientation toward children, improves the moral quality of adult-child sex, even when many victims of pedophilia do not show any scientifically measurable evidence of long-term harm.

Orientation and radical reorientation. Via writes:

When [Gagnon] abstracts homosexual acts from a person’s orientation, unifying center of consciousness, or ‘leading edge’. . . then he has severed homosexual

practice from the most intimate and essential context available and necessary for assessing the quality of the behavior. (p. 95)

Via's love affair with the concept of "orientation" makes little sense. Replace "homosexual acts/practice" with "pedophilic acts/practice" or "'polyphilic' (i.e., non-monogamous) acts/practice" and the absurdity of the formulation becomes self-evident. There is nothing magical about an "orientation," sexual or otherwise. In the sexual sphere a great many people, mostly men, have a "polysexual" orientation. They experience intense dissatisfaction with limiting sexual relationships to lifelong, monogamous unions. A much smaller number of persons, again mostly men, have a "pedosexual" (pedophilic) orientation. An "orientation" is just the directedness of a given strong desire or constellation of desires during a given period in a person's life. Indeed, the root human sin—the great "unifying center of consciousness"—is a self-centered, self-gratifying orientation, which in Christian thinking is to be put to death. One of the main thrusts of the Christian gospel or good news is that believers have died, and must actualize that dying, to an array of "orientations" that are at cross-purposes with the revealed will of God. An integral component of the gospel is the call to radical life reorientation, which takes place in spite of an ongoing and often intense struggle with sin.

Choosing destinies. Via's hermeneutical method presupposes that biologically related orientations determine a believer's "destiny." This "destiny" must be viewed as God's "creative intent," to be "actualized" in gratifying associated desires (pp. 33, 95).

In common English usage, what is *destiny*? *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (4th ed., 2000) defines *destiny* as:

1. The inevitable or necessary fate to which a particular person or thing is destined; one's lot.
2. A predetermined course of events considered as something beyond human power or control.

Similarly, *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1996, 1998) defines *destiny* as:

1. That to which any person or thing is destined; predetermined state; condition foreordained by the Divine or by human will; fate; lot; doom.
2. The fixed order of things; invincible necessity; fate; a resistless power or agency conceived of as determining the future, whether in general or of an individual.

The operative terms here are "predetermined," "foreordained," "determining," and "beyond human power or control." In Pauline and Johannine terms, the issue for believers in Christ is whether the "flesh" (i.e., Spirit-less humanity) or the Spirit of Christ will be the determining and controlling power in human life. The gospel announces to us that there is a choice. In Via's usage, destiny is established by the strong and persistent desires of the fallen old creation. In Christian understanding, destiny is established by God's will, manifested in pre-fall, creation structures, and afterwards renewed, empowered, and amplified in the new creation in Christ that is mediated by Christ's atoning death and the gift of his Spirit. No set of biologically related urges—no matter how dominant and persistent—has any precedence over the will of the Creator who is

now also the Re-Creator. In Via's reasoning, the more persistent and intense a desire is, the greater is its claim to destiny. In Christian reasoning, often the most persistent and intense of desires are crucified at the foot of the cross. Those who are, in the main, driven by the sinful impulses of the flesh do indeed have a destiny: death, separation from God. Those who are, in the main, driven by the Spirit and thus live in conformity to God's commands have a better destiny by far: eternal life (Rom 6:20-23; 8:6-8).

So then, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to living in conformity to the flesh, for if you live in conformity to the flesh, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God—these are the children of God. (Romans 8:12-14)

For further discussion I refer readers to N160.

What change means in the context of experiencing persistent sinful impulses. Via argues that a homosexual person “cannot *not be* homosexual (there may be exceptions),” so a homosexual should be entitled to gratify—in loving, committed relationships, of course—homoerotic desires. The “homosexual destiny,” Via claims, must be “part of God's creative intent” (p. 33).

This kind of theological reasoning leaves much to be desired. Even persons without theological training know better. In N19 I quote from Dr. Fred Berlin, founder of the Sexual Disorders Clinic at Johns Hopkins. With respect to pedophilia he says:

The biggest misconception about pedophilia is that someone chooses to have it. . . . It's not anyone's fault that they have it, but it's their responsibility to do something about it. . . . Biological factors play into [the development of pedophilia]. . . . We've learned that you can successfully treat people with pedophilia, but you cannot cure them.

Elsewhere he notes that there are exclusive and non-exclusive forms of pedophilia and reiterates the point regarding cure: “There's no cure for pedophilia. There is, however, effective and successful treatment. As with alcoholism, where there are many similarities, we talk about successful treatment but not cures” (“Interview with Frederick S. Berlin,” Office of Communications of the US Catholic Bishop Conference, Sept. 8, 1997: online: <http://www.usccb.org/comm/kit6.htm>). Should persons who often “cannot *not be*” pedophiles (or epehebophiles, men attracted to boys around the time of their puberty) be entitled to gratify—in loving, committed unions, of course—pedophilic desires? Applying Via's rationale for homosexual behavior to pedophilic behavior, should we not say: The “pedosexual” destiny must be part of God's creative intent? And on and on we could go. The alcoholic “cannot *not be*” an alcoholic. The “polysexual” man “cannot *not be*” dissatisfied with a lifelong monogamous relationships. The compulsive gambler “cannot *not be*” a compulsive gambler. There are just too many controlling sinful conditions in life to give any credence to Via's argument that the alleged immutability of homosexuality makes it “part of God's creative intent,” a destiny to be “actualized.”

How basic does this get? It is the very nature of sin itself to be a controlling and ever-present force in this life. In one sense, the Christian sinner “cannot *not be*” a sinner, if by

sinner we mean a person who perpetually struggles with intense sinful desires and who at points invariably succumbs to such desires. Should we then conclude that sin must be “part of God’s creative intent”? By Via’s reasoning, the answer is “Yes.” Since Christians cannot *not* sin—they can reduce the degree of acquiescence to sin but they cannot be perfect—by all means let us sin in a “responsible” way? The idea is absurd—contrast Paul’s answer to the question “Why not sin?” in Romans 6:1-7:6; 8:1-14—but that is where the logic of Via’s argument takes us. Despite the persistent character of sin, Christians are not mere “sinners” in the sense that they are helpless pawns in the grip of sin. Through the empowering force of the Spirit they can be freed from the ultimate control of sin. Change is possible at many different levels.

When one errs and sins, the appropriate response is not: That is the way you made me, God; it’s my destiny. Rather, an appropriate response would be: I failed you, God; I’m sorry. My sin has showed me that I have regarded the satisfaction of my own fleshly desires as more important than your will for my life. Renew my mind, Lord, to believe that what you want for me is better than the momentary self-gratification that I seek for myself.

How we think of change with respect to sin generally provides guidance in how we should think of change with respect to any particular sinful impulse, including homoerotic desire. I discuss this on p. 103 and in Nn150-52. Change for homosexuals is possible at many different levels: behavioral change, change in one’s conscious fantasy life, change in the level of intensity of homoerotic impulses, and/or change in heterosexual functioning and impulses.

Via comments under his “Change” heading on p. 97: “Despite what [Gagnon] may affirm about the reality of homosexual orientation, he nevertheless seems to regard homosexual passions as mutable.” Via seems confused here, but there is no need for him to be confused. Since his very next heading is “Analogies,” he is apparently alluding to my only references to homosexuality as a “mutable” condition, appearing in my discussion of analogies (pp. 43, 46). There I make clear in the context (see p. 44, second sentence from the top, and N9) that I am referring to macrocultural and microcultural influences on the incidence of homosexuality—including the extent of sociocultural sanctions or expectations for or against homosexual behavior, geographical setting (urban, suburban, rural), education and income level, family and peer influences, and incremental life choices and experiences (N146). That Via thinks that I said anything controversial only underscores the deficiencies of his knowledge of this subject. Not even homosexual scientists like Simon LeVay and Dean Hamer discount completely the role of environment in homosexual development. Even Alfred Kinsey and the Kinsey Institute recognized that experiencing one or more shifts along the “Kinsey spectrum” in the course of one’s life was the norm for the vast majority of homosexuals. I cite the evidence for the influence of socialization and environment on homosexuality in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (pp. 396-429, esp. 401-402, 413-18; cf. also Gagnon 2001b, 9-12; Gagnon 2003d, 14-17; and N146). Here is a study that I neglected to cite in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*: G. Remafedi, et al., “Demography of sexual orientation in adolescents,” *Pediatrics* 89:4 (Apr. 1992): 714-21. The authors’ abstract reads:

This study was undertaken to explore patterns of sexual orientation in a representative sample of Minnesota junior and senior high school students. The

sample included 34,706 students (grades 7 through 12) from diverse ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic strata. . . . Overall, 10.7% of students were "unsure" of their sexual orientation; 88.2% described themselves as predominantly heterosexual; and 1.1% described themselves as bisexual or predominantly homosexual. . . . Gender differences were minor; but responses to individual sexual orientation items varied with age, religiosity, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Uncertainty about sexual orientation diminished in successively older age groups, with corresponding increases in heterosexual and homosexual affiliation. The findings suggest an unfolding of sexual identity during adolescence, *influenced by sexual experience and demographic factors*. (emphasis added)

If adolescents experiment in homosexual behavior, those whose sexual identity is still somewhat in flux will probably experience a higher incidence of homosexual proclivity than if they had never participated in such behavior. We also know now that the brain rewires in accordance with experiences in life; in short, nurture can become nature (cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 398-99).

Obviously, I am not contending for unlimited homosexual plasticity. Rather, I am contending for a level of mutability that puts homosexuality in a whole different category from things like ethnicity and sex.

As with all sinful impulses, the key threshold of change for believers with homoerotic impulses is ceasing to live, in the main, out of such desires. One of the great themes of Paul's so-called "Second" Letter to the Corinthians is that we best replicate the paradigm of Christ's cruciform existence in our endurance of pain and suffering, not deliverance from such (e.g., 11:23-12:10). Endurance of difficult times, not deliverance from them, constitutes the supreme moment of God's power. That means the greatest example of change as regards homoerotic impulses may not be the eradication of such impulses but faithful endurance in the midst of an intense struggle. One thinks of Job. Anyone can serve God when things are going right. It is when things do not go right, when we are not delivered during hard times, that God is most glorified by his servants. A similar theological point is made in John's Gospel when the moment of Jesus' crucifixion is depicted as a "lifting up" or exaltation of the obedient Son of Man (3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34). Unfortunately, there is little room for this kind of thinking in Via's theology of change.

On a side note: Via comments that my "reference to those 'afflicted' with homoerotic desires [p. 41] suggests—regrettably—that homosexual orientation is a disease" (p. 97). Despite Via's condescending attempt at moralizing and scolding, there is nothing "regrettable" about my use of the term "afflicted." In fact, the term is quite pastoral. It underscores that individuals who experience homoerotic desire are not just "making up" these impulses but are in fact victimized by them. To be "afflicted" by something is to be caused persistent harm, distress, pain, or acute annoyance. Scripture is quite clear that the desire to have sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex is a particularly grievous *sinful* desire. As an unsolicited, persistent, and intense sinful desire, homoerotic passion is, by Christian definition, an affliction. A number of other sinful desires, sexual or likewise, could be so described. To be sure, I do not describe persistent homoerotic desire as a "disease" in my essay. Strictly speaking, homosexuality is not a disease because, as Dr. Jeffrey Satinover notes, it is not "predominantly innate and biological" such that "its 'treatment' would likewise be biological." There are too many factors that go into shaping homosexual development—including childhood socialization, macrocultural

factors, and incremental, reinforcing choices—to suggest that something like a vaccine could “cure” someone of homosexuality. Nevertheless, insofar as sinful impulses have a partial biological basis and disease-like traits, one may speak metaphorically of homosexuality as a spiritual illness, like other biologically related impulses that Scripture declares to be sin. For further discussion of this point readers would do well to consult Satinover (1996, 41-48, 172-74).

What is at stake? What is at stake in this whole discussion? Nothing less than essential tenets of the Christian faith—and not just in the area of human sexuality. Via’s “unwavering commitment” to four hermeneutical presuppositions—a “No” to all absolutes, a “No” to any structural prerequisites for sexual unions, a “Yes” to biological determinism, and a “No” to the Bible’s core values—constitute a distinctly anti-Christian philosophy that has negative ramifications well beyond the issue of homosexual practice.

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY, PREUNDERSTANDING, AND COMPLEMENTARITY

Via’s concession regarding the biblical witness. Via wants to assure readers that Gagnon’s

accumulation of biblical texts condemning homosexual practice is irrelevant to my argument since I agree that Scripture gives no explicit approval to same-sex intercourse. I maintain, however, that the absolute prohibition can be overridden regardless of how many times it is stated, for there are good reasons to override it. (p. 94)

Via tries to put the best face on his tacit concession that the Bible’s witness against same-sex intercourse is not limited to a few texts or given only marginal significance. After reading my essay, he does not even try to contest my position that the Bible’s witness is pervasive, absolute, strong, and countercultural. Yet he says to readers that it does not matter how important the other-sex prerequisite is in Scripture. He still has “good reasons to override” a core value.

In actual fact, though, Via’s position is made more vulnerable by the demonstration that he is repudiating a core value of Scripture in sexual ethics. And he knows it.

Moving from marginal value to core value in Christians’ “highest authority.”

According to Via’s own affirmation at the beginning of his essay, he takes “the Bible to be the highest authority for Christians in theological and ethical matters” (p. 2). If we take Via at his word, then a very strong position against homosexual practice in Scripture obviously increases significantly the burden of proof required to overturn that witness. Otherwise, Via’s statement about Scripture as the “highest authority” is just a pretense. A common hermeneutical principle is that some matters in Scripture are weightier than others. Accordingly, the more that one shows that the biblical witness against same-sex intercourse is pervasive, unqualified, intense, and countercultural—a core value—the more difficult it becomes to justify deviation from the biblical witness. This is all the more the case when the alleged justification entails tenuous, out-of-context appeals to the Johannine themes of “all truth” and “abundant life” (see below).

Via tacitly recognizes this point about ascending burden of proof when, in an effort to protect his position against the charge of arrogance in relation to Scripture, he tries to assure his readers at the end of his essay that this “new position” on homosexuality only has to supersede “the few explicit biblical texts that forbid homosexual practice” (p. 39). That has a much nicer sound than: My new position supersedes one of Scripture’s most important core values in sexual ethics. The church cannot eliminate a core requirement in sexual ethics and expect a confession about Scripture as “the highest authority” to remain intact. Sooner or later the vital place of Scripture in the life of the church has to unravel. Then holding up Scripture—including the figure of Jesus—as “the highest authority” is revealed to be the sham that it truly is. One of the main purposes of my—as Via calls it—“accumulative cataloging of the Bible’s *prescriptive* heterosexual norms and *proscriptive* homosexual norms” (p. 94) is to underscore for readers that pro-homosex readings of Scripture constitute a direct assault on the core sexual ethics of Scripture. We are not dealing with a minor matter within Scripture. We are dealing with a matter of great importance, the violation of which would have appalled Jesus and every writer of Scripture. Once we realize this, then the suspicion of arrogance on the part of so-called revisionists is heightened, and rightfully so.

Via knows too that I do not just “catalog” the substantial number of texts that speak explicitly or implicitly to the issue of same-sex intercourse. I show the great importance attached to an other-sex prerequisite for integrated sexual wholeness, as it intersects with other theological concerns within Scripture and contrasts with more open views prevailing in the “pagan” environment. In other words, I show that the biblical view regarding an other-sex prerequisite is a defining feature of early Jewish and Christian sexual ethics. More than that, I show that claims to “new knowledge” made by Via and other pro-homosex advocates are based on erroneous assumptions about what the writers of Scripture allegedly could (or could not) have known and what science allegedly tells us in our own day. Furthermore, I contend that this alleged “new knowledge” is quite beside the point since it sidesteps what Scripture finds fundamentally wrong about same-sex intercourse: the structural incongruity of attempting to remerge sexually, in an attempted act of sexual integration and completion, with the gender that one already is. So Via and others claim: Something new has burst on the scene that warrants a radical change from Scripture. But the reality is: No, this allegedly new thing, properly understood, is not radically different from what New Testament authors could have surmised, nor does it speak directly to the reasons behind the biblical indictment.

The multiple readings argument. Another attempt on Via’s part to do “damage control” is to argue that I, no less than he, have read my preunderstanding into the text so that what I get out of the text is essentially what I want the text to say:

There is no interpretation apart from the differing presuppositions and starting points from which interpretation is made. No one has Scripture as it is “in itself” but only from a point of view. Therefore, while Professor Gagnon puts great stress on *the consistent position of Scripture*, his *own position* is a *reading* of Scripture in light of certain ideas and choices that he brings *to* the Bible. (Via’s emphases; pp. 93-94)

Of course we all bring our varied interests to Scripture. There is no debate about that point. The debate is over what we claim Scripture brings to us, whether we can substantiate claims to applying faithfully the biblical heritage, and whether all readings are equally valid. In this instance Via makes no effort to refute my case for the overwhelming witness of Scripture against same-sex intercourse. He *wants* readers to think that my presentation is just one of many possible readings. But he does not *demonstrate* to readers that an alternate reading—namely, that Scripture lacks a consistent position—makes equal or better sense of the data. I, on the other hand, do demonstrate that Via’s perception of “few explicit texts” is a false reading—or at least neither Via nor any other scholar to date has refuted that demonstration. How much sense does it make to say: While Professor Gagnon puts great stress on *the* consistent *position* of *Scripture* against man-mother incest, bestiality, idolatry, and cheating the poor, his *own position* on each of these matters is a *reading* of Scripture in light of certain ideas and choices that he brings *to* the Bible? Isn’t this just a tad silly? Well, yes, it is my reading of Scripture in light of values that I bring to the Bible. But let’s face it: It also happens to be the only responsible and credible reading of Scripture’s witness on these matters. There are some vague matters in Scripture but that does not mean that everything in Scripture is subject to multiple contradictory readings.

Via’s “good reasons” for disregarding this core value of Scripture. Once Via, who professes the Bible to be the highest authority, decides not to contest the claim that the Bible’s stance on same-sex intercourse is strong, pervasive, absolute, and countercultural—in short, a core biblical value—the burden of proof shifts dramatically to Via to provide irrefutable evidence for any claim that the Bible is wrong.

As it is, Via does not provide such irrefutable evidence—though he alleges that he does in recapping his “three factors” (p. 95). These are his “good reasons” (p. 94) for overriding what he admits is a pervasive and absolute scriptural witness:

1. He insists that “the biblical understanding of creation” supports his position. It does not. The biblical understanding of creation recognizes binding structural prerequisites to legitimate sexual unions (marriage) that transcend matters of loving disposition and strong innate desire. Foremost among these prerequisites is the other-sex requirement outlined in Genesis 1:26-28 and especially Genesis 2:18-24. Sexual unions are designed and intended by God as re-mergers of essential maleness and essential femaleness into an integrated sexual whole. Jesus affirmed this understanding. Indeed, Via himself has admitted that the biblical prohibition, carried over into the New Testament, is “absolute,” with no exceptions made for loving disposition. So why does Via continue to refer to “the Bible’s belief that acts must be understood and evaluated in the light of [the actor’s] character”? Clearly, the Bible does not believe that a loving disposition changes homoerotic behavior from unacceptable to acceptable. A loving disposition does not restore the missing sexual complement. Prioritizing “motive and intent” over all structural prerequisites to sexual intercourse also leads to absurd ethical results (endorsing some forms of incest, polygamy, etc.). And homosexual desire is not even directly congenital, let alone part of God’s work in creation.

2. Via insists that “the reality of a destiny created by homosexual orientation” disqualifies the univocal biblical witness against same-sex intercourse. But he nowhere proves that knowledge of a persistent and relatively exclusive desire would have constituted radically new information for someone like Paul, leading irrevocably to a reconfiguration of his theological thinking. Nor does he demonstrate that every innate desire has to be considered “natural” in the sense of that which accords with nature’s well-working processes, God’s designs, or embodied existence. As noted above, the concept of a destiny based on a deterministic biological scheme is patently anti-scriptural since all sin is biologically related. The new creation in Christ is often at odds with our deepest and most intense biological urges. The very concept of dying and rising with Christ puts the lie to any assumption that intractable biological urges must be accommodated. Many such urges must be put to complete and total death. Of course, too, homosexual “orientation” is not a non-malleable condition on the order of ethnicity and a person’s sex. It is not 100% heritable like eye color. Its incidence can be impacted by microcultural and macrocultural influences.
3. Via insists that “the experience of gay Christians” is decisive. But why should it be? No experience is self-interpreting. And, on the whole, the disproportionately high rates of harm attending homosexual practice speak against, rather than for, endorsement. In addition, even when homosexual unions turn out, in very exceptional cases, to be both lifelong and monogamous, they still do not answer to why Scripture defines same-sex intercourse as wrong: its same-sexness, erotic attraction to what one is as a sexual being, denial of one’s complementary sexual otherness in relation to the other sex.

So this is the irrefutable evidence for overriding completely Scripture’s powerful position? His “three factors,” both collectively and individually, are full of holes.

Simply put, in a circumstance such as this where the biblical witness is so overwhelmingly strong, with no dissenting witness or even partial reservation within the canon, a strong hermeneutical presumption exists that a “reading” that claims to override such a witness is not a faithful application but a heretical departure.

As an example, consider the following. Suppose someone concedes that a few biblical texts explicitly and absolutely condemn man-mother sexual intercourse but then argues that these texts (1) do not address loving and committed unions, (2) are outdated purity taboos, and (3) were concerned only with patriarchal rights. What shall we say? Shall we throw up our hands and say that both those who support caring, adult man-mother unions and those who categorically oppose such unions, irrespective of loving motives and intentions, have an accurate and faithful reading of Scripture? Or that because we all bring our own “ideas and choices” to the Bible, it is not possible to discern which interpretation is faithful to the confession that “the Bible is the highest authority”? Or, worst of all, that only the person endorsing man-mother sex is truly faithful to the biblical witness? No reasonable biblical scholar would say any of these things. The interpretation and application of the biblical witness is based on, and must be substantiated by, exegesis of the biblical witness in its historical-cultural context and by proper use of analogical reasoning. It can be shown exegetically and analogically that: (1) consent, love, and commitment are irrelevant considerations for assessing the moral value of incest; (2) the

structural prerequisite against man-mother sex is not concerned merely with ritual purity; and (3) patriarchal rights are at best reductionistic ways of explaining laws against incest, leaving unaccounted incest laws that constrain patriarchal authority and the general principle of not having sex with “the flesh of one’s own flesh” (Lev 18:6). In sum, there is a strong and consistent position of Scripture against man-mother intercourse, with no credible (much less irrefutable) basis for Christians who acknowledge Scripture as their “highest authority” to diverge sharply from this position. The same applies to the strong and consistent position of Scripture against same-sex intercourse.

Analogies. Just as Via does not contest my “accumulation of biblical texts,” so too he does not contest my critique of various analogies, found on pp. 43-47. Once again he claims that my discussion has no bearing on his own position: “[Gagnon’s] critique does not affect my position, for I make no use of those analogies” (p. 97; referring to the analogies of Gentile inclusion, slavery, women in ministry, and divorce/remarriage).

Here too Via cannot insulate his position against criticism. For one of my two key points in assessing various proposed analogies was to show that there are no good, past analogues for the kind of massive violation of Scripture’s witness that endorsement of homosexual practice would require. If Via is not willing, or is unable, to contest this point, then he has little basis for advocating such departure while maintaining the pretense of calling Scripture “the highest authority for Christians in theological and ethical matters.” He has to concede that he is recommending an unprecedented denial of biblical authority.

In addition, Via does not contest my other key point; namely, that the Bible’s stance on incest constitutes the best analogy to the Bible’s position on same-sex intercourse (pp. 48-50). If it is the best analogy, it strengthens considerably the case for maintaining an other-sex prerequisite. I have already noted in this rejoinder how the incest analogue undermines a number of Via’s claims; for example, that there are no structural prerequisites for sexual relationships that trump demonstrations of consent, love, and fidelity. This analogy does not go away just because Via chooses to ignore it.

Male-female complementarity. According to Via, the theme of anatomical complementarity “comes from [Gagnon’s] preunderstanding, not from the biblical texts. . . . Gagnon attributes [the notion of anatomical complementarity] to the biblical texts because that is what he *believes* the text *must* mean, but the belief and the meaning come from his own modern set of beliefs” (pp. 95-96). That is false. The belief and meaning come from the biblical text itself, understood in its historical and literary context. Via makes much of the fact that Romans 1:26-27 does not refer explicitly to anatomical complementarity. Yet secure exegetical conclusions do not require explicit statements in the biblical text. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 13:10 that when the *teleion* (“perfect, mature”) comes, tongues and prophecy will be terminated. The text does not tell us explicitly what *teleion* means but the historical and literary context for Paul’s remark make clear that the return of Christ and the onset of the new age are in view. Context considerations are also decisive for understanding what Paul has in mind in Romans 1:26-27. Via contradicts himself a bit when he allows that “it *may* be part of what Paul had in mind” (p. 95). Well, if Via is willing to admit the possibility that Paul had it in mind, he cannot conclude categorically—as he does—that “the belief and the meaning

come from [Gagnon's] own modern set of beliefs." At any rate, the evidence is too strong to warrant only a "may."

There is nothing anachronistic about asserting that Paul saw the complementary character of male and female sex organs as a significant clue to God's will for human sexual relationships. For example, the second-century (A. D.) physician Soranus (or his translator Caelius Aurelianus) described the desire on the part of "soft men" to be penetrated (cf. 1 Cor 6:9) as "not from nature," insofar as it "subjugated to obscene uses parts not so intended" and disregarded "the places of our body which divine providence destined for definite functions" (*Chronic Diseases* 4.9.131). Similarly, the first-century (A. D.) Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria described the error of the Sodomites, at least in part, in terms of obvious anatomical and physiological features: "Although they were men, (they began) mounting males, the doers not standing in awe of the [male] nature held in common with those who had it done to them" (*Abraham* 135). Craig Williams, in his pro-homosex book *Roman Homosexuality* (1999, 242), acknowledges that "some kind of argument from 'design' seems to lurk in the background of Cicero's, Seneca's, and Musonius' claims: the penis is 'designed' to penetrate the vagina, the vagina is 'designed' to be penetrated by the penis" (cf. N88, N99). William R. Schoedel, in a pro-homosex essay (2000, 46), similarly concludes: 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."

The literary context for Paul's indictment of same-sex intercourse in Romans 1:24-27 further confirms that Paul was thinking in part about male-female anatomical complementarity. For Paul's overall point in 1:18-32 is not just that all humans sin but, more, that all humans "suppress the truth" accessible to them in the self-evident structures of creation/nature. So in the case of idolatry, which starts off the discussion, Paul focuses on the fact that God's "invisible qualities" are "made visible" and "clearly seen," because they are "mentally apprehended by means of the things made" (1:19-20). Paul clearly intends his readers to see the manifestation of God's wrath in this age (1:18)—giving some over to preexisting desires for intercourse with persons of the same sex—as a fitting punishment for their straying into idolatry (1:27). Paul's parenthetical reminder in 1:25—"who exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator"—underscores the close connection between, on the one hand, failure to accept the truth about God visible in creation and, on the other hand, participation in a sexual act "against nature." Those who denied the obvious truth about God transparent in material structures intact since creation and "exchanged" the truth about God went on to deny the obvious truth about themselves transparent in their embodied sexuality and "exchanged" natural (other-sex) intercourse for unnatural (same-sex) intercourse. In both instances there is a suppression of truth accessible through observation of material structures in creation or nature. In the context of Rom 1:18-27 the distinction between creation and nature collapses because there Paul means by *creation* the way things turned out after the initial act of creating. Both the truth about God "since the creation of the world" and the truth about male-female sexual complementarity in nature can be visually seen and mentally apprehended "by means of the things made," so that humans are "without excuse" (1:20).

In view of the evidence, when Via claims that I have imposed a modern argument from design on Paul's discussion in Romans 1, either Via is unaware of the data—in which case he has not read my book and essay carefully—or, worse still, he has deliberately chosen to suppress that data for his audience and perhaps for himself.

Not only does Via demonstrate a lack of knowledge about the historical and literary context for Paul's remarks in Romans 1:24-27 but also Via misrepresents my use of the argument from anatomy in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. For I do not argue there that Paul's objection to same-sex intercourse is restricted to the anatomical fit of the sex organs. Anatomical complementarity serves as an important heuristic springboard for grasping the broad complementarity of maleness and femaleness. As I say in N164:

Via has truncated my view under the rubric “the prohibitions against violating the complementarity of the male and female sex organs” (p. 35). Earlier on in his essay Via acknowledged the broader perspective of my complementarity argument (p. 26) but by the time he gets to this part of his essay he constricts it. The complementarity of the sex organs is a very important dimension of the whole, as is evident from the health hazards and repulsive quality of men who eroticize the anal cavity for penetration and even oral activity. Anatomy is also a clue not easily falsified, unlike the malleable character of many human desires. Christians are not anti-body gnostic dualists. At the same time, the matter is about more than sex organs. It is about essential maleness and femaleness. In effect, Paul is saying in Rom 1:24-27: Start with the obvious “fittedness” of human anatomy. When done with that, consider procreative design as a clue. Then move on to a broad range of interpersonal differences that define maleness and femaleness. The image behind this is the splitting and remerging of the two sexual halves in Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:21-24.

Via states that the theme of anatomical complementarity is “neither as prominent nor as graphically articulated in this article as it is in the book” (p. 95). I did give special attention in my book to anatomical complementarity because this dimension had been ignored in pro-homosex treatments of Scripture. However, even in my book the theme of anatomical complementarity is joined to a broader pattern of male-female complementarity: physiological, psychological, interpersonal, distinctive arousal, etc. (pp. 40, 60-62, 337, *passim*). For example, I state in the conclusion to *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (p. 487-88):

Scripture rejects homosexual behavior because it is a violation of the gendered existence of male and female ordained by God at creation. Homosexual intercourse puts males in the category of females and females in the category of males, insofar as they relate to others as sexual beings. . . . God intended the very act of sexual intercourse to be an act of pluralism, embracing a sexual “other” rather than a sexual “same.” . . . Same-sex intercourse represents a suppression of the visible evidence in nature regarding male-female anatomical and procreative complementarity. Complementarity extends also to a range of personality traits and predispositions that contribute to making heterosexual unions enormously more successful in terms of fidelity, endurance, and health than same-sex ones.

The question arises: Why does Via sidestep the case for male-female complementarity, broadly defined, that he acknowledges to be present at least in my essay but which is also clearly present in my book? I think I know why he sidesteps it. When the anatomical complementarity of men and women is viewed as *emblematic* of the complementarity of essential maleness and essential femaleness generally, it becomes much more difficult to argue that attention to complementarity is too simple or superficial. For, in effect, to trivialize male-female differentiation is to trivialize pro-homosex advocacy for *same-sex* erotic unions. A case in point: One occasionally hears pro-homosex apologists derisively referring to an obsession with “plumbing” or “equipment”—differences in male-female anatomy—on the part of those opposed to homosexual practice. But the latter are no more concerned solely with “plumbing” and “equipment” than are exclusive homosexuals. Certainly anatomical male-female differences are an important part of homoerotic attraction. Homosexuals—especially male homosexuals but female homosexuals as well—are erotically aroused by the body parts that they share in common with persons of the same sex. (I, for one, have never met, or heard of, a homosexual who has not experienced sexual arousal from the physical attributes of persons of the same sex.) Yet they are also attracted to an array of other features that define their own sex. Male homosexuals are erotically aroused by essential maleness, female homosexuals by essential femaleness—in short, by what they already are as sexual beings. If it were otherwise, they would be equally attracted to gender-nonconforming persons of the opposite sex.

It is this desire to *merge with what one already is* that Scripture, from Genesis 1-2 on, finds problematic. One sees a similar argument made by a Corinthian character, Charicles, in the Pseudo-Lucianic *Amores* or *Affairs of the Heart*, ca. A.D. 300:

And who then first looked with the eyes at the male as though 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 but . . . exchanged great disgrace for a little pleasure.

Precisely because sex is not just about more intimacy but also about a complementary erotic merger, the sex or gender of one’s partner makes all the difference. There is a world of difference between being attracted to complementary otherness and non-complementary sameness. A same-sex erotic merger is structurally discordant because the sexual counterpart or complement to one’s own sex is missing.

So when Via talks about using one’s “imagination” to conceive of “sexual connections that lie outside the palpably manifest anatomical complementarity of penis and vagina”—including, apparently, the mysteries of anal-penile “sexual connection” common in today’s male homosexual relationships—he misses the mark entirely. The obvious compatibility of male and female genitals is both part of and emblematic of the broad complementarity of essential maleness and essential femaleness that is so well illustrated by both the copulative act and by the story of the splitting off of woman from a sexually binary, primal human in Genesis 2:21-24. Scripture teaches that woman is man’s sexual “other half” and counterpart, not another man. This remains true irrespective of whatever other “sexual connections” one might “imagine.”

Via's attempt at enlisting of the Gospel of John for a pro-homosex reading. Via's attempt to co-opt the Gospel of John for a pro-homosex reading is one of the weakest hermeneutical ploys for circumventing Scripture that I have ever encountered from a seasoned biblical scholar—in this subject or any other. It is a classic instance of faulty proof-texting—citing biblical texts without the constraint of context.

Here is Via's reasoning: Jesus in John's Gospel says that he came into the world in order that those who enter the sheepfold by him "may have life and have it more abundantly" (10:10). Moreover, Jesus spoke in his "farewell discourse" (John 14-16) of the Spirit's role in "guiding us into all the truth" (16:13). So we should embrace same-sex intercourse since we "know" that some persons cannot experience "abundant life" without engaging in homoerotic behavior and since, too, we now have new "truth" that allegedly allows us to violate one of the prime core values of biblical sexual ethics. If a seminary student were to make such an argument in an exam or paper I would encourage the student to think a bit more deeply and rigorously. Yet, for Via, these "Johannine categories provide *weighty* theological material that can override the biblical rejection of all homosexual practice" (p. 96; emphasis added). If this is the best example of "opposing biblical material" (p. 27) that Via can come up with, then Via's self-acknowledged need to "find biblical support" for a pro-homosex position (p. 29) is in serious trouble.

Via's problems do not end with the admission that "the Gospel of John does not literally or directly support" his pro-homosex argument (p. 96). They merely begin there. Already, however, Via's admission that he has neither "direct" nor "literal"—read *historical-literary*—support for a pro-homosex position shows how inappropriate is the label "*opposing* biblical material" or the claim to having "*weighty* theological material" for overriding Scripture's witness. Indeed, from an historical standpoint it is highly likely that the author of the Fourth Gospel held views about abundant life and the Spirit's role in truth-telling *in tandem with*, rather than in opposition to, a categorical prohibition of homosexual practice. So how "opposing" can the former be to the latter?

Matters go from bad to worse as regards Via's proof-texting. For Via's application of John 10:10 and 16:13 depends entirely on showing that the four hermeneutical presuppositions on which Via's application is based (see the first section of this rejoinder) resonate with Johannine thought. As it is, all four presuppositions are anti-Johannine.

Take, for example, Via's presupposition that Scripture's own core values, including Jesus' prescriptive foundations for sexual ethics, exert no special authority over the life of Christians. There is no credible evidence that, in Johannine thinking, the Spirit's role in guiding believers into "all the truth" grants believers license to override a core value in biblical sexual ethics that Jesus undoubtedly affirmed (see my discussion of the witness of Jesus on pp. 68-74; and in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 185-228). Jesus understood the model of human sexual behavior set forth in Genesis 1:27 ("God made them male and female") and Genesis 2:24 ("For this reason a man . . . shall become joined to his woman/wife and the two shall become one flesh") to establish a clear other-sex prerequisite. Defined in the broader context of the farewell discourse, the Spirit's role in guiding into "all the truth," according to John's Jesus, means to:

- "remind you of all that I [Jesus] have said to you" (14:26)
- "testify on my behalf" (15:26)

- “take what is mine and declare it to you” (16:14).

In short, the Spirit at most expands on the deeper meaning of the sayings and deeds of Jesus. The Spirit does not contradict that meaning. Generally in John’s Gospel this deeper meaning takes the form of elevating the portrait of Jesus as “the way and the truth and the life” (14:6). Along with a high Christology comes a high ethical demand:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. . . . The one who has my commandments and keeps them—that one is the one who loves me. . . . If anyone loves me he (or she) will keep my word. . . . But the one who does not love me does not keep my words. . . . I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that does not bear fruit. . . . If anyone does not remain in me, he (or she) is thrown out like the branch . . . into the fire and burned. . . . If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept the commandments of my Father and remain in his love. . . . You are my friends if you do what I command you. (14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:1-2, 6, 10, 14)

There is no suggestion here of the Spirit coming to contradict Jesus’ core ethical convictions, sexual or otherwise. Indeed, the precise opposite is the case, as commentary from 1 John repeatedly indicates. The person who claims to be loving Jesus while violating his commands is a liar (1:6-7; 2:3-6, 29; 3:4-10; 5:2-4). Claims that there are no moral absolutes and no structural prerequisites for sexual intercourse that trump a loving disposition are also alien to the message of the Fourth Gospel.

By the same token, Johannine thought cannot be reconciled with another of Via’s main presuppositions; namely, that biology equals destiny or that abundant life requires gratifying biological urges. The key message of the Gospel of John is that abundant life is something that Jesus alone gives in the midst of the deprivation in this age. What we really need is Jesus, not sex as we would like it. The water that the Samaritan woman at the well really seeks is the water that flows from Jesus and gives eternal life. Her true betrothal is to Jesus, not to the series of sex partners that she has had (John 4). The point of the multiplication of the loaves is not that people should seek Jesus for earthly food but rather that they should recognize that Jesus himself is the food for eternal life (John 6). Via’s insistence that persons be able to have sex consistent with their sexual “orientation” and irrespective of the core commands of Scripture is just one more instance of unbelief, one more claim to life outside of Christ, one more Christ-substitute, one more idol. Life consists of Jesus—nothing less (cf. p. 104 with Nn161-163).

And what is this new “truth” that Via claims changes everything? We have already shown that strong antecedents to current views on sexual orientation existed in antiquity and that Scripture views all sin as having a biological basis.

In conclusion, a clearer case of bad proof texting could not be had. Only by ignoring all the Johannine coordinates and qualifiers for defining “abundant life” and “all the truth” can Via assert that he has “opposing” and “weighty” theological material from John’s Gospel for violating Scripture’s core values.

RITUAL IMPURITY AND MORAL IMPURITY—ONCE MORE

I treat at length the issue of the interrelationship of ritual impurity and sin on pp. 66-67, 100-101 and Nn50-54, 118-28. In his response to my essay (hence, to pp. 66-67 but not to pp. 100-101 in my response or to the online notes), Via contends two things. First, I allegedly “pay virtually no attention to” a “crucially important” difference between uncleanness and sin; namely, that “uncleanness happens automatically from contact with a physical object or process without any subjective involvement or intention on the part of the person,” while sin “proceeds from the conscious will and understanding of the heart” (p. 97). In his essay, Via makes clear that he understands the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 to be addressing *only* acts of ritual uncleanness and *not at all* acts of moral impurity. As he says on p. 7: “The pertinent point here is that the condemnation of homosexuality [*sic*—male-male intercourse] in Leviticus categorizes it as a source of uncleanness *rather than* as a sin” (emphasis added). For Via, the prohibition of male-male intercourse in 18:22 and 20:13 is nothing more than a piece of outdated purity legislation. Second, Via alleges that “Paul does reinterpret uncleanness as sin” by attributing the act of same-sex intercourse to a “conscious, intentional suppression of truth,” and that I tacitly acknowledge this point when I say that Paul rejects ritual impurity but maintains moral impurity (pp. 97-98; cf. p. 10).

The sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 as moral impurity matters. Via is both in error and confused on the question of whether the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 have to do with ritual purity or moral purity. My point never was that ritual uncleanness and moral uncleanness are always and everywhere indistinguishable. So far as a general principle is concerned, Via’s first contention is irrelevant. So far as his particular application of this principle to the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 is concerned, Via is simply wrong. My point—which Via pays no attention to in his response—was that *in the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20*, as elsewhere in the Old Testament, purity language is applied to sin, that is, to intentional acts conceived as morally culpable. The abstract distinction that Via wants to make between uncleanness and sin simply does not hold for the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20, including the prohibition of male-male intercourse in 18:22 and 20:13.

Scholars generally recognize that the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 have to do with moral impurity, so I am puzzled that Via has been unable to grasp this point. For example, David P. Wright, in the entry “Unclean and Clean [OT]” for the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* notes regarding the Old Testament: “Calling those involved in improper sexual relationships impure is a way of calling the persons sinful” (6:734). Now, does Via want to claim that Prof. Wright, who teaches in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis and has written a major study on purity in the Bible and the ancient Near East (*The Disposal of Impurity* [Scholars Press, 1987]), does not understand the difference between ritual impurity and moral impurity as regards sex laws in the Old Testament?

Similarly, Jacob Milgrom writes with respect to P (the Priestly Source, found in Leviticus in chs. 1-16) and H (the Holiness Code, Lev 17-26):

Ritual impurity always allows for purification and atonement. But the sexual abominations of Lev 18 (and 20) are not expiable through ritual. . . . In sum, ritual

impurity (P) is always subject to ritual purification, but no ritual remedy exists for moral impurity (H). . . . These radically differing concepts of *tum'a* 'impurity' is one of the terminological hallmarks that distinguish H from P. . . . H, however, is not negating P. . . . Each source speaks of a different kind of impurity: in P, it is concrete, cultic—ritual impurity; in H, it is abstract, inexpungeable—moral impurity. . . . Indeed, intention plays no part whatsoever in [Lev] 15 [P]; whether advertent or inadvertent, they generate impurity. Chap. 20 [H], however, focusing solely on sexual intercourse, is limited to advertences. (Milgrom 2000, 1573, 1578, 1756)

Once again, does Via want to allege that Dr. Milgrom, professor emeritus of Biblical Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and author of the magisterial three-volume Anchor Bible Commentary on Leviticus, has misread the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 when he classifies them as treating moral impurity rather than ritual impurity?

Then, too, there is the recent book entitled *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford University Press, 2000) by Jonathan Klawans, assistant professor of religion at Boston University. Klawans not only makes a distinction between ritual impurity and moral impurity within the Old Testament itself but also uses Leviticus 18 (esp. vv. 24-30) as the lead-off and primary example of a text that addresses moral, rather than ritual, impurity. He contrasts, for example, the moral impurity of sexual sins (Lev 18), idolatry (Lev 19:31; 20:1-3), and bloodshed (Num 35:33-34) with the ritual impurity of such things as childbirth, scale disease, genital discharges, the carcasses of certain impure animals, and human corpses (Lev 11-15 and Num 19). He sees five differences between ritual and moral impurity:

(1) Whereas ritual impurity is generally not sinful [i.e., generally natural and more or less unavoidable], moral impurity is a direct consequence of grave sin. (2) Whereas ritual impurity often results in a contagious defilement, there is no contact-contagion associated with moral impurity. One need not bathe subsequent to direct or indirect contact with an idolater, a murderer, or an individual who committed a sexual sin. (3) Whereas ritual impurity results in an impermanent defilement, moral impurity leads to a long-lasting, if not permanent, degradation of the sinner and, eventually, of the land of Israel. (4) Whereas ritual impurity can be ameliorated by rites of purification, . . . moral purity is achieved by punishment, atonement, or, best of all, by refraining from committing morally impure acts in the first place. (5) . . . Although the term impure [*tame'*] is used in both contexts, the terms "abomination" [*to'evah*] and "pollute" [*hanaf*] are used with regard to the sources of moral impurity, but not with regard to the sources of ritual impurity. (p. 26)

Klawans stresses that both ritual impurity and moral impurity are contagions but ritual impurity alone contaminates as a result of physical contact and is rectified largely by purification rites.

As to Via's second contention, once it is recognized that the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 already regard violations not (or not merely) as ritual impurity but as moral impurity—sin—it is no longer tenable to argue that Paul "reinterprets" the ritual uncleanness of Leviticus 18 and 20 as moral uncleanness. Rather, Paul's view of same-

sex intercourse as moral impurity in Rom 1:24-27 is substantially continuous with the view expressed in Lev 18:22 and 20:13.

What does Via hope to achieve by (falsely) categorizing the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20, particularly the prohibition of male-male intercourse in 18:22 and 20:13, as pertaining only to matters of ritual uncleanness? He has two things in view (see pp. 5, 7, 9-10, 18-20, 27-28).

First, he uses this argument to dismiss the Levitical prohibitions against male-male intercourse as irrelevant. Leviticus 18 and 20 allegedly treat sex violations such as incest, adultery, male-male intercourse, and bestiality as unclean acts and not as sin because they:

- Focus on acts rather than on the loving dispositions, motives, and intentions of the heart or on consequences (e.g., absence of promiscuity or exploitation)
- Are absolute, unexceptional
- Show concern for what I call “structural prerequisites” to sexual activity and what Via calls “the confounding of categories,” “mixing what should not be mixed”

Second, Via makes the move from dismissing the Levitical prohibitions to dismissing my view on same-sex intercourse, as well as the views held by Richard Hays and by Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, as throwbacks to outdated purity legislation. Via alleges that we “instantiate the gay phenomenon in the realm of unclean/clean rather than in the realm of sin/righteousness (the moral realm), where Paul has correctly put it” (p. 27) by likewise failing to take into account loving dispositions, consequences such as whether or not the relationship is promiscuous and exploitative, and the alleged priority of sexual orientation over structural prerequisites.

There are so many false steps in Via’s reasoning that it creates a minor headache just to sort out the logical mess. The key problem is that Via’s definition of the requisite features of “phenomena in the realm of unclean/clean” consists of features that are either misreadings of what the sex laws in Lev 18 and 20 are doing or actual features of “phenomena in the realm of sin/righteousness.” What he designates as distinguishing marks of ritual purity are in fact not distinctive to ritual purity. A related problem is that Via concedes that Paul treats homosexual practice as something morally impure or sinful, not as something that is merely ritually impure. What makes the difference for Via between the Levitical prohibitions and Paul? According to Via, for Paul homosexuality “issues from the distorted mind and heart . . . and is personal, chosen, (im)moral, and against God” (p. 10). Yet nothing of decisive significance in this definition of Paul’s view separates it either from the view expressed in Leviticus 18 and 20 or from the view held by Hays, Jones/Yarhouse, or me. *By definition*, any willful, consensual act of sexual intercourse that violates core structural prerequisites in Scripture and nature “issues from a distorted mind and heart”—regardless of loving disposition. At the same time both the authors of the Holiness Code and Paul gave implicit rationales for the prohibition of same-sex intercourse. And both regarded the behavior as chosen, not in the sense that it was unmotivated by preexisting or exclusive desires but rather in the sense that it was consensual. In other words, the behavior emanated from a conscious intent to act in accordance with one’s desires rather than in accordance with the revelation given in Scripture and in embodied existence.

Consider the strangeness of Via's arguments for distinguishing ritual impurity from sin and the Levitical prohibitions from both Paul's perspective and the perspective of modern morality.

Disregarding intentions? Via constantly refers to intentionality vs. non-intentionality as the line of demarcation distinguishing sin from uncleanness. But his usage is too poorly defined to be of much help. He assumes that the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 do not consider intentionality. Yet if they were entirely unconcerned about intention and motive, their penalty would apply even to victims of rape. As it is, the laws presume intentionality as consent on the part of those liable to judgment (compare the refrain "their blood is upon them" in 20:10-13, 16).

There may be a sense in which the victim is regarded as "defiled," but there is no sense of the victim defiling others through contact or of the victim's liability. Leviticus 18:20 warns, "You shall not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself through her." Here the male agent defiles himself. The phrase "through her" may suggest mutual defilement but, at any rate, the parallel verse in Lev 20:10 presumes consent on the woman's part. Ezekiel refers to an adulterer as one who "defiles his neighbor's wife" (18:6, 11, 15; 33:26), while Deut 22:24 refers to an adulterer who "violated (*innah*) his neighbor's wife" in a case of consensual adultery. Undoubtedly the same terms could be applied in a case of rape. Thus Gen 34:5, 13, 27 refers to Dinah as "defiled" by Shechem's act of coercive sex (cf. Deut 24:4). In this sense it describes the injury done to the victim, not the victim's culpability. Moreover, a woman defiled in this way does not convey ritual impurity to any subsequent husband, at least not to a non-priest. The key distinction is between the culpable act of "defiling *oneself*" through a willful act of immoral sexual intercourse (cf. 18:23, 24, 30; Num 5:13-29) and the non-culpable act of "being defiled" against one's will. To be sure, a woman who has had her virginity forcibly taken from her may suffer a downgrading of her marriageability status. Nevertheless, moral intentionality, defined as consent, makes all the difference in terms of the application of criminal sanctions. This is clear enough from the laws regarding suspected adulteresses in Num 5:11-31 and Deut 22:25-27. At issue in both laws is whether the married (or engaged) woman has willingly consented to have sex with another man. If the act was consensual—motives beyond consent are irrelevant—then the woman is guilty of acting unfaithfully, has "defiled herself," and must "bear her iniquity." Defilement of a raped woman refers at most to status degradation through loss of virginity—the woman raped has had something taken from her and has been done harm—not to ritual contact-contagion or to moral culpability (cf. Klawans 2000, 34).

Via's problem is that he confuses intentionality as consent and intentionality as loving motive or disposition. It is in the latter sense, and only in the latter sense, that Via can claim that Leviticus 18 and 20 do not treat "intentional" acts. Once the issue of consent is decided, these laws express no interest in whether the perpetrator's motives were noble or ignoble, loving or malicious. In this sense of intentionality, however, the Levitical sex laws are indistinguishable from Paul's views toward sexual immorality as well as our own. It certainly mattered not to Paul whether a perpetrator of incest, adultery, male-male intercourse, or bestiality—or, for that matter, a perpetrator of multiple-partner sex or of sex with a prepubescent child—claimed a loving disposition or motive. Nor does it matter to the church today what rationalizations persons may use to justify violations of

structural prerequisites for sexual behavior as regards blood relatedness, fidelity, gender, species, number of partners, or age.

Focus on acts rather than on loving disposition. Via insists that a focus on acts automatically puts one in the realm of uncleanness rather than in the realm of sin. But this is manifestly false. First, the act is not focused on to the exclusion of consent. Consent matters but rationalizations employed to justify a consensual act do not. Second, neither the authors of the Holiness Code nor interpreters such as Hays, Jones/Yarhouse, and I focus more on the act of same-sex intercourse than did Paul or any other positive New Testament figure. Via admits this, despite himself, when he speaks of Paul's views on the matter as "absolute." Third, as noted repeatedly, the church quite rightly focuses on a number of sexual acts irrespective of claims to love, commitment, and even fidelity. Unless Via wants us to consider, for instance, man-mother incest on a case-by-case basis, he must acknowledge that there are circumstances in sexual relations where the focus has to be on consensual act rather than on loving disposition. Because sexual intercourse is not just about more intimacy but even more about erotic merger, a loving disposition can be quite irrelevant to a valid sexual proscription—obviously.

Focus on acts rather than on consequences? Via claims that Hays, Jones/Yarhouse, and I regress to the ritual-impurity of the Levitical Holiness Code and deviate from Paul's moral-purity view when we allegedly focus on homoerotic acts to the exclusion of consequences. The truth is that we follow in the footsteps of both the Levitical prohibitions and Paul in considering consequences while recognizing the limitations of using *measurable* consequences as a basis for discerning immorality.

As regards the consideration or non-consideration of consequences, there are no significant differences between the authors of Leviticus 18 and 20 on the one hand and Paul on the other. Contrary to what Via suggests, the authors of the Holiness Code, and not just Paul, understood some of the negative consequences of incest, adultery, male-male intercourse, and bestiality (see p. 65 and N48; Gagnon 2001a, 135-39). It is absurd to think that they strongly proscribed certain forms of sexual behavior and yet had not the slightest idea why they were doing so. In fact, Via contradicts himself on this point because even he mentions several possible consequences of male-male intercourse that may have been in the minds of the authors of the Holiness Code (p. 8). Although Via's delineation of these consequences is deeply flawed, Via nonetheless concedes a consideration of consequences. By the same token Via cannot claim that Paul was more willing than the authors of Leviticus 18 and 20 to make exceptions to a ban on same-sex intercourse for allegedly non-exploitative homoerotic relationships. Even Via has to acknowledge that Paul's opposition to same-sex intercourse was not limited to particularly exploitative forms; for example, those manifesting promiscuity, idolatry, or pederasty. And yet when Via speaks disparagingly of a lack of attention to consequences on the part of the Holiness Code or pro-complementarity scholars he clearly has things like promiscuity, pederasty, and health effects in view. If readers are confused about how the issue of consequences allows Via to distinguish between Paul's moral-purity view on the one hand and the alleged ritual-purity view of the Holiness Code or pro-complementarity scholars on the other hand, they have every reason to attribute their confusion to the illogic of Via's argument.

One of the many unintended ironies of Via's critique is that, while he criticizes me for focusing on homoerotic acts to the exclusion of consequences, my book actually gives far more attention and documentation to the negative consequences of endorsing homosexual behavior than Via's essay gives to the allegedly positive consequences of endorsing homosexual practice. In the end, even Via has to concede, in the face of the documentation of my book, that the number of homosexual relationships that seem to be doing well "do not compose an impressively large population in our time" (p. 25). Via tries to save his position by asserting that not *every* homosexual relationship manifests measurable problems. But his counterargument is unrealistic. No type of consensual sexual relationship *always* produces measurable psychological distress or bad effects to one's physical health. Scripture and the contemporary church classify many behaviors, sexual and non-sexual, that do not produce measurable harm to all participants in all circumstances as sinful—for example, idolatry. If the church were to limit its disapproval of sexual relationships to only those types for which one can demonstrate scientifically measurable harm to all participants in all circumstances, the church could not disapprove absolutely of *any* form of consensual sexual relationship.

The fact that the church does categorically proscribe a number of types of consensual sexual relationships, despite the absence of proof regarding universal measurable harm, does not mean that the church discounts consequences altogether. First, the church recognizes that when it endorses a rule for the sake of an exception it promotes negative consequences for the many. Endorsement of the relatively few homosexual unions that seem to be working well—understanding "well" within the limited parameters of homosexual practice—will have the effect of lowering societal resistance to homosexual behavior as it is typically practiced. Ultimately, too, it will increase the incidence of homosexuality in the population, with its disproportionately high negative side effects. Second, the church also recognizes that the presence or absence of certain measurable consequences, such as promiscuity or negative health effects, does not address the prime problem with some sexual relationships. For example, who cares whether a man-mother relationship, a threesome, an adult-child union, or a human-animal erotic encounter produces promiscuity, psychical distress, or disease for *all* participants? The church rightly proscribes the behavior absolutely, regardless of such consequences, because the main problem with such sexual unions extends beyond questions of promiscuity or psychic-physical effects. Third, and most importantly, the church recognizes that negative consequences do invariably follow from a man-mother union, a sexual union between three or more persons, a human-animal union, and an adult-child union—even when the participants do not exhibit any long-term measurable harm. As a moral institution, the church distinguishes between a utilitarian version of consequences and a moral one; that is, between scientifically measurable physical or psychological harm on the one hand and non-measurable, but no less real, moral harm on the other hand. Just as one can surmise moral harm to all participants in adult-parent unions, so too one can surmise harm to all participants in same-sex erotic unions. For the narcissistic attempt at merging with a sexual "same" compromises one's integrity as a sexual being designed for holistic merging with one's missing sexual "half." Male erotic attraction for maleness and female erotic attraction for femaleness is as morally problematic as erotic attraction for one's own parent or sibling. That is a real moral consequence.

The unfortunate logical result of Via's argumentation regarding consequences can be seen in the contention of J. Michael Bailey, chair of the department of psychology at Northwestern University, that higher numbers of sex partners among male homosexuals should be accepted. His defense is that the negative consequences of such behavior are far fewer for male homosexuals than for heterosexuals: "gay male couples do not often have children"; "men feel much less psychic conflict than women about casual sex"; and "awful health consequences" to promiscuity "essentially vanish" when "proper precautions" are taken (see N167).

An absolute prohibition. I have already given significant attention in this rejoinder to Via's unreasonableness in asserting that absolute prohibitions represent a regression back to ritual purity. Certainly Paul's remarks about same-sex intercourse are no less absolute than the Levitical prohibitions. Certainly, too, the church today continues to maintain a number of absolute prohibitions, especially—but not exclusively—in sexual ethics. This clearly does not turn Paul's or the church's position into a ritual purity matter.

Structural prerequisites over orientation. Obviously giving priority to certain structural prerequisites over orientation does not put a command in the sphere of ritual purity. If it did, then absolute prohibitions against adult-child sex would have to be so classified, given the existence of exclusive "pedosexual" orientations. Similarly, absolute restrictions on the numbers of sex partners in a given union would have to yield to hard-wired proclivities toward multiple sex partners, especially among males, or risk being categorized under laws of ritual cleanliness. All sin is related to biological urges. Moreover, when Via scoffs at the concept of "mixing what should not be mixed," how far does he want to go with this? Does Via feel that there are no structural impediments to erotic contact between humans and animals or men and their mothers? A particular irony is that there is much stronger evidence for Paul having entertained the possibility of prenatal or congenital causation factors in some forms of homoerotic attraction than for the writers of the Holiness Code having entertained such. Yet Paul was just as insistent as the authors of the Holiness Code that sex between males and sex between females was structurally incompatible with creation design. Based on his definition of ritual purity, Via should be arguing that Paul was even more tied to ritual purity than the Holiness Code.

The bottom line is this: When Via claims that the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 treat ritual impurity rather than moral impurity he is wrong and out of step with the latest and best research on purity in the Old Testament. And when Via insists that absolute laws that do not make exceptions for loving dispositions and "orientations" are regressions back to ritual purity he shows that he does not understand what divides ritual purity from moral impurity. Furthermore, he opens the door to accepting some instances of every type of consensual sexual behavior.

HEARING THROUGH DIFFERENT EARS THE SAME GOSPEL

Via complains that the position that I espouse results in the gospel being heard in two different ways by heterosexuals and by homosexuals. Heterosexuals get to actualize their

heterosexual destiny in morally responsible ways while homosexuals are not allowed to actualize their homosexual “destiny” in any way. “Since you had the bad luck to turn out gay, it is only fair to impose the added burden of denying you the realization of who you are sexually” (p. 98).

On one level the gospel is the same for everyone. All would-be disciples of Jesus must, Jesus says, take up their crosses, deny themselves, and lose their lives for his sake. Paul gave great attention to this message in his constant refrain about dying with Christ to the old human existence and living a reoriented life for God in the new creation in Christ. So much for actualizing in responsible ways all our intense, biologically related urges. Everyone must put to death everything of the old self that runs counter to the will of God, for God is in earnest to shape us in the image of Christ.

On another level the gospel is indeed heard in different ways by every individual. The call of the gospel will make different demands on different persons because every individual carries his or her own set of biological or social baggage and has a unique role in God’s overall redemptive plan. Was it Jesus’ “bad luck” to be the Messiah and to have imposed on him the “added burden” of dying on the cross for the sins of the world? Paul had the “bad luck” of being called to a life of hardship that few, if any, followers of Jesus have had to face. Was it fair of God to impose on Paul the “added burden” of denying, on a daily basis, his basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and protection from severe social abuse and violence, all for the cause of the gospel? Some persons have the “bad luck” of turning out to be exclusive pedophiles, or of having seemingly uncontrollable desires for multiple sex partners, or of growing up without the kind of stable family environment that nurtures a capacity for lifelong sexual commitment, or of finding sexual stimulation only in coercive sexual activity, or of having a strong disposition for alcoholism, or of being afflicted with a strong sense of insecurity and distrust that makes faith in Christ difficult, or of being far more susceptible to feelings of covetousness than most. On and on we could go. It is wrong to be callous to the particular sufferings that people experience as they “work at their own salvation with fear and trembling” amidst God’s gracious work in them (Phil 2:12-13). But it is equally wrong to give the impression that one person’s particular “bad luck,” as Via puts it, justifies a circumvention of the gospel’s call or to convey that a particular constellation of intense desires constitutes “who you are” and establishes an inviolable, God-given “destiny.” A person who does not experience homoerotic desires may be beset by other types of sinful impulses that impose even greater burdens on an obedient Christian life. Yet no one gets an exemption as regards death to self, whatever the particularities of one’s individual life experiences.

The hope of the gospel message is that our identity is not found in “who we are” in the flesh but rather in who God is shaping us to be in the Spirit of Christ. Any other message, including a message of moral-biological determinism, is a false gospel.