

Revised and corrected on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011

*This is the original (in revised form) of a book that was published in Swedish (2000) and in Greek (2005). It was also translated into Dutch (2000), though I decided not to go ahead with that publication.*

*Because English-speaking readers, who took notice of its existence, have repeatedly begged me for permission to read it, I finally decided to let it appear in this form for their benefit.*

*Although this book has been written in a more popular form, because it is meant for a wider public, it is, nevertheless, based on serious research in the original sources. As a scholar of the New Testament, of the Greek Language of all periods, and of Greek antiquity in general, it is my scientific duty to research and to write on any subject that falls within my scholarly competence and interests, and thus share my findings with those who care to read them. It is, therefore, my hope that its dispassionate and detached style will be appreciated by all lovers of Truth. Science has as its object of inquiry Truth and Truth is what profits everyone.*

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# HOMOEROTICISM

ANCIENT AND MODERN—AND THE CHRISTIAN  
CHURCH

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## PREFACE

The last few decades—and in particular the last few years—have brought the question of homoeroticism or homosexuality to the forefront of discussion in many social and cultural contexts. The discussion has included also the religious dimensions of the problem, both with regards to the Biblical attitude to homosexuality and the stance which the Christian Church should adopt today.

Within the religious discussion, and in particular the Biblical view of the problem, three positions are discernible. The first is that the Biblical authors criticize only gross heathen perversion, but had no idea about the genuine type of homoeroticism between consenting adults that we know of today. The second is that no matter what the Biblical authors knew or did not know about homoeroticism, their views are not binding today. The third position is that because of the place of the Bible in the Christian Church, the views of the Biblical authors must be taken seriously.

In articles and contributions to discussion in journals and newspapers personal views of very diverse

kinds have been presented, and the picture has been obscured rather than clarified. Thus, many well-meaning Christians today feel uncertain, confused, and do not know what to make of the Biblical statements. At the same time material that is of the utmost importance for the evaluation of the Biblical view and has important consequences for its relevance or non-relevance today has not been mentioned in the discussion, for the simple reason that it is totally unknown. No discussion of the problem of homosexuality can ignore this material if the discussion is to be considered serious and responsible.

This book has been written for ordinary people, Christian or non-Christian, who want to know what kinds of homosexuality were practised in antiquity, with what kinds of homosexuality the Biblical authors were acquainted, and whether the Biblical attitude to homosexuality is relevant or not today. The discussion is carried out in a dispassionate manner presenting the evidence, which is cited at length and in the original Greek. For the sake of readers who cannot read Greek, all the Greek quotations are translated, but the original wording is also given in the footnotes so that those who can read it, may be able to verify the evidence.

Although this book is the result of meticulous scholarly research, it is written in a simple, straightforward style, because it intends to target the widest possible public—including those who live in homoerotic relations—with a genuine interest in the question. It has no interest, whatsoever, in polemics, which explains why no reference is made to the previous debate. Much

of that debate is considered fruitless and uninformed. What is needed is to take a look at the ancient and biblical evidence dispassionately and with an open mind. This is what this book is trying to do.

No doubt a book on a subject such as this will be read with different spectacles. Some will show greater openness than others. Some may even have ideas as to how this book should have been written. However, if it helps some people to find their way out of this difficult problem and to come to clarity about the issues involved, the labour expended on it will have been well worth-while.

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Chrys C. Caragounis

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

**H**omosexuality is, strictly speaking, not a modern phenomenon, but has in recent decades drawn considerable attention from moral philosophers, psychologists, psychiatrists, theologians, medicine experts, lawyers and others. Because traditionally the Western World has had a so to speak 'Christian outlook', homosexuality has not been a real problem, i.e. a philosophical, ethical, or sociological question of controversial nature, on which opinions have been divided. The practising homosexual understood himself or herself to be at the fringe of society and outside the pale of propriety, doing their thing in secret and accepting the condemnation of society without demur.

In more recent times, however, along with many other voices from various minority groups, or groups which traditionally have been oppressed or

discriminated, also homosexuals have raised their voice demanding recognition<sup>1</sup>. This new state of affairs implies not merely that society should show understanding for their problem and refrain from the traditional 'holier-than-thou' attitude toward them, but that society should recognize their way of life as a perfectly normal one and on the same level as the heterosexual relation.

Until a few decades ago homoeroticism was often regarded as a mental illness. It had to be accepted as all other types of sickness. This argument is not prominent anymore because now the claim is made that homosexuality is just as normal a way of life, and sometimes, in fact, that it is even truer and deeper than the heterosexual one<sup>2</sup>. Though it would seem that proponents of homosexuality are not agreed about a united line of argument, arguments from e.g. ethics, medicine, and not least theology are marshalled to its support. Today homoeroticism has become a problem both for Church and society. For society, on account of its social and judicial implications, and for the Church,

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<sup>1</sup> On the "Gay rights movement", etc., see the brief account in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, Vol. 6, (1991), pp. 30f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. Herdt, "Homosexuality" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, Vol. 6 (1987), pp. 451f.: "Over the past century homosexuality has undergone a dramatic transformation, from the turn-of-the-century 'disease of effeminacy' to the modern gay rights movement".

on account of its open penetration of it and, according to many, its conflict with the teaching of the Bible.

In this study I shall deal only with the theological issue. I shall briefly take up the various types of illicit sexual relations in the ancient Near East in order to present the general background and the forms in which homosexual practices appeared. Thereafter I shall concentrate in greater detail on the various types of homosexuality known and practised in ancient Greece with a few references to Roman sources, the former of which is the most relevant material for modern homosexuality. The Greek evidence is also the most relevant evidence for the New Testament teaching.<sup>3</sup> This will be followed by a discussion of the main New

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<sup>3</sup> This is so for the following reasons: (1) at the time the New Testament was being written Greek culture, thought, and language had been saturating the ancient Mediterranean world outside Greece for between 1,000 and 500 years. In the first century A.D. the political power was Roman, but the Romans themselves had come under the spell of Greek culture and civilization (see also under ch. 8); (2) The Apostle Paul, the exponent of the Christian view of homosexuality, was born and brought up in a prominent Hellenistic city, Tarsos, and must have had at least some elementary Greek education; and (3) practically all of the letters of Paul are addressed to Greek audiences, which had previously been pagans. This includes also his letter to the Romans. The Church of Rome was originally composed of Greeks and Greek speaking people from the East, and remained such during the first two Christian centuries. See C. C. Caragounis, "From Obscurity to Prominence: The Development of the Roman Church Between Romans and 1 Clement" in *Judaism and Christianity in First Century Rome*, ed. K. P. Donfried & P. Richardson, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1998, 245-279, esp. 250-252.

Testament texts. A chapter on the continuing validity of the New Testament statements for our day is made necessary by the fact that the relevance of the New Testament teaching for the modern Christian Church has been called into question. The study will conclude with a few observations on the primitive Church's attitude to homosexual practices.

The discussion begins with a brief presentation of the three claims made by modern advocates of homosexuality.

## 2. THREE CLAIMS MADE BY ADVOCATES OF HOMOSEXUALITY

### *1. Modern Homosexuality is Genuine Homosexuality*

Advocates of homosexuality often claim that modern homosexuality is different from its ancient counterpart. Ancient homosexuality is thought to have taken various forms such as cultic prostitution, *paidierastia*, or gross heathen exploitation of weaker individuals, persons in dependence, slaves, and others. Modern homosexuality, on the other hand, is said to be concerned with a steady relation between two adult consenting individuals. It is an ideal relation. Such a relation springs from the partners' inner disposition, which is attracted to its own sex, and the relation is claimed to involve a deep, mutual affection, in short, a

relation that is deeper and more genuine than the relation between husband and wife.

## ***2. Homosexuality is an Inner Disposition or Propensity***

Related to the above is the second claim made by its advocates, namely, that modern Homosexuality is an inner disposition or propensity. As such it is innate. The homosexual way of life is not something assumed, as for example, a bad habit; the homosexual is born that way, and hence homosexuality is as natural for him or her as heterosexuality is for the heterosexual. Since it is understood as a wholly natural disposition, homosexuality is claimed to be on a par with heterosexuality. Because of this, not only should it not be classed as a disease or as an irregular type of living, it should rather be looked upon as something entirely natural for a part of the human race.

## ***3. The Biblical Attitude to Homosexuality is Irrelevant Today***

The third claim is that what the Biblical authors have to say is irrelevant today, because they were acquainted only with cultic, *paidierastic*, or gross heathen

homosexuality. They knew nothing of the noble, genuine type of homosexuality between consenting adults that we are concerned with today. Neither were they acquainted with the fact that homosexuality is an innate disposition. The problem here is whether people in ancient times spoke about homoerotic relations in terms analogous to the modern talk of 'genuine homosexuality' and whether the New Testament authors were acquainted with such views or not.

The above three claims seem to boil down to the following argument: modern, so-called genuine homosexuality is something new, which did not exist in the ancient world. This claim assumes that the ancients were born heterosexual, but that some of them perverted their sexuality, whereas the moderns are born both as heterosexuals and as homosexuals. The historical continuity of the human race, however, would seem to disprove any such biological distinction between ancient and modern human beings.

In view of the obvious absurdity of the above argument, the claim may take another form: the ancients had failed to observe that there is such a thing as genuine homosexuality, hence the criticisms of the biblical authors were directed at what were gross acts of

heathen perversion, but have nothing to say about genuine homosexuality as it is known and practised today. This argument is subject to historical scrutiny through an investigation of the relevant ancient texts that inform us of ancient views of homosexuality.

The last point will be one of the main concerns of the present study (see below, ch. 5. Homosexuality in Greece (and Rome) in Ancient Times). But first a brief description of the situation in the ancient Near East and in Israel.

### 3. PROSTITUTION AND HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

**T**hrough clay-tablets, inscriptions, paintings as well as ancient writings it has become well-known that ancient Near Eastern societies practised, in addition to common prostitution, also female cultic prostitution as well as cultic male prostitution or homosexuality<sup>4</sup>.

It is not possible within the limits of this study to go at length into a discussion of the immense and often, for details, complicated evidence about male and female prostitution in the ancient world. Nor will such a discussion be much appreciated by the ordinary reader, who will lack the necessary background for its correct

evaluation. Hence, I will content myself with illustrating briefly by means of ancient documents the occurrence of the phenomenon of various types of illicit sexual activity throughout the ancient Near East, which also formed the matrix for homosexuality.

It should be borne in mind that the life of ancient societies was to a large extent determined by various fertility beliefs, traditions and rites, which included a form of prostitution known as “sacred prostitution”, and which involved both men and women. It is this form of prostitution that is best attested in ancient Near Eastern documents. Male and female prostitutes are often referred to in literature by the late Greek term *hierodouloi* (sing. *hierodoulos*; fem. *hierodoulê*) i.e. “sacred slaves”, though not all *hierodouloi* need have been prostitutes. In this study, however, the term will be applied consistently to male and female cultic prostitutes.

According to Babylonian texts in ancient Mesopotamia ordinary prostitutes as well as cultic prostitutes were very common<sup>5</sup>. The proneness to free or cultic

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<sup>4</sup> However, see certain qualifications in some more recent research in K. v. d. Toorn, “Cultic Prostitution” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York, etc.: Doubleday, 1992, 6 Vols., Vol. 5, pp. 510-13.

<sup>5</sup> See *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. J.B. Pritchard, Princeton 1969, p. 595 and *Documents of Old Testaments Times*, ed. T.W.Thomas, New York 1958, pp. 106f.

sexual relations is illustrated by Herodotos' story<sup>6</sup> (V B.C.) that every Babylonian woman, whether of mean or noble birth, once in her life time had to sit in the temple of the goddess of fertility waiting for any stranger to throw some coins into her lap, which were given as a gift to the temple, and invite her to sexual intercourse. Having thus discharged her obligation to the goddess, the woman was free to return to her home and continue her usual life<sup>7</sup>. The existence of male cultic-prostitutes in Babylon is extremely probable<sup>8</sup>, though so far lacking explicit proof<sup>9</sup>.

A practice similar to that in Babylonia existed also in Syria, at Baalbek near the Lebanon<sup>10</sup> as well as at Paphos, in western Cyprus<sup>11</sup>.

On Cyprus, in the city of Kition, there was a Semitic temple, in which, according to inscriptional evidence, male-prostitution was practised<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Herodotos, I. 199.

<sup>7</sup> The story is reported also by Strabon, XVI. i.20.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the terms used in the Code of Hammurabi and other documents referring to male devotees, which are similar to those used of female temple prostitutes.

<sup>9</sup> See G.A. Barton, "Hieroduloi (Semitic and Egyptian)" in J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 6, (1937), pp. 673f.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Loukianos, *The Syrian Goddess*, 6. See also Eusebios, *Life of Constantine*, III.58.

<sup>11</sup> Herodotos, I.199; Klemes of Alexandria, *Proteptikos*, II.

<sup>12</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*: Vol. I: *Inscriptiones Phoeniciae*, Paris, 1887-90, I.86.

In Asia Minor the cult of Kybele and Attis included certain male servants of the temple, known by various names<sup>13</sup>, who had castrated themselves, wore women's clothes, and were probably given to homosexual activities<sup>14</sup>.

In Egypt cultic prostitution is evidenced by Egyptian as well as by Greek sources. The Greek geographer-folklorist Strabon relates a custom at Thebes, Upper Egypt, according to which a beautiful virgin of noble family, consecrated to the god Amon, prostituted herself for a month to whomsoever she chose<sup>15</sup>. At the same place, the wife of the high priest was called the 'chief concubine', while a queen or princess was called "the wife of the god"<sup>16</sup>. Herodotos had heard the story that to build one of the pyramids, Cheops had to prostitute his own daughter (who might have been a *hierodoulê*), whose clients were expected to offer each a stone for the completion of the project<sup>17</sup>. This commerce in various types of illicit erotic acts, also led to homosexual

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<sup>13</sup> E.g. Gallos, *Korybantês, Mêttragyrts*.

<sup>14</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*. iv. 183-246; vi. 349-72. See further, F. A. Margling, art. "Hierodouleia" in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, Vol. 6 (1987), p. 311.

<sup>15</sup> Strabon, XVII.i.46.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. also Herodotos, I.182

<sup>17</sup> Herodotos, II.126.

practices among the Egyptians as also among many others, such as Galatians and Persians<sup>18</sup>.

In Kappadokia, in Asia Minor, in the city of Komana, over 6.000 male and female *hierodouloi* were dedicated to the temple of Ma, while at Venasa, another city of Kappadokia, the number of such sacral prostitutes and sodomites was about 3.000<sup>19</sup>.

Cultic prostitution and homosexuality were rife also in Canaan.<sup>20</sup> It occurred in honour of the goddess Ashtarte, whence the custom had penetrated the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem<sup>21</sup>. This led the Hebrews to speak of “the abomination of the Sidonians” (2 Kgs 23:13). The Hebrew wording is interesting. Deut 23:17 prohibits a Hebrew woman from becoming a קְדִישָׁה, *kedesha*, fem. for ‘consecrated one’ or a Hebrew man from becoming a קִדְּשׁ, *kadesh*, masc. for ‘consecrated one’. The interesting thing is that the nature of their

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Lev 18: 3, 24. Further, the *Sibylline Oracles*, III. 596-600, ascribes the existence of homosexual practices in Egypt as well as other Near Eastern countries, such Canaan, Galatia, and Persia.

<sup>19</sup> Strabon, XII. ii. 3, 6.

<sup>20</sup> The older story of Lot’s dealings with the people of Sodom and Gomorrha (Gen 17), shows clearly that they were given to homosexual practices, cf. e.g. “Bring them out [sc. the men who visited Lot] that we may have sex with them” (so correctly NIV; the Hebrew verb יָדָע, *yada*’, ‘to know’, in such contexts means ‘to know sexually’.

<sup>21</sup> These קְדִישִׁים (*kedeshim*), ‘consecrated ones’ (see also *K-B* [= L. Koehler – W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Leiden: E. J. Brill], Vol. III, p. 1075 )—the ‘dogs’ of Deut 23:17—were finally evicted by the reforms of Josiah (2 Kings 23:7).

consecration becomes clear in the following verse, which identifies the ‘consecrated woman’ as a ‘harlot’ (זוֹנָה, *zonah*), i.e. a ‘cultic/temple prostitute’ and the ‘consecrated man’ as a ‘dog’ (כֶּלֶב, *kelev*), i.e. a ‘cultic/temple male prostitute’. It would thus appear that the male prostitute played an analogous role to that of the woman prostitute and hence he would in all probability be a sodomite or *kinaidos*, i.e. a homosexual. (similarly *K–B*).

From the above brief survey it may be concluded that in the countries surrounding Israel illicit sexual practices including homosexual acts were widespread, and that they occurred in the form of common female prostitution, cultic female prostitution as well as cultic male prostitution or homosexuality.<sup>22</sup> What is common between the above forms of Near Eastern homosexuality and modern homosexuality is the act itself, though the context, the types, and the reasons for it, are different. For material relevant to modern homosexuality we must turn, instead, to the Greek (and Roman) evidence. Before doing so, however, we will take a brief look at the attitude of the OT to homosexuality as a phenomenon,

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. F. A. Marglin’s judgment that “Some form of sexual activity was practised by temple servants of both sexes in most of the cultural areas of Ancient West Asia” (“Hierodouleia” etc. as above, p. 309

i.e. as an erotic act, irrespective of the reasons for which it was undertaken.

#### 4. THE ATTITUDE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TO HOMOSEXUALITY

There are two fundamental groups of texts in the OT, which determine the OT view of homosexuality. The first group of texts is the Genesis account of the creation of man and woman and the institution of marriage and family (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18-24). In this account we note that men and women are created “in the image of God” and as human beings are equal with one another. At the same time, they have certain anatomical and physiological differences which make them complementary to one another; they are “male and female”, a distinction that is grounded in their creation. This simple fact engaged Greek philosophers, who tried

to give a rational explanation of the male and female factors and their attraction to one another<sup>23</sup>.

A natural consequence of this statement is the institution of marriage. We are told that among the great variety of God's creatures, no one was found which could fellowship with Adam, sc. Man, i.e., who could complement him as a being of equal order, sharing his life on the physical as well as the intellectual and spiritual planes. This led to the creation of the woman, who on being presented to man, was recognized as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23), i.e. a being that is part of man and without which man is incomplete. It is interesting that the designation 'woman' in Hebrew is the feminine form of the word for 'man'<sup>24</sup>. The deep insight encapsulated in this brief and simple but realistic story is that we are presented with a double-faceted institution: the institution of marriage and family: "for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). The contextual placing of this story at the very beginning of the human race, establ-

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<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Platon, *Symposion*, especially the speech of Aristophanes, 189c - 193e.

<sup>24</sup> Thus, Heb אִישׁ 'man' becomes אִשָּׁה 'woman', a fact that one of the Greek translations of the Old Testament (by Symmachos) sought to preserve by turning the word for 'man' ἀνὴρ (genitive: ἀνδρός) into a novel feminine

ishes the order and norm for the continuation of human-kind i.e. as one based on marriage and family.

The other group of texts is placed in a very different context. Here the context is that the various human families are understood as having turned away from the recognition of the Creator and his order and as having perverted his ordinances. Turning away from him they sink into all kinds of idolatry and lawless acts, which in their essential character are a revolt against God's law and will. In his mercy and for the purpose of fulfilling his salvation-historical plan for humankind, God chooses one family to make it into a people —Israel— through which he will introduce his Messiah - Saviour into the world. At the same time, this people becomes a model for the future, eschatological people of God. It is of this people, to which God reveals himself in a particular way, that God demands a standard of life and conduct that differentiates them from all other nations around them, and is in accord with the intention and order of God's creation and his law.

At the Sinai revelation therefore among the things that are laid down for Israel to observe is the prohibition of "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; this is

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form: ἀνδρῖς 'woman'. The word thus created is never again used in Greek or Biblical literature, which keep to the normal Greek term: γυνή.

abominable” (Hebr. תועבה *to‘eva* = ‘*abomination*’) (Lev 18:22).

This prohibition occurs in a chapter devoted to sexual prohibitions. Our text is preceded by prohibitions referring to sexual relations with relatives of various degrees and offering children by fire, and is followed by the prohibition against sexual relations with animals. In ch. 20:13,15,16 the same prohibitions are repeated, this time with their relevant punishment:

If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is abominable. They must be put to death ... if a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death, and you must kill the animal ... if a woman approaches an animal to have sexual relations with it, kill both the woman and the animal ...

These prohibitions are made in the face and context of widespread practices in the ancient world, of which a specimen was given above:

You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. ... Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways (Lev 18: 3, 24).

The great difference in the ethos of Hebrew religion over against that of the peoples of the ancient Near East is also seen in Yahweh's refusal to accept for his temple gifts coming from the hire of a prostitute or of a "dog". This last term, "dog", as Dt 23:18 shows, was a pejorative reference to male prostitutes, which in the nature of the case appears to refer to homosexual practices!<sup>25</sup> Parenthetically it may be pointed out that the same attitude persists in the NT, where according to Rev 22:15, these "dogs" will be excluded from the heavenly Jerusalem and from partaking of the tree of life<sup>26</sup>.

In the environment in which Israel found herself and in view of tendencies to adopt Canaanite religious customs, the prophetic movement made a strenuous effort to rid Yahweh's worship of idolatrous practices, which were contrary to the ethos of the Sinai revelation. The king that introduced high places (Hebr. *bamoth*), sacred stones (Hbr. *matzevoth*), Ashera poles (Hebr. *asherim*) and male prostitutes (Hebr. sing.: *qadesh*; plural: *qedeshim*) was Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:23-24). Despite attempts by kings Asa and Jehoshaphat to expel the

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<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that the denomination of "dog" was given also to cultic male prostitutes on Cyprus, see G.E. Barton, "Hierodouloi (Semitic and Egyptian)" in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. 6 (1937), p.674.

sodomites or male temple prostitutes (Hebr. *qedeshim*) (1 Kgs 15:12; 22:46), these were once again entrenched in the Jerusalem temple, from which they were definitely removed during the reforms of Josiah, who also razed their houses to the ground (2 Kgs 23:7).

We may thus conclude that the Hebrew aversion to homosexuality and their acceptance of exclusively heterosexual relations is based on (a) the view of God's creation of humankind as man and woman, in order to complement each other physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually; (b) the view of marriage as a monogamous institution (cf. Gen 2:24, esp. in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint (= LXX), executed between the third and first centuries B.C., which brings out explicitly the idea of the 'two' who in marriage become 'one', quoted in Mt 19:5), from which, however, the Hebrews often deviated; and (c) the idea of God's blessing involved in the gift of children.

The attempt made sometimes to construe this last point as a crude element of primitive societies, *sc.* that marriage was contracted only for the purpose of procreating offspring, would seem to be unjustified. The

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<sup>26</sup> See R.H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (ICC), Edinburgh 1920, Vol. II, p.178 and D. E. Aune, *Revelation*, 3 Vols., (WBC), Dallas, Nashville: Nelson, 1997-1998, Vol. III, 1222 f.

OT repeatedly speaks of married life as involving joy, delight and fellowship between the partners<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. according to Dt 24:5 the newly-wed Hebrew young man was free from war duties for one year in order to “bring happiness to his wife”; Prov 5:18 exhorts men to “rejoice in your young wife”, or “the wife you married when you were young”; Isa 62:5 portrays the bridegroom’s rejoicing over his bride; in Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10 the disappearance of “the voices of bride and bridegroom” is the sign of desolation, while its reappearance in 33:11 is the sign of Yahweh’s restoration; and finally, the whole of the Song of Songs is an erotic description of heterosexual love.

## 5. HOMOSEXUALITY IN GREECE (AND ROME) IN ANCIENT TIMES

### *1. The Terms 'Homosexual' and 'Homosexuality'*

The terms 'Homosexual' and 'Homosexuality' are modern terms, having been created during the nineteenth century. They derive from the Greek element *homo*, 'same' and the Latin *sexus*, 'sex'. According to *Webster's Third International Dictionary* (1993) the main meanings of the term 'Homosexuality' are: "1: atypical sexuality characterized by manifestation of sexual desire towards a member of one's own sex, 2: erotic activity with a member of one's own sex".<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A special use in Freudian psychoanalysis is "a state in normal psychosexual development occurring during prepuberty in the male [i.e. before the 13<sup>th</sup> year of age] and during early adolescence in the female [i.e.

The Modern Greek equivalent is *homophylophilia* (ὁμοφυλοφιλία), derived from *homo-* ('same') + *philo-* ('sex') + *philia* ('love', 'friendship'), i.e. 'love for a person of the same sex'). The fact that the term 'homosexuality' is a modern construction has led some of its advocates to argue that Homosexuality or Homoeroticism as an innate disposition, too, of necessity is a modern phenomenon, and hence that it was unknown in the ancient world. It must be pointed out that this argument confuses terminology with substance.

The fact that *homophylophilia* is a modern Greek term, created to correspond to the modern international term 'Homosexuality', in no way implies that the ancient Greeks were ignorant of the thing itself. We know, for example, that they used many different terms. Whether they knew of homosexuality as an innate disposition or not can only be decided after a careful investigation of the terms used and especially of the texts that take up this whole problem. Do such texts speak only of

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after the 15<sup>th</sup> year of age] during which libidinal gratification is sought with members of one's own sex". The Latin *libido*, 'pleasure', '(inordinate) desire', 'unnatural lust', is defined as "emotional or psychic energy that in psychoanalytic theory is derived from primitive biological urges and that is usually goal-directed". It is obvious that this third meaning with its restricted use in psychoanalytic theory about the early stages of human development is not applicable here, where we are concerned with adult homosexuality, and this holds true even in the case of *paidierastia*.

homosexual practices or also of homosexuality as a disposition?

And now I turn to the examination of the ancient evidence.

## *2. Common Homosexuality*

Cultic prostitution was not endemic to Greece, while common prostitution was forbidden to Athenian citizens, who, if proved guilty, lost their civic rights and were put to death<sup>29</sup>. The relatively rare presence of cultic prostitution in later times is to be attributed to the importation of oriental cults, as e.g. the cult of Aphrodite in Corinth<sup>30</sup>.

Because Greece was divided into city-states and each city-state had its own laws, traditions and customs, views of homosexuality were not uniform. For example, in Elis and Boiotia, relations between men were accepted, while in Ionia, and among the Greeks living

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. the law-text in Aischines, *Against Timarchos*, 21: ἐὰν τις Ἀθηναῖος ἐταιρήσῃ ... καταγνωσθέντος αὐτοῦ ἐταιρεῖν, θανάτῳ ζημιοῦσθαι ("If any Athenian prostitutes himself ... and be convicted of prostitution, he shall be condemned to death"). Cf. also 13. On the Athenians' tendency to soften the harshness of certain unsavory words, as e.g. πόρνη, see Herodotos II, 134 and Ploutarchos, *Solon*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Pausanias, II. 5 and N. Παπαχατζῆ's Commentary, Πausανίου Ἑλλάδος Περιήγησις: Κορινθιακὰ καὶ Λακωνικά, Athens 1976, p. 85. On the Corinthian *hierodouloi* see also Strabon, VIII. vi. 20f.

within the Persian empire, they were condemned as shameful<sup>31</sup>. Though the laws were discouraging,<sup>32</sup> adult homosexuality was rife at Sparta, where, owing to Sparta's militaristic system, men were kept long periods of time away from their wives and in the company of each other. Homosexuality was practised also at Athens in spite of prohibitive laws,<sup>33</sup> as well as in other parts of Hellas<sup>34</sup>. Xenophon's *Anabasis* gives a number of examples<sup>35</sup>. Homosexuality between adults or those of equal status did occur but was frowned upon.

### 3. Lesbianism

Female homosexuality, though probably not so common, also occurred and was known as Lesbianism, on account of the Lesbian (from the Island of Lesbos) poetess

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<sup>31</sup> Platon, *Symposion*, 182b. See also Josephos, *Against Apion*, II.273.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Xenophon, *The Republic of the Lakedaimonians*, II.13-14. The Spartan lawgiver, Lykourgos, regarded relations between males as on a par with "incest".

<sup>33</sup> Platon, *Phaidros*, 231e. In *Symposion*, 182a according to one of the speakers the law was somewhat ambiguous.

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. Sophocles, *fragment* 153; Thoukydides, I.132; Platon, *Symposion*, 178e; Loukianos, *Dialogues of the Dead*, XIX. 4; Ploutarchos, *Solon*, I. 3; *Love Stories*, II (772); (773); III (773); *Dialogue on Love*, 751b; 751c-d; 751d-e; 758b; 760b; 761a-d; 768a; 769b.

<sup>35</sup> Xenophon, *Anabasis*, II.vi.6, 28; VII.iv.7-10.

Sappho (VII-VI cent. B.C.), who, it was believed, encouraged such relations with her girl pupils<sup>36</sup>.

#### 4. *Paidierastic Homosexuality*

The typically Greek homosexuality was of a particular brand. The proper name for it is παιδεραστία (*paiderastia*) ‘love of boys’, or τὰ παιδικά (*ta paidika*)<sup>37</sup> ‘the things of

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<sup>36</sup> On Lesbian relations, see Loukianos, *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, V.1-4. Cf. also Aristophanes’ speech in Platon’s *Symposion* 191 e. There is a paucity in ancient sources about female homosexuality. It occurred often among *hetairai* (ἑταῖραι, ‘companions’, i.e. luxury prostitutes). The *hetaira* was often an exceptionally beautiful, spirited, glamorous, educated and witty woman, who kept company to upper class citizens. Some *hetairai* were even capable of discussing philosophical subjects, as e.g. Aspasia, Pericles’ paramour (see e.g. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai*. 25, 56). Other famous *hetairai* were the Corinthian (actually Sicilian) Lais and the Theban (actually Thespian) Phryne, both of whom were said to be extremely beautiful. The last named served as the model for Apelles’ statue of Aphrodite rising from the sea and for Praxiteles’ Aphrodite of Knidos. She became so wealthy that she offered to rebuilt the walls of Thebai, which Alexander the Great had destroyed, provided they raised the inscription “Alexander destroyed, but Phryne the *hetaira* rebuilt it” (Athenaios, *Deipn.* 59). Her offer was rejected. Some *hetairai* were given also to homosexual practices, and were known as *tribades* (τριβᾶδες), derived from the verb τρίβω = ‘to rub’, i.e. ‘those who rub’. They appear to have used various devices as in modern times. In his *Dialogues of the Courtesans* Loukianos mentions some twenty-five *hetairai*, while in the thirteenth Book of his *Deipnosophistai* Athenaios relates various events and anecdotes of more than one hundred such women.

<sup>37</sup> The expression *ta paidika* refers primarily to the role which the boy played as the beloved. Hence the expression came to denote generally the ‘passive homosexual’ (see below) irrespective of whether he was a boy or a grown up man, and finally it came to cover all homosexual relations. The terms occur frequently in Platon, *Symposion*: 178c; 180b; 183a; 184d-e; 193b-c; 211d; 217b; 222b τὰ παιδικά (*ta paidika*); 181c; 184c παιδεραστία (*paiderastia*); 192b

(i.e. relations with) boys'. Both terms referred to erotic relations between an adult and a boy of, say, between 14 and 20 years old<sup>38</sup>. This was, however, extended to include even adults, who for various reasons prostituted themselves<sup>39</sup> or allowed themselves to be abused. There were several types of *paiḗderastia*.

#### a. Common *paiḗderastia*

First, there is the ordinary *paiḗderastia* in which an adult develops a homosexual relation with a boy or a youth, often a slave, or at any rate a dependent person, or even

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παιδεραστής, (*paiḗderastēs*); and the verb παιδεραστῶ (*paiḗderastō*) "to make love to boys" occurs in 192b as well as Loukianos, *Love Affairs*, 35; 48; 53. The Jewish philosopher Philon, who had come under Platonic influence, evidences the distinction between active and passive homosexuals, e.g. Philon, *Special Laws* III. 37: μέγα ὄνειδος ... οὐ τοῖς δρῶσι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς πάσχουσιν, "a great shame ... not only for those who are active, but also for those who are passive".

<sup>38</sup> The example is set by Zeus, the supreme divinity of the Greek pantheon, who abducted the handsome youth Ganymedes and made him his cupbearer, Homer, *Ilias*, XX.231; *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, 202ff.; Apollodoros, *Bibliothēke*, III.xii.2; Aristeides, *Apologia*, IX.7; Justin, *Apologia*, I.21.5; Tatian, 10; Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* XIII. 77-79. It is this name, which in its Latinized form *Catamitus*, gave the term "catamite", a passive homosexual. Another such case was the Theban king Laios's abduction of young Chrysippos, see Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* XIII.79; Apollodoros, *Bibliothēke*, III.v.5.

with an adult of inferior social status. The person occupying the inferior station is the ‘beloved’ (ἐρωμένος, *erômenos*, or τὰ παιδικά), i.e the passive homosexual, the catamite or *kinaidos*.<sup>40</sup> He plays the role that a woman normally would have played in heterosexual relations. The senior person of a higher social status is the ‘lover’ (ἐραστής, *erastês*), that is, the active homosexual, or the person that would play the role of the man in heterosexual relations.

This type of homosexuality aims at satisfying in the first place the lusts of the active partner. There are several examples of this in Xenophon’s *Anabasis* as well as in the Latin authors Suetonius and Tacitus, who describe what they considered to be the lecherous practices of emperors Tiberius and Nero.<sup>41</sup>

### **b. *Paidierastia* in Teacher-Pupil Relationships**

Secondly, another type of *paidierastia* took place in the context of a teacher-pupil relationship. This is more

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<sup>39</sup> This is the whole point in Aischines’ accusation (*Against Timarchos, passim*) of Timarchos, namely that he, being an Athenian, had prostituted himself, and should therefore be put to death.

<sup>40</sup> See Aischines, *On the Embassy*, 99; Loukianos, *Demonax*, 50.

<sup>41</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 28-29; Tacitus, *Annals*, VI. vi.1; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 43. On these texts, see below under “Homosexuality in Rome”.

complex, since it involved a wider spectrum of relationships.

The basic idea here is that it is good for a young boy to be associated with a man of character and learning, who is going to educate the boy to be a virtuous citizen. We must remember here that in very ancient times education was private, and that it was given on a personal basis. From this it follows that a father would seek out a good teacher to whose educating care he would entrust his boy. In a society that was very elitist, a prospective teacher looked for a promising boy, which had as many personal qualities, physical and intellectual, necessary for success, as possible. "Greek education (i.e. παιδεία = *paideia*) was aimed at building up the whole man, soul and body. The Greek must be virtuous in soul, that is, brave, magnanimous, righteous, and in body, handsome, athletic, and strong".<sup>42</sup>

The private character of education made often inevitable an intimate friendship between teacher and pupil, a friendship that often lasted for the rest of their life time. Such an intimate friendship was in itself free from all blemish. We see an example of this intimate friendship in the education of physicians, as this is set

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<sup>42</sup> C. C. Caragounis, "Greek Culture and Jewish Piety: The Clash and the Fourth Beast of Daniel 7", *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 65 (1989), 280-308, 297f.

forth in the so-called *Hippocratic Oath*. In addition to the many high moral demands (e.g. purity and decent behaviour towards women) that the Oath laid upon the pupil in the future exercise of his profession, the pupil was also bound to look after his teacher in his old age as though he were his own son.<sup>43</sup> We may here recall what Paul says of Timothy:

As a son with his father he has laboured with me in the ministry of the Gospel (Phil 2:22).

There was nothing sexual in this whole relationship.

Not all teachers, however, were paragons of virtue, and this made it necessary for fathers to have their *paidagogos* (i.e. a slave who took care of the boy) to see to it that no impropriety was committed by the teacher at school or the trainer at the *palaistra*, the training establishment, where boys spent a good deal of their time. Parenthetically it may be pointed out here that all physical training took place without clothes.

The laws of Athens regulating such matters are quoted at length in the Orator Aischines' speech *Against Timarchos*. They were aimed at giving a morally healthy education to the youth protecting them from all

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<sup>43</sup> For the text of the oath see *Ἱστορία τοῦ ἐλληνικοῦ ἔθνους* (= *History of the Hellenic World*), Vol. III. B, p. 519.

corruption. Punishment against offenders was extremely severe. For example, the law prescribed that

The teachers of the boys shall open the school not before sunrise, and they shall close it before sunset.<sup>44</sup>

The reason for this was that the lawgiver was

extremely suspicious of lonely and dark places,<sup>45</sup>

and wanted to prevent the boys from being left alone with the teacher at school or with the trainer in the *palaistra*.<sup>46</sup> Moreover

No man older than the boys shall be permitted to enter the school while the boys are there, unless he is a son of the teacher, a brother, or a daughter's husband. If anyone enters in contravention of this law, he shall be punished with death.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Aischines, *Against Timarchos* 12: οἱ δὲ τῶν παιδῶν διδάσκαλοι ἀνοιγέτωσαν μὲν τὰ διδασκαλεῖα μὴ πρότερον τοῦ ἡλίου ἀνιόντος, κλειέτωσαν δὲ πρὸ ἡλίου δύνοντος.

<sup>45</sup> Aischines, *Against Timarchos*, 10: τὰς ἐρημίας καὶ τὸ σκότος ἐν πλείστη ὑποψία ποιούμενος.

<sup>46</sup> Aischines, *Against Timarchos* 10.

## Again

The trainers at the *palaistrai* are under no circumstances to allow those who have reached the age of manhood to enter the contests of Hermes together with the boys. A trainer who allows this and does not keep such men out of the training establishment, shall be liable to the punishment prescribed by the law for the seduction of free-born boys”.<sup>48</sup>

These examples and the rest of the evidence in Aischines’ oration shows the great pains taken by the Athenian state to protect its youth from abuse, and at the same time the fact that there was a real risk for the teacher-pupil relationship to extend to the forbidden territory, which explains the severity of Athenian legislation.

### c. The Philosophical Use of *Paidierastic Language*

A third type of *paidierastia*, or rather *paidierastic* language meets us in Platon’s dialogues. The question of the

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<sup>47</sup> Aischines, *Against Timarchos* 12: καὶ μὴ ἐξέστω τοῖς ὑπὲρ τὴν τῶν παίδων ἡλικίαν οὕσιν εἰσιέναι τῶν παίδων ἔνδον ὄντων, ἐὰν μὴ υἱὸς διδασκάλου ἢ ἀδελφὸς ἢ θυγατρὸς ἀνὴρ· ἐὰν δέ τις παρὰ ταῦτ’ εἰσίη, θανάτῳ ζημιούσθω.

<sup>48</sup> Aischines, *Against Timarchos* 12: καὶ οἱ γυμνασιάρχαι τοῖς Ἑρμαίοις μὴ ἐάτωσαν συγκαθιέναι μηδένα τῶν ἐν ἡλικίᾳ τρόπῳ μηδενί· ἐὰν δὲ ἐπιτρέπη καὶ μὴ ἐξείργῃ τοῦ γυμνασίου, ἔνοχος ἔστω ὁ γυμνασιάρχης τῷ τῆς ἐλευθέρων φθορᾶς νόμῳ.

*paiderastic* language in philosophy is a taunting one. It is taunting because it is connected with the Greek passion for beauty, found both in the bodily perfection of a youth and especially in his psyche, i.e. his mental, intellectual and spiritual virtues. There is an elusive relation between the etherial use of *paiderastic* language in philosophical discussions about Beauty and Truth, as we find in Platon's *Symposion*.<sup>49</sup> (a dialogue devoted to the quest of the nature and praise of true and beauteous Love) and the purely physical enjoyment in the exploitation of young boys, exemplified by the soldiery in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. The former type consisted in setting the highest value upon a handsome, promising boy and educating him with personal intimacy to become an exceptionally successful and virtuous citizen in his country. In philosophical contexts such language was intended symbolically in an analogous way as the Song of Songs, which though using erotic language, has been retained in the Bible because of its symbolical interpretation.

In Platon's dialogues the speaker is usually Platon's own teacher, Sokrates. Without pretending with a few lines to do full justice to a very interesting and highly

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<sup>49</sup> The entire dialogue deals with the theme of love, which on the lips of different speakers may have different values; however, as becomes clear, on the lips of Sokrates the language is purely symbolic.

significant doctrine of one of the world's most original thinkers (Platon), I may say one or two words. Sokrates' mother was a midwife, so he often took his illustrations from her profession. Just as a midwife assists in the birth of a child, so, too, the true philosopher, who is in conception with truth and beauty seeks to be delivered, that is, to procreate and bring forth his 'child'. Sometimes Sokrates actually explained his own role as that of a midwife. Since *Eros*, the god who impels us to love, is drawn to that which is beautiful, and cannot procreate in the ugly,<sup>50</sup> it is natural that a philosopher, too, should be

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<sup>50</sup> Platon, *Symposion* 209 b-c: τούτων δ' αὖ ὅταν τις ἐκ νέου ἐγκύμων ἦ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἦθεος ὢν καὶ ἡκούσης τῆς ἡλικίας, τίκειν τε καὶ γεννᾶν ἤδη ἐπιθυμῆ, ζητεῖ δὴ οἶμαι καὶ οὗτος περιῶν τὸ καλὸν ἐν ᾧ ἂν γεννήσειεν· ἐν τῷ γὰρ αἰσχρῷ οὐδέποτε γεννήσει. τὰ τε οὖν σώματα τὰ καλὰ μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ αἰσχρὰ ἀσπάζεται ἅτε κυῶν, καὶ ἂν ἐντύχη ψυχῇ καλῇ καὶ γενναίᾳ καὶ εὐφυεῖ, πάνυ δὴ ἀσπάζεται τὸ συναμφοτέρων, καὶ πρὸς τοῦτον τὸν ἄνθρωπον εὐθύς εὐπορεῖ λόγων περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ οἷον χρῆ εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἃ ἐπιτηδεύειν, καὶ ἐπιχειρεῖ παιδεύειν. ἀπτόμενος γὰρ οἶμαι τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ὁμιλῶν αὐτῷ, ἃ πάσαι ἐκείναι τίκειν καὶ γεννᾶ, καὶ παρῶν καὶ ἀπῶν μεμνημένος, καὶ τὸ γεννηθὲν συνεκτρέφει κοινῇ μετ' ἐκείνου, ὥστε πολὺ μείζω κοινωνίαν τῆς τῶν παίδων πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἴσχουσι καὶ φιλίαν βεβαιωτέραν, ἅτε καλλιόνων καὶ ἀθανατωτέρων παίδων κεκοινωνηκότες ("Again when someone has conceived these in his soul since his youth, having reached the age of manhood, he longs to bring forth and to beget; he goes about, I suppose, looking for the beautiful in which to procreate. For he will never procreate in the ugly. While in conception he is drawn to beautiful rather than ugly bodies, and if he chances upon a beautiful, noble and good-natured soul dwelling in a beautiful body, he gladly greets this combination, and he immediately speaks resourcefully to such a person of virtue and of how a good man should be and what he should practise; and so he tries to educate him. I think that through his contact with the fair one and his conversing with him, he brings forth and begets that which he had conceived long ago, and whether present or absent he is remembered.

drawn to beautiful bodies, especially if they contain a still more beautiful, noble soul, in which the philosopher can generate his thoughts, fertilize the soul, and bring forth his ‘spiritual child’<sup>51</sup>.

The connection in Hellenic thought between bodily beauty and the inner beauty of the *psyche*—difficult to be appreciated by those without a Hellenic upbringing, especially in modern times in which a classical education is almost non-existent—was an integral part of Hellenic *paideia*, ‘education’. Therein lies the nexus between athletics (e.g. the Olympic Games) and moral character: a beautiful, noble soul dwelling in a handsome, healthy and strong body. Since the situation envisaged is the teacher-pupil relationship, it is easy to see how the terms and the forms of expression glide over to *paiderastic*

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Together they bring up the offspring, enjoying a much better fellowship with one another than that of children and a more stable friendship, since they have communion with a more beautiful and immortal kind of ‘children’”).

<sup>51</sup> That this has nothing to do with homosexual love becomes clear by the above quotation as well as the following, namely, Platon, *Symposion*, 206 c: κυοῦσιν γάρ, ἔφη, ὃ Σώκρατες, πάντες ἄνθρωποι καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ ἐπειδὴν ἔν τινι ἡλικίᾳ γένωνται, τίκτειν ἐπιθυμεῖ ἡμῶν ἡ φύσις, τίκτειν δὲ ἐν μὲν τῷ αἰσχυρῷ οὐ δύναται, ἐν δὲ τῷ καλῷ. Ἡ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς συνουσία τόκος ἐστίν. (“ ‘All men are in conception’, she said, ‘O Sokrates, both in body and in soul, and when we reach a certain age, our nature wishes to be delivered. But they cannot be bring forth in the ugly, but only in the beautiful. Now the sexual intercourse of man and women is really a begetting’”). The speaker here is Diotima, the Mantinean woman who, Socrates claims, taught him his *paiderastic* philosophy. This fact alone shows that this is no homosexual love.

thought patterns. For Platon, however, these terms are only symbolical, their content being philosophical and ethereal, which has nothing to do with homosexual practices.

In Platon's philosophy, the 'boy' symbolizes—as Photios, the learned Patriarch of Constantinople, explained—

Aestheticism, and the appreciation of the beautiful in relation to the older person, who symbolizes the paidagog or teacher of aestheticism, that is, the Mind.<sup>52</sup>

This is the so-called “Platonic eros”. In this context homosexual relations are considered out of place, base, perverse, degrading. This is the position taken by the great philosophers of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., Sokrates, Platon and Aristoteles, who condemned physical relations as being below the standards of propriety and as unnatural<sup>53</sup>, advocating only “A

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<sup>52</sup> Photios, *Bibliotheke* 464: παῖδα γὰρ εἶναι τὴν αἴσθησιν καὶ τὸ ἐν αἰσθήσει καλόν, ὡς πρὸς πρεσβευτὴν καὶ παιδαγωγὸν τῆς αἰσθήσεως τὸν νοῦν.

<sup>53</sup> Platon, *Republic*, 403 a-c: *Symposion* 181 b: ἐρῶσι δὲ οἱ τοιοῦτοι πρῶτον μὲν οὐχ ἥττον γυναικῶν ἢ παίδων, ἔπειτα ὧν καὶ ἐρῶσι τῶν σωμάτων μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν ψυχῶν (“In the first place these are in love no less with women than with boys, and secondly they are in love with their bodies rather than with their souls”); 181 d: ... χρῆν δὲ καὶ νόμον εἶναι μὴ ἐρᾶν παίδων (“it is necessary that there are laws which forbid the love of boys”); *Latws*, 836 c: εἰ γὰρ τις ἀκολουθῶν τῇ φύσει θήσει τὸν πρὸ τοῦ Λαΐου νόμον, λέγων ὡς ὀρθῶς εἶχεν τὸ

marriage of noble minds with no physical manifestation at all".<sup>54</sup>

If their language is sometimes interpreted to the contrary, this is inspired by modern concerns.<sup>55</sup> The same

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τῶν ἀρρένων καὶ νέων μὴ κοινωνεῖν καθάπερ θηλειῶν πρὸς μεῖξιν ἀφροδισίων, μάρτυρα παραγόμενος τὴν τῶν θηρίων φύσιν καὶ δεικνὺς πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐχ ἀπτόμενον ἄρρενα ἄρρενος διὰ τὸ μὴ φύσει τοῦτο εἶναι ("If one follows nature, one will enact the law that was in force before Laios (who is credited as being the first homosexual man), and accept as right the prohibition of relations with males and youths as in sexual intercourse with females. He will have as witness the nature of animals, and show that the male does not touch another male because this is not in accordance with nature"); and 838 e-839 a: Καλῶς ὑπέλαβες· αὐτὸ γὰρ τοῦτο ἦν τὸ παρ' ἐμοῦ λεχθέν, ὅτι τέχνην ἐγὼ πρὸς τοῦτον τὸν νόμον ἔχοιμι τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν χρῆσθαι τῇ τῆς παιδογονίας συνουσίᾳ, τοῦ μὲν ἄρρενος ἀπεχομένους, μὴ κτείνοντάς τε ἐκ προνοίας τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος, μηδ' εἰς πέτρας τε καὶ λίθους σπεύροντας, οὗ μήποτε φύσιν τὴν αὐτοῦ ῥιζωθὲν λήψεται γόνιμον, ἀπεχομένους δὲ ἀρούρας θηλείας πάσης ἐν ἧ μὴ βούλοιο ἂν σοι φύεσθαι τὸ σπαρέν ("You put it right. This is why I said that in respect to this law I had a method, namely, to use sexual intercourse according to nature for the sake of childbirth, thus abstaining from males, and not purposely killing the human race, nor sowing seed among rocks and stones, where it will never take root producing children, while abstaining from every female field in which you do not wish the sown seed to spring up"); Aristoteles, *Politics*, 1262a 32ff. For further evidence of Socrates's and Platon's condemnation of *paiderastia*, see W.K.C. Guthrie, *Socrates*, pp. 70-78. Cf. also W. Hamilton, *Plato: The Symposium*, pp. 12-30

<sup>54</sup> W. Hamilton, *Plato: The Symposium*, p.13.

<sup>55</sup> I can illustrate this by an experience I had in Uppsala almost four decades ago. An Old Testament docent while talking to me on this topic, grew quite furious against those who practise homosexual relations and called a certain Swedish bishop "a sponge" (whatever he may have meant by that). Then, realizing that I was a Greek, he turned around to vent his fury on Platon, for having introduced, as he thought, homoerotic love to the world. This docent had not read a single line of Platon's works. He was merely reacting to what he had heard from those who were supposed to know, and who sought to enlist Platon's support for their homosexual practices. This

position was taken by such other famous ancient authors as Ploutarchos, Dion Chrysostomos,<sup>56</sup> Loukianos and Athenaios.<sup>57</sup>

### *5. Homosexuality as a Stable Relationship Between Consenting Adults*

Naturally, claims to ideal homosexuality were made also outside the teacher-pupil relationship. Ancient literature has preserved many such examples.<sup>58</sup>

One of the clearest cases in antiquity of what in today's jargon might be called a stable relationship between consenting adults, occurred at Thebai, a place 70 km north-west of Athens. Here in the fourth century B.C. General Gorgidas created the so-called "Sacred Band", a select corps consisting of 150 pairs of lovers and

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example perhaps suffices as an illustration of current misinterpretations of Platon's teaching.

<sup>56</sup> E.g. Dion Chrysostomos, *Seventh Oration*, 151-52.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. Ploutarchos, *Dialogue on Love*, 768 e; Loukianos, *Love Affairs* 36; Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* XIII. 84 (605 d) (see text, below).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. e.g. the romantic story in Achilles Tatios' *Leukippe and Lykophron*, 34, which describes the relationship between an Egyptian young man and a youth described as a *meirakion* (μειράκιον). A *meirakion* was a boy of between 14 and 21 years of age. In this case the "boy" must have been in the upper limits of that age span. The details of the story make clear that this relationship would qualify as what today is called 'a stable relationship'.

beloved, i.e. active and passive homosexuals.<sup>59</sup> In creating this band Gorgidas experimented with the psychology of the homosexual relation. He made capital of the devotion which the partners felt for each other, being certain that

The lovers would be ashamed to play the coward before their beloved, and the beloved before their lovers.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, both of them would be induced to fight heroically to the bitter end by thinking in the first place of their partner. Gorgidas' expectations were not disappointed. It is reported that this "Sacred Band" was undefeated in all of its engagements, until it was finally annihilated by Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great.<sup>61</sup> When Philip surveyed the fallen, they were found to be lying all of them with their armour on and mingled with one

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<sup>59</sup> Ploutarchos, *Pelopidas* 18. 1-5.

<sup>60</sup> Ploutarchos, *Pelopidas* 18.2: τὸ δ' ἐξ ἐρωτικῆς φιλίας συνηρμοσμένον στίφος ἀδιάλυτον εἶναι καὶ ἄρρηκτον, ὅταν οἱ μὲν ἀγαπῶντες τοὺς ἐρωμένους, οἱ δὲ αἰσχυρόμενοι τοὺς ἐρῶντας ἐμμένωσι τοῖς δεινοῖς ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων. See further Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai*, 13.12

<sup>61</sup> Ploutarchos, *Pelopidas* 18. 5.

another as if to defend one another.<sup>62</sup> It is said that Philip was moved to tears when he saw such selfless devotion.<sup>63</sup>

Similar to the above case is the story of Kleomachos, who defended the Chalkidians to the point of offering his life in the presence of his beloved.<sup>64</sup>

A third example of homosexuality between consenting adults is found in Ploutarchos.

Ploutarchos was born in Chaironia, a place between Thebai and Delphoi only a few years before the Apostle Paul visited Athens and Corinth. He remained a pagan to the end of his life. He was a fervent devotee of the old Greek religion, and held some sort of priestly office at the Delphic Oracle. He has left us a very large number of writings, some of which are considered spurious. About half of Ploutarchos' writings treat various ethical problems. He was a fervent adherent of Platonism, and in his writings he shows such an ethos that early Christian authors often quoted his writings in support of their Christian teachings.

One of the gems he has left us is his consolatory letter to his wife at the death of their child.<sup>65</sup> Another

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<sup>62</sup> Ploutarchos, *Pelopidas* 18.5: κείσθαι τοὺς τριακοσίους ἐναντίους ἀπνητηκότας ταῖς σαρίσαις ἅπαντας ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις καὶ μετ' ἀλλήλων ἀναμειγμένους.

<sup>63</sup> Ploutarchos, *Pelopidas* 18. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Ploutarchos, *Dialogue on Love* 760e-f.

writing, is his *Erotikos*, or *Dialogue on Love*. This writing, patterned on the Platonic dialogues, discusses homosexual versus heterosexual love. To be appreciated the work must be read in its entirety, but here I will quote only one passage that speaks of such relations between consenting adults. At 751 d-e Ploutarchos writes:

But to have relations with males without their consent involves violence and piracy; or, again, if this happens with their consent, there is softness and effeminacy on the part of those who, against nature, allow themselves in Platon's words 'to be mounted and receive the seed like animals'." <sup>66</sup>

Of this union Ploutarchos says:

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<sup>65</sup> Incidentally, this letter shows that marriage in ancient Greece could really be based on true love, esteem and deep fellowship between the partners.

<sup>66</sup> Ploutarchos, *Dialogue on Love* 751 d-e: ἡ δ' ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρρένων ἀκόντων <μὲν> μετὰ βίας γινομένη καὶ λεηλασίας, ἂν δ' ἐκουσίως, σὺν μαλακίᾳ καὶ θηλύτητι, "βαίνεσθαι" κατὰ Πλάτωνα (*Phaidros* 250e) "νόμῳ τετράποδος καὶ παιδοσπορεῖσθαι" παρὰ φύσιν ἐνδιδόντων. Platon's full text at this point is: ὁ μὲν οὖν μὴ νεοτελής ἢ διεφθαρμένος οὐκ ὀξέως ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φέρεται πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ κάλλος, θεώμενος αὐτοῦ τὴν τῆδε ἐπωνυμίαν, ὥστ' οὐ σέβεται προσορῶν, ἀλλ' ἡδονῇ παραδοὺς τετράποδος νόμον βαίνειν ἐπιχειρεῖ καὶ παιδοσπορεῖν, καὶ ὕβρει προσομιλῶν οὐ δέδοικεν οὐδ' αἰσχύνεται παρὰ φύσιν ἡδονὴν διώκων (But he who has not been initiated, who is corrupt, is not eagerly transported hence to that place, to Beauty itself, when he contemplates its name; he shows no respect at the sight of it, but having abandoned the law he tries with pleasure to mount like a four-footed animal and sow the seed of children. And when practising hybriatic intercourse, he is neither afraid nor ashamed of pursuing a pleasure that is contrary to nature"). The Christian teacher, Klemes of Alexandria, was another author who had understood Platon corectly, see his *Paidagogos*, X.

Now of the relation of male with male (it is, rather a lascivious assault and a mounting like cattle), one would be correct to say, ‘This is the work of Hybris, not of Kypris’<sup>67</sup>.

The above examples show unmistakably that what in modern times is called ideal homosexual relations, and claimed to be based on deep friendship and commitment, from which springs a stable relationship for the fulfilment of both partners with far-reaching consequences of involvement, was not only well known in ancient Hellas, it was even surpassed—as the above evidence implies.

## *6. Homosexuality as an Innate Disposition or Propensity*

That the ancients were well aware of what today is termed innate disposition or propensity is proved also from a number of ancient writings.

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<sup>67</sup> Ploutarchos, *Dialogue on Love* 768 e: τὴν μέντοι πρὸς ἄρρεν’ ἄρρενος ὁμιλίαν, μᾶλλον δ’ ἀκρασίαν καὶ ἐπιπήδησιν, εἶποι τις ἂν ἐννοήσας “ὑβρις τὰδ’ οὐχὶ Κύπρις ἐξεργάζεται”. Kypris was another name of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, who was supposed to instigate love affairs. It is here chosen for the sake of rhyming with hybris.

Treating generally of pleasure and restraint in his *Nikomacheian Ethics* the great philosopher-scientist Aristoteles speaks of certain things that are

Not pleasant by nature, but which become pleasant in some cases on account of curtailed development, in others from habit, and in others still because of natural depravity. We may observe a related disposition of character that corresponds with each one of the above types of unnatural pleasures.<sup>68</sup>

A little further down he includes among morbid propensities “sexual relations among males”.<sup>69</sup> Of these he says:

These practices are in some cases owing to natural disposition, and in others to habit, as with those who have been abused from childhood.<sup>70</sup>

Recognizing that mere disposition in itself is not reprehensible, Aristoteles goes on to say that

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<sup>68</sup> Aristoteles, *Nikomacheian Ethics*, VII. v. 1: τὰ δ' οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν διὰ πηρώσεις τὰ δὲ δι' ἔθη γίνεται, τὰ δὲ διὰ μοχθηρὰς φύσεις, ἔστι καὶ περὶ τούτων ἕκαστα παραπλησίας ἰδεῖν ἔξεις.

<sup>69</sup> Aristoteles, *Nikomacheian Ethics*, VII. v. 3: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἢ τῶν ἀφροδισίων τοῖς ἄρρεσιν.

<sup>70</sup> Aristoteles, *Nikomacheian Ethics*, VII. v. 3-4: τοῖς μὲν γὰρ φύσει τοῖς δ' ἐξ ἔθους συμβαίνουσιν, οἷον τοῖς ὑβριζομένοις ἐκ παίδων.

In those cases where nature is responsible, no one should call such persons unrestrained.<sup>71</sup>

He makes, however, a clear distinction between

Having a natural disposition and not yielding to it ... (i.e.) having the desire to practise unnatural intercourse with males and refraining from it and having a natural disposition and yielding to it.<sup>72</sup>

It is the latter behaviour that is condemned.

At this point it is germane to observe that modern medicine and psychiatry have not yet solved the problem posed by the homosexual disposition. There is currently no consensus among medical experts in the world, but it is only supposed partly that in some cases there may be a genetic connection—which, however, still awaits verification and clarification—and partly that traumatic experiences may play a role in inducing a homosexual propensity in other cases. It would thus appear that for all the amazing advances of the modern medical sciences, in this area we have not yet come very

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<sup>71</sup> Aristoteles, *Nikomacheian Ethics* VII. v. 4: ὅσοις μὲν οὖν φύσις αἰτία, τούτους μὲν οὐδεὶς ἄν εἴπειεν ἀκρατεῖς.

<sup>72</sup> Aristoteles, *Nikomacheian Ethics* VII. v. 7: τούτων δ' ἔστι μὲν ἔχειν μὲν τινα ἐνίοτε μόνον, μὴ κρατεῖσθαι δέ, ... ἢ πρὸς ἀφροδισίων ἄτοπον ἡδονήν· ἔστι δὲ καὶ κρατεῖσθαι, μὴ μόνον ἔχειν.

far from Aristoteles. A third factor might perhaps be added for the modern situation. It would be the constant bombardment with sexual motifs of the modern imagination through TV, films, and magazines, in which promiscuity and unnatural sexual behaviour become fix ideas in people's minds, many of whom, without this inordinate emphasis on sex, would no doubt have had a normal sexuality.

Female homosexuality, i.e. Lesbianism, as an innate disposition or propensity may be illustrated by reference to Loukianos of Samosata. This author, perhaps antiquity's greatest satirist, flourished just over 100 years after the Apostle Paul, but he never became a Christian. Among his many extant writings he has composed a Dialogue between famous courtesans, called *Dialogues of the Hetairai*. In one of these dialogues a courtesan relates to her friend her strange experience with two Lesbian women, who went to work on her simultaneously. Being uninitiated in this sort of game, she asked in astonishment the more active of the two, whether she was a woman or a man, To this the latter replied:

I was born, Leaina, a woman like the rest of you, but I have the mind, the desire, and everything else of a man.<sup>73</sup>

### At the question

And is the mere desire enough for you?<sup>74</sup>

she replied:

Just give me a chance, Leaina, if you don't believe me, and you'll find that I do not lack anything men have: I have a substitute for the male organ.<sup>75</sup>

It is quite clear that this Lesbian woman understood her lesbianism as an innate disposition, not as something she had put on.

## 7. *Homosexuality as Contrary to Nature*

In another work, dealing with homosexual versus heterosexual love,<sup>76</sup> Loukianos, anticipating modern

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<sup>73</sup> Loukianos, *Dialogues of Courtesans* 291: Οὐκουν, ὧ Λέαινα, ἔφη, ἀλλὰ ἐγεννήθην μὲν ὁμοία ταῖς ἄλλαις ὑμῖν, ἡ γνώμη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα ἀνδρός ἐστί μοι.

<sup>74</sup> Loukianos, *Dialogues of Courtesans* 291: Καὶ ἰκανὴ γοῦν σοι, ἔφην, ἐπιθυμία;

<sup>75</sup> Loukianos, *Dialogues of Courtesans* 291: Πάρεχε γοῦν, ὧ Λέαινα, εἰ ἀπιστεῖς, ἔφη, καὶ γνώση οὐδὲν ἐνδέουσάν με τῶν ἀνδρῶν· ἔχω γάρ τι ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀνδρείου.

<sup>76</sup> This work is sometimes considered as spurious.

claims, counters the argument that homosexual love implies a deep, steady friendship, superior to the love of women and fit only for people who are capable of higher thoughts or deeper feelings. Like other ancients Loukianos was evidently impressed by the fact that in the animal kingdom the male was ruled by its urge for the female, and he could nowhere detect unnatural love among animals.

If every man, [he writes], remains within the ordinances set by Providence, we should be satisfied with sexual intercourse with women, and life would be pure from anything shameful. To be sure, among animals, which cannot falsify anything by a depraved disposition, nature's law is preserved uncorrupted. Lions feel no passion for lions, but in due season sexual love evokes their desire for the female ... But you who wrongly enjoy the reputation for wisdom, you truly evil beasts, you humans, by what novel disease have you come to act lawlessly and been incited to outrage each other?<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Loukianos, *Love Affairs* 22: εἰ δὲ ἐφ' ὧν ἡ πρόνοια θεσμῶν ἔταξεν ἡμᾶς, ἕκαστος ἴδρυτο, ταῖς μετὰ γυναικῶν ὁμιλίαις ἂν ἠκούμεθα καὶ παντὸς ὀνειδούς ὁ βίος ἐκαθάρευεν. ἀμέλει παρὰ τοῖς οὐδὲν ἐκ πονηρᾶς διαθέσεως παραχαράξαι δυναμένοις ζῴοις ἄχραντος ἢ τῆς φύσεως νομοθεσία φυλάττεται· λέοντες οὐκ ἐπιμαίνονται λέουσιν, ἀλλ' ἡ κατὰ καιρὸν Ἀφροδίτη πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ τὴν ὄρεξιν αὐτῶν ἐκκαλεῖται . . . ὑμεῖς δ', ὃ μάλιστα ἐπὶ τῷ φρονεῖν εὐλογούμενοι, θηρίον ὡς ἀληθῶς φαῦλον, ἄνθρωποι, τίνι καινῇ νόσῳ παρανομήσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν κατ' ἀλλήλων ὕβριν ἠρέθισθε;

Finally, further down in the same work Loukianos administers a biting sarcasm against this ‘superior’ kind of love:

Lions, bears, boars do not love others of their own sort, but their urge is directed only to the female ... Why wonder if animals, which have been condemned by nature not to receive from Providence any of the gifts which intellect affords, they have also been deprived of desires for males? Lions do not have a [unnatural] love, since they are no philosophers. Bears have no such love either, since they are ignorant of the beauty that comes from friendship. But for men wisdom coupled with knowledge has after many experiments chosen what is best, and come to the conclusion that love between males is the most stable kind of love.<sup>78</sup>

The above discussion hopefully has clarified the situation in ancient Greece, which constituted the intellectual and spiritual climate of the Early Christian Church in general, and of the Apostle Paul in particular.

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<sup>78</sup> Loukianos, *Love Affairs* 36: Οὐκ ἐρῶσιν, φησίν, ἀλλήλων λέοντες οὐδ’ ἄρκτοι καὶ σύες, ἀλλ’ αὐτῶν ἢ πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ μόνον ὀρμὴ κρατεῖ . . . τί δὴ παράδοξον εἰ ζῶα τῆς φύσεως κατάκριτα μηδὲν ὧν λογισμοὶ παρέχονται παρὰ τῆς προνοίας λαβεῖν ἠτύχηκότα προσαφῆρηται μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ τὰς ἄρρενας ἐπιθυμίας; οὐκ ἐρῶσι λέοντες, οὐδὲ γὰρ φιλοσοφοῦσιν· οὐκ ἐρῶσιν ἄρκτοι, τὸ γὰρ ἐκ φιλίας καλὸν οὐκ ἴσασιν. ἄνθρωποις δ’ ἢ μετ’ ἐπιστήμης φρόνησις ἐκ τοῦ πολλάκις πειρᾶσαι τὸ κάλλιστον ἐλομένη βεβαιοτάτους ἐρώτων ἐνόμισεν τοὺς ἄρρενας.

## 8. *Homosexuality in Rome*

The situation in Rome need not detain us long. It can be exemplified by a few brief references.

In Roman imperial times homosexuality, as also incest,<sup>79</sup> was quite rife at Rome<sup>80</sup> and it was practised by the emperors as well. For example, the emperor Hadrian had the young man Antinoos as his beloved<sup>81</sup>. Nero, the emperor to whom Paul appealed for justice had, according to the Roman author Suetonius<sup>82</sup>, not only relations with many “freeborn boys”, but he even

Castrated the boy Sporus, and actually tried to make a woman of him; and he married him with all the usual ceremonies, including a dowry and a bridal veil, took him to his house attended by a great throng, and treated him as his wife!<sup>83</sup>

As for the homosexual practices of Tiberius, the emperor under whom Jesus was crucified, they were of such a nature as to disgust such pagan Roman authors as

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Suetonius, *Nero*, 5.

<sup>80</sup> According to the *Sibylline Oracles*, III.596-600, homosexual practices occurred among the “Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Latins, and spacious Hellas ... Persians, Galatians and all Asia ...”.

<sup>81</sup> See Pausanias, VIII. 9.7; Dion Kassios, LXIX.11.

<sup>82</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 28-29.

<sup>83</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 28 (Tr. J. C. Rolfe, LCL, London: Heinemann 1979) (Puerum Sporum exsectis testibus etiam in muliebrem naturam

Tacitus<sup>84</sup> and Suetonius<sup>85</sup>. Tiberius's *paiderastia* had, of course, nothing to do with 'philosophy'!<sup>86</sup>

## 9. Conclusions

To conclude this part of the investigation, in ancient Hellas (and Rome) homosexuality was a sufficiently

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transfigurare conatus cum dote et flammeo per sollemnia nuptiarum celeberrimo officio deductum ad se pro uxore habuit).

<sup>84</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, VI. 1: ... saxa rursum et solitudinem maris repetiit, pudore scelerum et libidinum, quibus adeo indomitis exarserat, ut more regio pubem ingenuam stupris polluerat ("... he resorted once more ... in shame at the sins and lusts whose uncontrolled fires had so inflamed him that, in the kingly style, he polluted with his lecheries the children of free-born parents" Tr. J. Jackson, LCL, London: Heinemann, 1969-70).

<sup>85</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 43: Secessu vero Caprensi etiam sellaria excogitavit, sedem arcanarum libidinum, in quam undique conquisiti puellarum et exoletorum greges monstrosique concubitus repertores, quos spintrias appellabat, triplici serie conexi, in vicem incestarent coram ipso, ut aspectu deficientis libidines excitaret ("On retiring to Capri he devised a pleasance for his secret orgies: teams of wantons of both sexes, selected as experts in deviant intercourse and dubbed analists, copulated before him in tripple unions to excite his flagging passions" Tr. J. C. Rolfe, LCL, London Heinemann, 1979). Another story goes: Fertur etiam in sacrificando quondam captus facie ministri acerram praeferentis nequisse abstinere, quin paene vixdum re divina peracta ibidem statim seductum constupraret simulque fratrem eius tibicinem; atque utrique mox, quod mutuo flagitium exprobrarant, crura fregisse ("Once at a sacrifice, attracted by the acolyte's beauty, he lost control of himself and, hardly waiting for the ceremony to end, rushed him off and debauched him and his brother, the flute-player, too; and subsequently, when they complained of the assault, he had their legs broken" Tr. J. C. Rolfe).

<sup>86</sup> In the words of J. Jackson, the editor of Tacitus (LCL), Vol. 4, p.155.: "It remains impossible that all can be true and incredible that all can be false!"

frequent phenomenon<sup>87</sup> and it had many faces: homosexuality among adults, female Lesbianism, common *paiderastia*, 'philosophical' *paiderastia*, homosexuality between consenting adults, as well as homosexuality as an innate disposition. It is therefore wrong when some of its modern advocates seek to differentiate between ancient homosexuality, which they suppose to have been either cultic or crude, and modern homosexuality between consenting adult individuals with inner and enduring bonds. The so-called modern type of homosexuality, described as an innate disposition or propensity and based on devotion and fidelity to as well as mutual fulfilment of the partners was, as the above survey has made clear, only too well known in antiquity.

Many pagan philosophers, scientists and other authors, while recognizing that the causes of certain types of homosexuality were either pathological, that is, an innate disposition on account of arrested development, or the result of abuse in early childhood, nevertheless were of the opinion that homosexual practices of all types of homosexuality were contrary to nature. There was nothing secret about this knowledge; it was common to everybody, which explains how such

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<sup>87</sup> Though perhaps not as frequent as it is today in the Western world.

Jewish authors, as Josephos and Philon and such Christian authors as e.g. Justin Martyr<sup>88</sup> and Klemes of Alexandria<sup>89</sup> were able to criticize the various types of homosexual behaviour.

The Apostle Paul did not live on an island. He had been brought up in an important Hellenistic city, Tarsos, and his constant, daily encounters with his contemporaries had acquainted him with all these forms of homosexuality. To claim that the Apostle Paul alone was ignorant of what went on around him is unconvincing; in fact, it lacks seriousness, and shows a fundamental ignorance of the life and intellectual climate of ancient societies.

In his letters to the Romans and to the Corinthians Paul refers to Lesbian and male homosexual practices, as well as to those who play the passive role and those who play the active role in these relations. It now remains to take up for detailed discussion the New Testament texts.

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<sup>88</sup> E.g. Justin, *Apologia*, I. 21.5; I. 27.1; Tatian, 10.

<sup>89</sup> Klemes of Alexandria, *Paidagogos*, X.

## 6. THE NEW TESTAMENT ATTITUDE TO HOMOSEXUALITY

### *1. The New Testament Terms for 'Homosexual'*

The New Testament texts that explicitly speak of homosexual practices are few. The reason for this is not that the question was regarded as unimportant, but that the whole ethos of the Gospel message made clear the unacceptable character of such practices for Jesus' followers. Moreover, these practices were regarded as a result of heathen perversion on a par with many other characteristics of heathen life, which the believers in Christ were expected to abandon. The texts are three: Rm 1: 24-28; 1 Cor 6:9-10; and 1 Tim 1:9-

10. There are covert allusions to it in 2 Pt 2 and Jud 7-8, but these will not be discussed at length in this study.

Of these three passages only 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10 use terms for 'homosexual'. 1 Cor 6:9 uses *malakos* (μαλακός) and *arsenokoitês* (ἀρσενοκοίτης) while 1 Tim 1:10 uses *arsenokoitês*. Rm 1:26-27 uses no such term, but describes the act itself.

The term *malakos* has a host of different meanings: the basic meaning is 'soft'. It then comes to mean 'gentle', 'mild', 'coward', and in bad sense, 'morally weak' and 'effeminate' or 'catamite'<sup>90</sup>. In the Gospels the term (in neuter) occurs twice of the soft or fine clothing of kings (Mt 11:8 = Lk 7:25). In its sense of 'effeminate', 'catamite' it occurs only at 1 Cor 6:9. The abstract substantive *malakia* (μαλακία) occurs in the New Testament only in the sense of 'sickness' (Mt 4:43; 9:35; 10:1); in its bad sense of 'effeminacy', 'sodomy'<sup>91</sup> it does not occur in the NT.

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. e.g. *Papyrus Hibeh* I. 54, 11 (245 B.C.); Vettius Valens 113,22; Diogenes Laertios, VII.173. Cf. A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Greco-Roman World*, tr. L. R- M. Strachan (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), pp. Grand Rapids 1965, sid. 316-17.

<sup>91</sup> Philon, *Special Laws*, III, 39f.; Ploutarchos, *Gracchus*, 4; in Chrysostom († 407 A.D.) *On Fasting* I. 1904 c the term occurs of female masturbation. The verb *malakizomai* occurs in Kyrillos 1108C (A.D. IV) in the bad sense of "to be used as a catamite" (In modern Greek this verb, as also its substantive *malakia*, is used especially of male (sometimes female) masturbation).

The term *arsenokoitês* (ἀρσενοκοίτης) consists of *arsen* (ἀρσεν-, genitive of Ionic ἄρσῆν = Attic ἄρρην, genitive ἄρρεν-) ‘male’ and *koitê* (κοίτη) ‘bed’, and signifies ‘one who goes to bed with a male’. This term does not occur in the LXX. However, that version translates the relevant words in Lev 18:22 (similarly 20:13) “do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman” with *arsenos koitên* (ἄρσενος κοίτην), i.e. ‘the bed of a male’), which gives the noun *arsenokoitês* or *arrenokoitês* (ἀρρενοκοίτης). The word is a late formation, occurring rarely in Greek literature<sup>92</sup>. A large number of similar words formed from the same two elements or the element *arsên-* (or *arrên-*) and some other element occur sparingly in Greek literature, but they are almost all of them from Christian times<sup>93</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> *Epigrammata adespota* in *Anthologia Palatina* IX, 686 (see *The Greek Anthology*, ed. W.R. Paton, (LCL) Vol. III, p. 380. Another form is *arrenokoites*. In the *Sibylline Oracles* II.73 the verb is used.

<sup>93</sup> E.g. ἀρσενοκοιτία (*arsenokoitia*) “sodomy”, “homosexuality” Aristeides, *Apologia*, XII.7; XVII.2; Klemes of Alex., *Paidagogos*, II. 10 (ἄρρενα ... κοίτην); Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, 25 (ἔρωτας ἀρσένων); ἀρσενοκοιτέω (*arsenokoiteō*) (and ἀρρενοκοιτέω, *arrenokoiteō*) “to lie with a male” *Sibylline Oracles*, II. 73; *arsenomiktês* “one who has sexual intercourse with males” Manethon (III B.C.), IV.590; ἀρσενομιξία (*arsenomixia*) (and ἀρρενομιξία, *arrenomixia*) “sexual intercourse with males” Chrysostomos VI, 1,553; Sextos Empeirikos, *Pyrrhonism*, I.152; III.199; ἀρσενοβάτης (*arsenobatês*) (and ἀρρενοβάτης, *arrenobatês*) “one who mounts males” Hesychios *Lexicon s.v. παιδοπίπας* (*paidopipas*); ἀρρενοβασία (*arrenobasia*) “mounting of males” Theophilos, *Autolykos*, III. 6; ἀρρενογαμέω (*arrenogameō*) “to fuck males” *Scholium* on Aristoteles, *Ethica Nicomacheia*, 428,16; ἀρρενομανής (*arrenomanês*) “one who has a sexual mania for males” *Catalogus Codicum*

It is thus obvious that *malakos* is the passive while *arsenokoitês* is the active homosexual.

## 2. *Romans 1:24-28*

It has sometimes been supposed that the dark picture that Paul paints of heathenism in these verses is owing to his reaction against these practices which he must have met during his missionary labours at Corinth, and that in his description he makes sweeping, one-sided statements.

It may be that in the port city of Corinth Paul came face to face with common female prostitution. Some of these prostitutes may in fact have been converted to the gospel, and may even have given him some trouble in the order and discipline of Church life, either by personal involvement or connections with male members of the Church.

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*Astrologorum* VIII (II). 43; Hephestion *Astrologos* I.1 (IV A.D.); ἀρρενομανία (*arrenomania*) "sexual mania for males" late formation (Δ. Δημητράκου, *Μέγα Λεξικόν* s.v.); ἀρρενοπίπης (*arrenopipês*) "one who watches males with lascivious eyes" Hesychios, *Lexicon*, s.v.; Eustathios 827, 30 (XII A.D.); ἀρρενοφθορία (*arrenophthoria*) "debauchery of males" *Scholion* on Loukianos, *Love Affairs* 36; παιδοφθορία (*paedophthoria*) "debauchery of boys" Klemes of Alex., *Paedagogos*, II.10; ἀνδροβάτης (*androbates*) "one who mounts men" Aristeides, *Apologia*, IX,9; Hesychios, *Lexicon*, sv. παιδοπίπας (*paidopipas*).

But if Paul was influenced by such events at all, this must have been only marginal. A careful look at Romans ch. 1 leaves no doubt that Paul is not concerned with describing any local practices, but in setting forth by way of principle humanity's revolt against God's will, law, and order.

The verses that are concerned with homosexuality are vv. 24-28. To interpret them correctly we need to pay special attention to their context, i.e. vv. 16-23. Vv. 16-17 give the theme of the whole letter<sup>94</sup>:

I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it is God's power (or, effective working) unto salvation for everyone who believes. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith

The theme of Romans is God's salvation based on faith in Christ. The salvation spoken of here stands in

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<sup>94</sup> Similarly C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. I, 1975, 87; J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT), 1968, 26; C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (BNTC), 27; J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (WBC), Vol. I, 1988, 46. The words for 'righteousness' with its Hebrew background in תְּדָאָה, 'tsedaka', comes very close to being the equivalent of 'salvation' (σωτηρία) in verse 16. The Hebrew *tsedakah* often bears this sense in the OT, as in e.g. Isa 42:6; 45:13; 51:6,8 (see C. R. North, *The Second Isaiah*, Oxford 1964, 111f, 118, 152, 166) and Ps 24:5; 31:1; 98:2; 143:11 (see H. J. Krause, *Psalmen* (BKAT), Neukirchen 1978, Vol. I, 139; Vol. II, 847). Cf. also Barrett, *Romans*, 29f.

close connection with the next verse as the causal/explanatory particle 'because', 'for' (γάρ) indicates:

For/because the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness<sup>95</sup>

Here we are concerned with a double revelation; the revelation of God's wrath which comes down from heaven and which is directed against every form of wickedness, and the special revelation in the gospel which entails a salvation based on faith. The latter revelation, in the gospel, is God's way out for mankind on account of the former revelation, God's wrath from heaven.

Vv. 19-23 develop the second part of vs. 18: the way people hold the truth of God in unrighteousness. We are told that God has already revealed to men what could be known of Him and of his attributes. These are clearly perceptible through the works of creation. By means of creation man has had the possibility to obtain a certain knowledge about the eternal power and divine majesty of God. But instead of glorifying him and thanking him,

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<sup>95</sup> Similarly taken by Cranfield, *Romans I*, 106f. and Dunn, *Romans I*, 54f.

humans “became vain in their thoughts and their foolish minds [or intellects] were filled with darkness. Claiming to have become wise they actually became fools”. This claim to wisdom undoubtedly refers to all human achievement: intellectual wisdom or philosophy, as well as to scientific invention or progress. These words have not lost their relevance today, when the great scientific progress of our time has led modern man to overestimate his cultural achievements and to assume an arrogant stance towards the biblical witness.

For Paul nothing shows more clearly the depravity to which humanity has sunk than its conceptions and presentations of the incorruptible God in the form—note the downgrade climax! —“of mortal men and women, of birds, of four-footed animals, and of reptiles”!<sup>96</sup> It is against this background of mankind’s rejection of God that Paul places the phenomenon of homosexuality. The knowledge that some forms of homosexual living were explained as ideal, as involving stable relationships, and as expressions of an innate disposition, could not hide for Paul the fact that all homosexual practices were

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<sup>96</sup> The Greek word translated ‘reptiles’ *herpeta* (ἑρπετά) means ‘creeping [animals]’. From this root (the verb ἔρπω, (*herpo*) ‘to creep’) we get the Latin *serpens* (verb *serpo*; ‘to creep’; the Greek aspirate (‘h’) is sometimes rendered by Latin ‘s’, so in this case; at other times by ‘v’ as ἔσπερος = *vesper*, ‘evening prayer’) and from this we get the English ‘serpent’. Here an allusion to the serpent’s deceit in Paradise is not improbable.

unnatural, unhealthy and contrary to God's creative intention.

In vs. 24 Paul writes:

Therefore according to their hearts' desires God gave them over to impurity so that they would dishonour their bodies with one another.

Here Paul introduces his statement with the causal particle 'Therefore' (διό), in order to underline that this dishonouring of their bodies by one another constitutes a part of "the wrath of God which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness" (vs. 18). As Cranfield, one of the finest modern commentators on *Romans* expresses it, "διό ['on account of this'] indicates that what is related in this verse was God's response to the perverseness of men just described in vv. 22-23".<sup>97</sup> The fact that the important thrice repeated term 'gave them over' (παρέδωκεν) occurs with God as subject indicates that this is a retributive act of God; however, not in the sense of final condemnation, but in order that they might come to their senses, repent and turn to Him for help.<sup>98</sup> In other words, the homosexual practices that Paul is speaking of are a part of the divine judgement

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<sup>97</sup> Cranfield, *Romans* I, 120

<sup>98</sup> See Cranfield, *Romans* I, 121.

because men have rejected God and have “worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (vs. 25). The term ‘uncleanness’ has no cultic connotation, but a clear moral significance, especially sexual immorality.<sup>99</sup> This places the problem of homosexuality in its true biblical perspective.

Vs. 24 referred to homosexuality only in a general way as a ‘dishonouring of their bodies’. In vv. 26-28 Paul takes up specifically female Lesbianism and male homosexuality:

Because of this God gave them over to dishonouring passions. Even their females exchanged the natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the males also abandoned natural relations with women [females] and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men [males] committed the indecent act with other men [males], and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. And since they did not seek to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind to do what is unlawful.

We may note the following details:

1. The first expression of importance in these three verses is the phrase “Because of this” (διὰ τοῦτο). This

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. *Wisdom* 2:16; *1 Esdras* 1:42; *1 Enoch* 10:11; *Testament of Judah* 14-15. See also Philon, *Allegorical Interpretation* III,139.

phrase shows that the lesbianism and male homosexuality of which Paul is about to speak, are not an unrelated or independent theme of which he just came to think, but an integral and essential part of what he discussed in vv. 18-25, man's fall and alienation from God. It is abundantly clear, too, that in the preceding section of this chapter Paul does not primarily think of the people of his own time, but of mankind's whole history, ever since the fall of Adam. This leads to the second crucial expression of this text.

2. The expression "God gave them over" (παρέδωκεν) occurs no less than three times which implies that this is a grave warning: at vs. 24: "Therefore God gave them over to the lusts of their hearts to sexual impurity for the dishonouring of their bodies with one another", which is a covert allusion to illicit sexual practices; at vs. 26: "Because of this God gave them over to dishonouring passions" taking up in particular Lesbianism and male homosexuality, and at vs. 28: "Since they did not seek to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind to do what is unlawful", exemplifying with such things as "hatred, murder, ... divers inventions of evil things", etc. This shows, that Lesbianism and male homosexuality are for Paul only two—albeit grave—examples of what rejection of God implies. At

the same time they form a kind of retribution, which according to God's law is inexorable.

3. The third expression of interest is that God gave them over to "dishonouring passions" (πάθη ἀτιμίας). The term that is translated with 'passions' (πάθος) has given us such words as 'pathos', 'pathology', 'pathetic', and in its Latin equivalent *passio*, has entered English in the form of 'passion'. The Meaning is 'suffering', which underscores the fact that such acts involve a suffering. The individual concerned is passive, is acted upon, and like a slave cannot but obey his brutal master, sin. Jesus said: "every one who commits sin is the slave of sin" (Jn 8:34).<sup>100</sup> This applies as much to the passive as to the active homosexual. The word 'dishonouring' is, of course, evaluative, characterizing these passions as dishonourable. As we saw above, these practices were regarded as dishonourable not only by Christians but also by many pagans.

4. And now Paul takes up explicitly female homosexuality. "For their females" (θήλειαι) he says, "exchanged the natural use to that which is against nature". He does the same thing in vs. 27 when speaking of male homosexuality: "Similarly their males (ἄρσενες)

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<sup>100</sup> The Greek word for 'passions' is the same word as the one used of Jesus' passion or sufferings.

left the natural use of the female ...” By using ‘females’ rather than ‘women’ and ‘males’ rather than ‘men’ Paul draws attention to their sexuality, in order to thus emphasize the wrong use of their organs.

5. The expression ‘natural use’ (φυσικὴν χρῆσιν) was in ancient times an established way of speaking of ‘natural intercourse’. The same idea could be expressed in another way, namely, ‘according to nature’ (κατὰ φύσιν). The expression ‘contrary to nature’ (παρὰ φύσιν)<sup>101</sup>,—often used in Stoic philosophy<sup>102</sup>—signified that which was against the Creator’s intention, and hence not in harmony with how he had created the various organs.<sup>103</sup> In other words, the term signifies something abnormal.<sup>104</sup> Such expressions occur frequently in such Jewish authors as Philon<sup>105</sup> and Josephos<sup>106</sup>, as well as in pagan Greek authors<sup>107</sup>.

<sup>101</sup> See the informative article φύσις etc. by H. Köster, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), Vol. IX, 251-277; on Paul specifically pp. 271-275.

<sup>102</sup> E.g. Chrysippos, *Frg.*, 68.5; 550.5; 719.5; 937.5; 140.2; 421.2; Poseidonios, *Frg.* 85.80, 91; 428.6; 441f.6; Epiktetos, *Dissertations*, I. 11.11; 11.18; 18.9; II.5.7; 5.24; 13.11; III.12.1; 16.15; 24.1; IV.6.11; *Manual* II.1, 2, XLVIII.3.

<sup>103</sup> With regards to rabbinic equivalents to κατὰ φύσιν and παρὰ φύσιν, see H. Strack-P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, (München, rp. 1986), Vol. III. 68-74.

<sup>104</sup> Jfr. Diodoros of Sicily, XXXII. xi.1, παρὰ φύσιν ὁμιλία (‘unnatural intercourse’).

<sup>105</sup> Cf. e.g. Philon, *Special Laws* II. 50: μίξεις ἀθέσμους ... παιδεραστῶν καὶ βιαζόμενος τὸν ἄρρενα τῆς φύσεως χαρακτῆρα παρακόπτειν καὶ μεταβάλλειν εἰς γυναικόμορφον, “unlawful intercourse ... acting as a paiderast and

Thus, commenting on the acts of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha (Gen 19:5ff.), Philon says: “ ... also men mounted males without respect for the sex nature which the active partner shares with the passive (κοινήν φύσιν)”.<sup>108</sup> In another passage, too long to reproduce here, Philon uses exactly the same expression as Paul does, when he speaks of homosexual relations as being ‘contrary to nature’ (παρὰ φύσιν)<sup>109</sup>.

6. One more interesting term in verse 26 is the term ‘exchanged’. This is a composite verb, and it occurs in vv. 25 and 26. The simple verb ‘changed’ (ἠλλάξαν) occurs in verse 23, where it is said that “they ‘changed’ (i.e. they downgraded) the glory of the invisible God to

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violating the naturally masculine type, debasing it and turning it to a feminine form”; III. 39: τὴν παρὰ φύσιν ἡδονήν, “the pleasure that is contrary to nature”.

<sup>106</sup> See e.g. 2 (*Slavonic*) *Enoch* 10:4; *Testament of Naphthali*, III.4f.; Josephos, *Against Apion*, II.273, 275.

<sup>107</sup> E.g. Platon, *Laws*, 636: ἐννοητέον ὅτι τῇ θηλείᾳ καὶ τῇ τῶν ἀρρένων φύσει εἰς κοινωνίαν ἰούση τῆς γεννήσεως ἢ περὶ ταῦτα ἡδονὴ κατὰ φύσιν ἀποδεδόσθαι δοκεῖ, ἀρρένων δὲ πρὸς ἄρρενας ἢ θηλείων πρὸς θηλείας παρὰ φύσιν καὶ τῶν πρώτων τὸ τόλμημ’ εἶναι δι’ ἀκράτειαν (“It is quite clear that when a man and a woman come together for reproduction, it gives them a pleasure that is according to nature, while the union between men (males) or between women (females) is contrary to nature. This is a shameful act of the first order since it involves incontinence”). Cf. also Loukianos, *Love Affairs* 19: καὶ μήτε τὸ θῆλυ παρὰ φύσιν ἀρρενοῦσθαι μήτε τᾶρρεν’ ἀπρεπῶς μαλακίζεσθαι (“Neither should women (females) contrary to nature behave like men, nor should men (males) disreputably become feminized”).

<sup>108</sup> Philon, *Abraham*, 135: ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄνδρες ὄντες ἄρρεσιν ἐπιβαίνοντες, τὴν κοινήν πρὸς τοὺς πάσχοντας οἱ δρῶντες φύσιν οὐκ αἰδούμενοι.

one of the likeness of the image of mortal man, birds”, etc. In vs. 25 men ‘exchanged’ (μετήλλαξαν) the truth of God for a lie, i.e. they replaced truth with a lie. And in vs, 26 women ‘exchanged’ (μετήλλαξαν) natural intercourse for that which is against nature, i.e. they stopped using their sex organs in the way they were intended to be used, and began, instead, using them in a deviant way.

7. In verse 27 Paul addresses male homosexuality. “Similarly, the males (οἱ ἄρσενες) abandoned natural intercourse with the females (θηλείας), and were inflamed with lust for one another” (ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους). In 1 Cor. 7:9, writing to unmarried people, Paul advises those who cannot live in abstinence to marry, because “it is better to marry than *to burn* with passion” (πυροῦσθαι). This ‘*burning* with passion’, which could also be rendered with ‘to be heated’, is used of a legitimate sexual desire that is unfulfilled.<sup>110</sup> In Rom 1:27 Paul uses an entirely different word (ἐξεκαύθησαν), which implies the breaking out of a

<sup>109</sup> Philon, *Special Laws*, III. vii-ix (39ff.). For other passages in Paul using ‘nature’, see e.g. Rom 2:14; 11:21, 24; Gal 2:15; 4:8;

<sup>110</sup> On this issue see C. C. Caragounis, “‘Fornication’ and ‘Concession’? Interpreting 1 Cor 7,1-7” in R. Bieringer (ed.), *The Corinthian Correspondence* (BETL 125), Leuven 1996, 543-559, esp. 548-552 and C. C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament. Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (WUNT 167), Tübingen: Mohr 2004, corrected rp. paper-

fire and devouring whatever is in the way. The passive form in this verb underscores the idea that the actors here are under the control of this passion. In other words, this term has a more violent significance, and aptly describes the unnatural character of the action.

8. In the clause “males committed the shameful act with males”, (ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι) the expression ‘shameful act’ represents a Greek word meaning something ‘indecent’, ‘repulsive’, ‘shocking’<sup>111</sup>. Already in Lev 18:7-18<sup>112</sup> the word was used as a euphemism for the sexual organs (Hebrew עֲרֻוָּה, ‘*erva*’)<sup>113</sup>.

9. The next clause is: “They received within themselves the just punishment for their perversion” (καὶ τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν ἣν ἔδει τῆς πλάνης αὐτῶν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀπολαμβάνοντες). Hereby Paul summarizes the net result. The term translated ‘punishment’ basically means ‘reward’. But what is given as ‘reward’ is actually a

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back: Baker Academic, 2007, blz. 299-316.

<sup>111</sup> The verb *aschêmonô* (ἀσχημονῶ), corresponding to the substantive *aschêmosynê* (ἀσχημοσύνη), used here, occurs in e.g. Loukianos, *Love Affairs* 28, in a passage that strongly decries homosexual practices.

<sup>112</sup> The word occurs also in Lev 20:11,17,19-21.

<sup>113</sup> See L. Koehler – W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, Vol. II 1995, p. 882.

retributive punishment<sup>114</sup>. This does not exclude the idea of final punishment, but merely indicates that the perpetration of such acts already at the present time carries with it its own punishment. In this way Paul effectively rounds up his thoughts in this entire section by placing the reward they received within the sphere of the wrath of God, exemplified in the thrice repeated phrase “Therefore God gave them over” (in vv. 24, 26 and 28).

10. Finally, the way in which Paul expresses himself and the words he uses in vs. 27 show that he is not thinking in the first place of (cultic) prostitution, or of homosexuality between unequal partners, but rather of homosexuality between consenting adults, in other words, he is thinking of an ideal form of homosexuality. First, we have the word *orexis* (ὄρεξις) whose basic meaning is ‘appetite’, ‘craving’ i.e. an inner longing or yearning for something. Second, the word ‘one another’ in the clause “men were inflamed with an inner appetite, a craving or a deep longing for one another” implies that these activities were the free choice of both partners. And third, both of the partners are said to “be committing the indecent act and receiving or rather

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. J. D.G. Dunn, *Romans* (Word Biblical Commentary, Dallas: Word Books, 1988), Bd.1, p. 65: “The implication is that unnatural sexual practice is its own penalty”.

‘enjoying’<sup>115</sup> in themselves the reward [i.e. the just punishment] of their perversion”. It is thus obvious that Paul is thinking here of consenting adults, who enter this relationship by their own free choice, not of a relation into which one of the partners is drawn against his will.

### 3. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Or do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not deceive yourselves: neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers, nor passive homosexuals, nor active homosexuals nor thieves nor

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<sup>115</sup> The verb *apolambano* (ἀπολαμβάνω) normally means ‘to receive’, ‘to receive back’, so e.g. in Lk 6:34; 15:27; Col 3:24. However, because of its nearness to *apalaio* (ἀπολαύω), ‘to enjoy’, and its substantive *apolausis* (ἀπόλαυσις), ‘enjoyment’, this verb in time came to have the sense of ‘to enjoy’ (It should be noted here that in the current pronunciation the two verbs were closer than they appear in the above transliteration: ἀπολαμβάνω was pronounced as *apolamvano*, and ἀπολαύω was pronounced as *apolavo*, while in certain tense forms of this verb the pronunciation coincided). We see such a meaning already in Lk 16:25, where the point is that the rich man has enjoyed (not merely received) in his life-time the good things of this life. In Rom 1:27 *apolambanontes* (ἀπολαμβάνοντες) would imply that the partners ‘enjoyed’ (not merely received) whatever they got out of their homosexual activities. That in Paul’s eyes this was a ‘just punishment for their perversion’ and nothing else is beside the point. The important thing is how they looked upon it. Chrysostom, *Romans, Homily 5*, understands this verb similarly: εἰ δὲ οὐκ αἰσθάνονται, ἀλλ’ ἡδονται, μὴ θαυμάσης ... γελῶσι καὶ ἐντροφῶσι τοῖς γινομένοις (“But if they do not feel, but are enjoying it, do not wonder ...they laugh and delight in what is being done”). The meaning of the above terms is discussed in detail in C. C. Caragounis, *The Development of*

greedy nor drunkards, nor abusers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God

This text is more straight-forward than the Romans text and will, therefore, be treated more briefly. The context for this text is ch. 5 and the first part of ch. 6.

According to ch. 5 one of the members of the Corinthian Church lived in an incestuous union with his father's wife. According to ch. 6 there occurred law suits between members of the Church, who thus sought the arbitration of unbelievers, i.e. heathen courts. Paul's response to both of these challenges to Christian purity and honor is clear and definite. The actions of the individuals concerned have brought dishonor on the name of Christ, while the failure of the Church to correct these individuals, implies that the whole Church has been contaminated.

For the first problem, that of incest, Paul prescribes separation from fellowship with the Church. The details of what exactly this means in practice are unclear, but what is crystal clear is the objective of the punishment: "that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord". In other words, the incestuous person was in danger of losing his eternal salvation unless he repented.

These two themes give Paul the occasion to administer to the Corinthian Christians a very sharp rebuke, and then to go on and warn them that sins like these will exclude their practitioners from the Kingdom of God. Among those who will be excluded are passive and active homosexuals who practise and persist in practising such acts.<sup>116</sup>

One important point here is that this time Paul distinguishes between the two roles, that of the passive (*μαλακός*), and that of the active homosexual (*ἀρσενοκοίτης*), although both of them, according to Paul, are equally guilty.

As if he wanted to underscore solemnly the consequences of such acts by the Jewish custom of judicially establishing a matter by two or three witnesses, he plays the part of a witness twice by solemnly averring once at the beginning and once at the end, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

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*Transmission*, Tübingen: Mohr, 2004, pp. 279-91 (rev. pb. ed. Baker 2007).

<sup>116</sup> Reference may here be made also to the allusions in 2 Pt 2:6-7 and Jude vs. 7. In the former passage Sodom (from which we get the word 'sodomite') and Gomorrah, whose homosexual acts drew, according to Gen 19, the judgement of God, are here presented as an example of God's judgement on future practitioners of such acts: "He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly". Similarly, Jude vs. 7 refers to the unnatural sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and says that "they were punished by eternal fire and are set forth as a warning".

Finally, vs. 11 is of great significance. Paul writes expressly that some of the Corinthian Christians had been idolaters, thieves, passive and active homosexuals, etc.:

But [he says], you were washed clean from these things [that is the force of ἀπελούσασθε], you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is clear from the above that the Apostle Paul and the Early Church expected people who turned to faith in Christ to break all connections with their past life of sin.

#### *4.1 Timothy 1:9-10*

Knowing this that the law is not made for the righteous, but for the lawless, the rebels, the ungodly, the sinful, the unholy, the profaners, those who kill their father and mother, murderers, fornicators, (active) homosexuals, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and for whatever else that is contrary to sound doctrine

This text, too, is simple and will be treated briefly. The point of departure is the law and its function. In the New Testament the term 'law' has a number of different usages, such as the 'ethical law', the 'ritual law', the

‘Mosaic law’, the ‘law of the husband’,<sup>117</sup> etc. Sometimes by ‘law’ reference is made to any human law (including heathen law-systems), as is almost certainly the case in Rom 7:1, while most of the time it refers to the Mosaic law. In our passage ‘law’ could refer to any legislation whether pagan or Jewish as a system of norms and rules which lays down what is lawful and what is unlawful. In Israelite society the Mosaic law functioned in the same way as all other law-systems in their respective societies.

All the vices in this list except one or two like homosexuality, which were not condemned uniformly by all law-systems, came under the sway of both Gentile and Jewish law. However, in view of the fact that homosexuality was not everywhere criminalized as well as the detail in vs. 7 that the persons here opposed aspired to becoming teachers of the law, it is preferable to understand ‘law’ primarily of the Mosaic law, though a secondary reference to law in general should not be ruled out.

The author then is saying that the law is against those who practise the vices enumerated here, among which homosexuality is included. More interesting than this obvious statement, however, is the final clause of vs. 10: “and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine” (τῆ

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<sup>117</sup> Rom 7:2.

ὕγιαινούση διδασκαλία ἀντίκειται). Here the ordinances of the law are understood as ‘sound teaching’,—the term ‘sound’ is typical of the Pastoral letters—and the vices listed are understood as unsound, unhealthy, in other words, they are sick.

From the Christian point of view, therefore, all these vices, and hence homosexuality, too, with which we are concerned here, were spiritually unhealthy practices.

Finally, a question that has surfaced from time to time concerns the question of how Jesus related to homosexuality.

### *5. Jesus and Homosexuality*

From time to time the insinuation has been made that Jesus was involved in an unnatural relation. Since there is no other indication in the New Testament for such a relation than the fact that the Gospel of John speaks of a certain Disciple whom Jesus loved, we need to look more closely into this expression. The expression ‘The disciple whom Jesus loved’ occurs 5 times in John: at 13:23, 19:26, 20:2; 21:7 and 21:20. Four of these expressions use the verb *agapō* (ἀγαπῶ), ‘to love’, from whose root we get the substantive *agapē* (ἀγάπη). One instance,

20:2, uses a different verb, *philô* (φιλω), which means ‘to love’, ‘to like’, ‘to be friendly’, but also in certain contexts ‘to kiss’,—used in the NT, for example, of Judas’ kiss when he betrayed Jesus in Gethsemane.

The verb *agapô* occurs sparingly in ancient Greek literature. Its significance is ‘to love’, ‘to like’, ‘to feel (for somebody/something)’. It appears never to occur in Greek literature with the sense of sexual love. That meaning was reserved for the verb *erô* (ἐρω), and its substantive *erôs* (ἔρως). Sexual love was also expressed by the phrase ‘the things of Aphrodite’ (τὰ Ἀφροδίσια). Homosexual love, as we have already seen, was indicated by the expression *ta paidika* (τὰ παιδικὰ, ‘relations with boys’, *paiderastia*) or through a circumlocutionary phrase. None of these expressions occur in the NT.

The verb *agapô* occurs over 250 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the so-called Septuagint (LXX). It occurs mostly of God’s love or of man’s love of God’s law, commandments, etc. Since the classical verb *erô* was unusable in Biblical contexts, owing to its heathen connections (cf. for example, the god Eros, who lay behind all sexual love), it was natural that *agapô* should do duty also for expressing love between a man and a woman (within the scheme of

God's creation order). Thus, in a few instances it occurs with just that sense.

The substantive *agapê* does not occur in ancient Greek literature, its earliest uses appear to be in the Septuagint. There it occurs 19 times, of which 11 times in the Song of Songs, where, understandably, it refers to the love between a man and a woman.

In view of the sexual denotations of *erôs* ('sexual love') and *erô* ('to love [sexually]') (from *Erôs*, the god of love), these words could not be used in the NT, where the meaning is always brought into relation with the divine love for man or of man's love for God. Even the injunction "Husbands, love your wives" in Eph 5:25, does not really have sexual overtones, since it is brought within the sphere of divine love in the context of honorable Christian marriage. Thus, it was that the term *agapê* became really a Christian concept, and has basically remained that ever since.<sup>118</sup>

Now of the 140 occurrences of *agapô* in the NT, the term occurs some 34 times in Paul and 71 times in the Johannine writings. We may then say that John's writings are saturated with the thought of Christian

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<sup>118</sup> In Modern Greek both *erôs* (ἔρως) and *agapê* (ἀγάπη) may be used of sexual love, but there is this distinction between them, that whereas *erôs* is exclusively used of sexual love, *agapê* has all the other uses as well. Sometimes *erôs* can also be used of esthetic matters, as philosophical, artistic, etc.

love. Love is the new sphere within which human existence has been drawn by the self-revelation of God in Christ. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves the Father and obeys Him. Into their eternal, intimate, divine relationship they have now drawn mankind. Humans, too, are given the possibility to be freed from the fetters of egoistic self-love and to begin learning to love as they are loved.

In this atmosphere of self-giving love John speaks of Jesus' love to various people and groups of people. The very same verb and in the very same form (imperfect indicative) that is used of Jesus' love to the so-called Beloved Disciple, is also used at 11:5, which says that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus". Are we to think here that Jesus had a sexual relation with Martha, an incestuous relation with her sister Maria, and a homosexual relation with their brother Lazaros? The very same verbal form is again used at 13:1, where referring to all of his disciples we read: "Jesus having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the end". Are we to interpret this saying, too, in a homosexual way? And again the very same form is used at Mk 10:21, where we read that Jesus loved a rich, religious, promising young man, whom he had just met, because he impressed him by his godliness, and he said

to him "One thing you need. Go, sell all that you have ... and come and follow me!"

Not only is the Greek term used about Jesus' love to the Beloved Disciple free from all homosexual connotations, but since exactly the same expression is used about the other groups of people whom Jesus loved, it proves the absurd character of such insinuations.

But why is this disciple, who traditionally has been identified with John, the Apostle, singled out from the rest? The suggestions are many. Perhaps the most satisfactory explanation is that John's years-long meditation on the love of God and his deep sense of his own unworthiness for such divine love, induced him to refer to himself out of humility, not by name, but as the Disciple whom Jesus loved, in other words, the unworthy disciple to whom Jesus, the Son of God, had shown his gracious and merciful love. Certainly the contents of the Gospel and his first letter are entirely in line with such an understanding of the mind-set of the Apostle John.

## 7. DEEP, GENUINE FRIENDSHIP WITHOUT SEXUAL OVERTONES

**N**ow a word about deep, genuine friendship. Jesus said to his disciples: “I have called you ‘My friends’ because I have confided in you all that I have heard from my Father” (Jn 15:15). And again he said: “Greater love has no one than this, that one lays down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:139). History gives many examples of deep, genuine friendship. But we must not confuse true friendship and true love with sex. These are very different things.

Sometimes love, a spiritual activity, which in its nature is always self-giving, is confused with sex, a

physical activity, which in its nature is self-gratifying.<sup>119</sup> In itself sex has nothing to do with love, as sex with prostitutes proves. On account of this confusion, often expressions for genuine, pure love and devotion (e.g. among the peoples around the Mediterranean and the Middle East) have been misunderstood for homosexual inclinations or relations, as for example, the friendship between David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1-4; 23:16-18; 2 Sam 1: 25-27).

Such sexual connotations are not present in the Greek verbs *agapô* or *philô*. In Hellas and in Palestine there occurred cases of true, genuine love and devotion between men as well as between women without being tinged by unnatural passions. True friendship means one soul in two bodies, but in two bodies that keep apart!

The inability to keep love separate from sex partly explains the present time's exaggerated talk about homosexuality. This happens partly by misinterpreting every manifestation of deeper friendship as though it implied a homosexual disposition or even a homosexual relation, and partly by supplying through the pressure

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<sup>119</sup> This is not to be understood as a demeaning of sex as such. Sex is a gift of God when it takes place within the parameters that God has established, marriage!

of opinion those capable of such deeper friendship with the model after which to interpret their sexuality.

It can even be imagined that there are cases today in which a man feels a deeper friendship, an inner fellowship with another man (or a woman with another woman), but misinterpret their own feelings and draw the conclusion that they must have a homosexual disposition. In this way some of them open themselves to unworthy passions on account of the overemphasized sexual character attributed to such friendships. They simply cannot distinguish between genuine friendship and sex.

But then there are also those who claim that in homosexual activities they find a friendship that is deep and genuine. These need to be challenged with the great difference between true, pure, decent love and this degrading passion. Why can they not keep their deep friendship on its spiritual level, where friendship properly belongs, without outraging each other with unbecoming acts, which according to the New Testament do not lead to eternal life?

When we speak of the homosexual disposition we must bear in mind that this is not the only disposition that humans may be subject to. Though not in all its aspects comparable, *kleptomania* may be used here as a

convenient example of another disposition. The point is that the kleptomaniac steals not because of need, but because of an inner urge. He would, therefore, claim that stealing is in his nature; he cannot help it. In other words, the kleptomaniac experiences his kleptomania in a similar way as the homosexual experiences his homosexuality: as an innate propensity.

The interesting thing here is that many of those who perceive themselves as having the homosexual disposition, abstain totally from practising it. In other words, these persons bear a clear witness to the fact that they can, indeed, control their homosexual disposition. And it is precisely because dispositions can be controlled that society holds the kleptomaniac responsible for his thefts. The question, then, is, should not the same standard be applied to the homosexuals as well—since they (i.e., many of them) have proved that it is possible to control themselves, abstaining altogether from such practices? Should not society expect all homosexuals to practise abstinence?

It may be urged that kleptomania is defined as a pathological condition, whereas homosexuality is not, and therefore, they should not be compared. Granted. But here they are not being compared as conditions but only on the level of disposition, whatever be the ultimate

causes of each. However, precisely the fact that kleptomania is defined as “a persistent neurotic impulse to steal esp. without economic motive in which the object stolen is usu. believed to have symbolic significance to the kleptomaniac”,<sup>120</sup> ought to have been an added reason for regarding the kleptomaniac a victim of his pathological condition, and therefore, for not holding him responsible for his acts.

Now, it has become quite obvious from the abstaining homosexuals themselves, that homosexuality is a disposition that can be controlled, as Aristoteles expressed it (“having a natural disposition and not yielding to it”<sup>121</sup>). It is strange, therefore, that while society holds the kleptomaniac responsible, in the case of practising homosexuals, makes no demands on restraint and absolves them of all responsibility, although there do not seem to be any sound grounds, whatsoever, philosophical or rational, for the different treatment.

Perhaps the reason why the kleptomaniac is held responsible by society but not the homosexual, is because the kleptomaniac is considered as harming society by his thefts, whereas the actions of consenting adult homosexuals are considered as not harming

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<sup>120</sup> Webster's *Third World International Dictionary*, *ad. loc.*

<sup>121</sup> Aristoteles, *Nikomacheian Ethics* VII. v. 7: τούτων δ' ἔστι μὲν ἔχειν μὲν τινα ἐνίστε μόνον, μὴ κρατεῖσθαι δέ.

anybody. This quite dubious reasoning implies that the different treatment accorded by society to the two propensities is not made at the level of the propensities as such, but at the level of the outcome of the propensities. However, the moral exoneration of the homosexual takes place at the level of the propensity. It is argued that the homosexual is born that way; he cannot help it; homosexuality is his nature; therefore homosexuality cannot be unnatural or wrong. The kleptomaniac, however, is not exonerated in the same way, in spite of the fact that his condition is understood as a *pathological condition*: “a persistent neurotic impulse”, that is, in his case it seems to be established that he is really a victim.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> I hope it is quite plain from the above reasoning that my discussion at this point is neither a pleading to exonerate the kleptomaniac nor a pleading to criminalize homosexuality. It is simply a reasoning that tries to show that authorities and society show two different standards to these propensities, although from the point of view of the propensity as such, both of them ought to be treated in the same way. The reason why this is not so, is that moral standards have so changed in the West in recent decades, that while all kinds of laxity are condonable, economic interests may not be violated.

## 8. IS THE NEW TESTAMENT VIEW OF HOMOSEXUALITY RELEVANT TODAY?

### *1. Introductory Remarks*

The above discussion has tried to answer the questions posed by the three claims made by advocates of homosexuality. We have seen that ancient Greek evidence establishes the fact that the ancients were acquainted with various types of homosexuality, but that especially in the Greek world the most characteristic and perhaps the most prevalent type was one that implied a steady, homosexual relation between consenting adults based on free-choice and devotion to one another to the point of giving their life for their partner. In addition, there was knowledge of what nowadays is termed “genuine homosexuality” or

homosexuality as an innate disposition. We saw, moreover, that Paul, not only had every opportunity to become acquainted with the various types of homosexual practices current in his day, but more specifically, that what he has in mind in Rom 1 is the so-called “noble” or “ideal” type of steady homosexual relations, rather than cultic or gross heathen homosexuality.

From the exegetical point of view, therefore, there is no doubt as to what Paul’s words mean. However, objections to the relevance of Paul’s words have been raised on the ground that what Paul wrote two thousand years ago, in another culture, and to people of a different way of thinking, different values, and a different world view to our own, cannot possibly be binding on us today. In other words, this argument assumes that the NT has lost its relevance for the Christian Church today, because it was given a long time ago, to a different people, and in particular, to one which did not share our modern outlook and viewpoint.

The question whether the NT is relevant for the Christian Church today or not is a very important one, not only for the problem at hand, but also for many other questions of modern life, on which it has anything to say. Here, however, we will focus our attention specifically on the problem of homosexuality.

## *2. The Cultural Gap*

One of the main arguments for rejecting the New Testament view about homosexuality in the modern debate is the immense cultural gap which is assumed to exist between the NT and our modern world. While it must be readily admitted that there is a cultural issue which needs to be faced squarely, it must be underlined, at the same time, that the importance of this cultural gap has been greatly exaggerated. This exaggeration is at least partly the result of a world view which the proponents of this cultural gap assume for the NT that has no basis in history as well as on account of the superficiality with which they compare world-views.

Those who speak of the unbridgeable cultural gap between the ancient and the modern worlds suppose that the NT world view was the same as the one current in Mesopotamia and Egypt about 2,000 years B.C. According to that view the universe was thought of as consisting of three flat disks: heaven, earth and the underworld. The sun was pictured as a disk revolving around the earth. The earth was at the center of the universe. People lived under the spell of superstitious fear. Magic reigned supreme, and so on. With such a "cave-man" world view it is easy to press the point of the supposedly huge difference between NT society and modern western society, and from the platform of the

‘Besserwisser’, the authoritarian platform of modern science and technology, to smile patronizingly at this ‘naïve’ thinking of the NT authors. It is therefore easy to understand the attitude, “What can a book, produced in such a backward environment, have to say to a modern person like me?”

But this picture of the NT world view is a caricature of the true, historical picture, current in the first century.

Those who claim that the NT world view was along the above lines forget that the world view of the NT was the result of radical changes that had been introduced during the last few centuries before Christ.

The world view of the NT Authors was the world view of the Greeks, and this world view was amazingly modern.<sup>123</sup> But the question may be raised: How is the Greek culture and the Greek world view connected with

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<sup>123</sup> When I say “modern” I am not using the term as in the modern consumer society’s jargon, for example, of the latest model of any gadget of technology on the market—for in that case nothing could be called modern except what has been manufactured during the past few years! I am using the term “modern” as it is used in usual scientific historiography and the history of ideas, whereby the modern world has its inception at the dawn of the Renaissance and later the Enlightenment.

The Renaissance was set off by the rediscovery of the Greek classics: the ideas, the methods, the sciences contained therein, of which the western European nations had become unaware for a thousand years, were now drawn upon and combined with new ideas fed by fresh discoveries to produce the marvel of the modern world. Now inasmuch as the Greek achievement in the various departments of learning current at the time of the NT were in Renaissance times being made the foundation of progress in sciences, and guided the new thinking of Western Europe, it may rightfully be said to be “modern”.

the NT? Well, for more than 300 years before the birth of Jesus Palestine had come under the cultural campaign of Alexander the Great and his successors. The Greeks had made it their consistent policy to found new cities in the conquered areas, nuclei of Greek civilisation and culture, in order to radically transform the life-style of these peoples. Palestine alone had some thirty such Greek cities<sup>124</sup>, functioning as centra of Hellenic culture with theaters, hippodromes (i.e. race courses) and gymnasia (athletic establishments) to achieve this very purpose. For instance, the area called Decapolis in the Gospels (e.g. Mt 4:25; Mk 5:20) was precisely an example of this, consisting of ten Greek cities to the east of the Sea of Galilee. Jerusalem itself had come under the influence of Greek culture and a gymnasium with a palaestra (wrestling ring) was built hard by the temple.<sup>125</sup> Large

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<sup>124</sup> See C. C. Caragounis, "Greek Culture and Jewish Piety" etc., 299. See the list in Josephos, *Antiquitates judaicae* XIV, 75ff. and *Bellum judaicum* I, 155ff. See further the discussions in V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, 90-116, E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Vol. II, 1979, 86-183, and M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 2 Vols. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London 1973, Vol. I, 65-106.

<sup>125</sup> In these heathen exercises and contests, which the participants performed without clothes, also priests of the Jerusalem temple were eager to participate. Being ashamed of their circumcision they tried to hide it by undergoing special surgery operations. See 1 Macc 1:11-15; Josephos, *Antiquitates judaicae* XII. 241. See C. Caragounis, "Greek Culture and Jewish Piety" etc. 300-303. E. R. Bevan, *The House of Seleucus*, Vol. II, 162-177; O. Mørkholm, *Antiochus IV of Syria*, 135-59; E. Bickermann, *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, 90-139; J. Goldstein, *1 Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 104-160. In fact, the attempt to Hellenize Jerusalem (i.e. to make Jerusalem into a typical Greek city) had been made

sectors of the Jewish people, especially the Sadducees, not only had learned to live and to think like Greeks and longed for Greek citizenship, but also to prefer speaking Greek to their own mother tongue, Aramaic.<sup>126</sup>

The Apostle Paul himself, citizen of a no-mean city, Tarsos, who had learned Greek from childhood, had also received the usual Greek curriculum up to the point of his gentile education.

Thus, the culture mostly represented in the NT letters is the Greek culture rather than the oriental one, the same culture that gave birth to Western culture.

### *3. The Greek World View*

To present the ancient Greek world view adequately would require a whole volume. Such an undertaking would be concerned both with the way the Greek perceived existence, the world, his own place in the scheme of things, and how he reacted to various phenomena both natural and such as were within his own soul. It would, moreover, include the momentous scientific discoveries of the last five pre-Christian centuries, which completely changed their world view.

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by the High Priest himself. It was these events that led to the Maccabean revolt.

<sup>126</sup> See Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I, 58-106.

Here, however, I will content myself with a few brief remarks.

Greek philosophy early sought a rational explanation for the various phenomena of nature. It freed the creation and the study of the physical world from the fetters of mythology and mythopoeic religion, and tried to explain world phenomena by a rational approach. This type of thinking led to the birth of science in principle as it is known today, i.e. in taking its cue from observation and experimentation.

Thus, already before the birth of Jesus such progress had been made that the primitive way in which the world had been conceived in oriental thought was completely replaced by a rational explanation based on strictly scientific observations, advanced mathematical calculations and astoundingly exact measurements.

Accordingly, that the universe was spherical and replete with spheres, some fixed stars, others planets, the revolution of the earth around the sun, the exact duration of the year (less than seven minutes longer than our modern calculation!), the size of the earth (almost exactly the same as known today), the distance of the moon (extremely close to the modern estimate), that matter consists of infinitissimally small atoms, and a

thousand other things were well known and assumed positions.<sup>127</sup>

Medicine, too, had been put on a scientific basis, and the discoveries were so startling that in the first century intricate operations had become possible. We may thus take it for granted that Luke, for example, was no witch doctor, but practised Greek scientific medicine. His 'medical' comments in the Gospel and Acts evince the terminology of the scientific medicine of the times.

Thus the Greek world view became the basis upon which all subsequent scientific developments have built. It is therefore impossible to reject the Greek world view as primitive, and by extension to condemn the NT as archaic.

In view of the above facts, there is no ground whatsoever for claiming that the world view of the NT makes its statements irrelevant for modern man.

But quite apart from the above considerations regarding the ancients' world view, the immense difference between the ancient and the modern worlds lies in the area of Technology, that is, the practical application of scientific discoveries and the harnessing of energy. In the area of the humanities, however, much of ancient thinking is still valid today.

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<sup>127</sup> See C. C. Caragounis, "Scholarship: Greek and Roman" in *Dictionary of the New Testament Backgrounds* ed. S. E. Porter and C. A. Evans, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Leicester, 2000, 1065-86.

The ancient thinkers were confronted by perennial problems, problems which have never lost their actuality. On account of this, the problems they raised and the solutions they proposed are still subjects of serious study. There is, in fact, a lively modern debate with the ancient thinkers, and though not all of their conclusions or reasonings are accepted today, they are considered as serious partners in the modern discussion. Their ideas are often intriguing, usually engaging and seldom irrelevant.

But—to go one step further—the heart of the NT message does not have to do with scientific discoveries or utterances. There are, in fact, no utterances in the NT that need be interpreted in a way that would cause embarrassment. The heart of the NT has to do with man's relation to God and to his fellowmen; with his need for forgiveness, for deliverance from the bondage of sin, and for salvation. Can we honestly say that modern man does not need God, forgiveness, or salvation? Only if we could honestly answer these questions in the negative, would we be justified in considering the NT as irrelevant.

#### *4. The Cultural Problem and the New Testament*

It is, however, true that the atmosphere one breathes in the NT is the atmosphere of the first, not of the twenty-

first century. And in this, more limited, sense there is a cultural problem. For example, there are statements in the NT that cannot be fully understood without a background knowledge of the ancient situation.

Because the New Testament was given in a concrete historical situation or rather situations, its message was clothed in a linguistic form as well as in cultural patterns with which the original recipients were familiar. It was inevitable, therefore, that its wording, its expressions, its figures of speech and its metaphors, its references and contextualization were those current at the time. There would have been something eerie or weird about it, if the NT had been written with the ideas, conceptions and jargon of the twenty-first century! Besides, if the NT reflected twenty-first century forms of expression, it would not have been intelligible to its first readers. Being rooted in history, the NT exudes the spirit and life of the times giving an authentic picture of current conditions. It is therefore natural that certain things that are said to the original audience should have no bearing today. At other points there are cultural problems to be circumvented in order to understand what is being meant. While at other points again, what is said is so interwoven with human experience in general, that it is as true today as it was when it was first uttered.

In what follows an attempt will be made to briefly exemplify NT statements that were of relevance only for

the original recipients, other statements that are culturally conditioned, and other statements still that have never lost their original relevance. This will be followed by a few hermeneutical principles important in interpreting the NT today.

*a. Things addressed only to the original readers*

2 Cor 2:12-13 relates Paul's anxiety for the Corinthian Christians, which hindered him from a preaching opportunity at Troas. The relevance of what is said here has its historical limitation. Paul's opposition to Peter for his inconsistency in the matter of gentile freedom from the law (Gal 2:11-14) is also a historical, unrepeatable event, although its consequences have had permanent validity. The same holds true of the Galatians' original devotion to Paul and their subsequent alienation from him (Gal 4:13-16). The envy and rivalry that Paul experienced at Rome (Phil 1:15) was his own particular experience, no one else's (even though many others have had similar experiences in their own environment). The injunction to Timothy to avoid drinking only water, and instead to take some wine on account of his frequent illnesses (1 Tim 5:23), is intended entirely for Timothy, not for anyone else. Hence, this text has no bearing whatsoever on the question of whether a Christian should or should not drink wine. Similarly 2 Tim 4:13 is

a request to Timothy to bring to Paul his cloak and certain manuscripts—obviously with no relevance for today. This list could become very long.

These details, although they are irrelevant for a modern context, nevertheless supply us with valuable information about conditions, attitudes, reactions, etc. which help us reconstruct the historical situation and to better understand the communication as a whole.

*b. Things that are culturally conditioned*

But there are other things that are more clearly marked by the cultural factor. These things need to be studied carefully in their proper context. For example in 1 Cor 10:25 Paul exhorts the Corinthians to eat meat sold in the *macellum*, the meat market, where meat of animals offered to idols was sold, since eating such meat would not compromise them in any way. Would the fact that in the Western world at present we have no such meat markets imply that this detail is irrelevant today? Not at all! A little further down Paul enunciates the principle that if the partaking of such meat becomes a stumbling-block to another Christian, the supreme rule of Christian love demands that the former should desist from eating it. Thus, here a detail that is immersed in the cultural

element of the times, gives rise to an important principle that is ever valid.

*c. Things that are as true today as they were then*

Perhaps the great bulk of the most important NT statements about man, God, salvation, eternal life, etc. are as comprehensible and valid today as they were when they were first written. Who, for example, today does not understand what the NT means when it says "All have sinned" (Rom 3:23)? And who can claim to be without sin? This statement is not only comprehensible to, but also valid for modern man. Who can misunderstand Jn 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"? Who can be in doubt as to the meaning of "the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20)? Or of Jn 14:6 "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me"? or of Acts 16:31 "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"? or of Jn 3: 36 "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever refuses to believe in the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him", or of the ethical demands on his followers which Jesus lays down in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt chs. 5-7)? In all these cases the fact that these statements were made two thousand years ago has not

rubbed off one whit of their comprehensibility and validity today

*d. Paul and his Jewish morality*

Not infrequently it is argued that Paul had this or that view because he was a Jew. His morality would have been inspired by his Jewish ethics, and, therefore, his ethical statements cannot be binding on us today. Thus, for example, in the question of homosexuality, Paul's Jewish background is thought to be responsible for his abhorrent attitude to it.

This is a gross misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Paul. First, it must be underlined that Paul, more than anyone else in the Early Church, broke away from his Jewish background, his Jewish customs and his Jewish laws, and proclaimed such an unparalleled freedom for the gentile Christians that almost cost him his own life. Secondly, it must be pointed out that homosexuality was practised in Greece and Rome. Together with many other things in which he ruled, that the gentile Christians need not observe (as for example, Jewish meat rules), he could also have made allowance for a custom that was rooted in the existence of his gentile converts. But he firmly believed that this was a non-negotiable point. It lay at the heart of God's demand for holiness and purity in his Church, and he solemnly

warned the Corinthians, that those who live in *i.a.* homosexual relations will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10). If the Apostle Paul made this demand of Greek and Roman Christians, who lived in an environment where homosexuality was rife, there is no ground whatsoever for claiming that this NT statement is not relevant today.

The fact that there are statements in the NT that are culturally conditioned must not hide from us the more important fact that in the case of the NT message there is an immense difference between *essence* and *form*. Being a book rooted in history, the NT message is channeled through appropriate forms of expression for the benefit of its recipients. These forms are historically and culturally conditioned. Many of these historico-cultural forms of expression are no longer current today. But this does not mean that the message that is encapsulated in these forms, too, must be abandoned together with the form. The message, the essence, has abiding validity. It is the Word of God. It cannot change. The form can and should change in order to make the message available to every generation.

This means that some things in the NT are essential and thus non-negotiable, while other things are merely formal or time-bound and are non-binding. This, in turn, suggests that in deciding what the NT has to say to us today we must begin with historical exegesis. We must

first determine what the NT told the people to whom it was originally addressed, before we can distil its meaning and apply it to our situation today.

### *5. The Validity of the New Testament Today*

That the NT still retains its relevance today can be seen from the following points.

#### *a. Historical*

If the NT was relevant as the Word of God at the time of its appearance, but it is not relevant today, we must ask: "Since when has the NT lost its relevance for the Christian Church? When did anything happen which brought about this radical change? And what precisely did happen?" We must be able to pinpoint the time when, the circumstances under which, and the reasons for which the NT lost its relevance. The point at which the NT becomes irrelevant must be a recognizable, critical point in history, in precisely the same way as, for example, the sacrificial system in Israel became defunct and irrelevant with the death of Jesus on the cross. We may thus ask, "What, where, and when did anything happen that put an end to the relevance of the NT as the Word of God to His Church?" The fact is that History knows of no such event.

*b. Theological*

If the NT is the Word of God, it cannot possibly be relevant only for the first generation of Christians. If it was the Word of God then, it cannot possibly have lost its relevance during the present generation, simply because we entered the age of satellites and computers.

Moreover, it is unthinkable that God's will for man today would be different from God's will for Jesus' and Paul's contemporaries. That God's ethical demands, rooted in His own character and holiness, should change from one time to another and from one place to another is an absurd idea. In scriptures God is presented as the "Unchangeable". Nor have we received any other newer or more final revelation. No newer way of salvation has replaced the cross. It would be ludicrous to think that God would have made the supreme sacrifice of giving up His only Son for the salvation of the world only to change His demands for salvation some sixty generations later. Nor is there any indication that God's standards, laws and demands have been substituted by others. It is characteristic that of the millions of theological books and articles that have been written during the past two thousand years within the Christian Church, not one of them has put forward the claim of replacing or even adding to the NT. They are mere commentaries on it. Thus, the continuing validity of the

NT must be a presupposition of first importance in all interpretation.

*c. The New Testament Claims*

The NT acquaints us with the way both Jesus and the Apostles looked upon the Bible. For example, in Jn 10:35 Jesus is said to have looked upon the Old Testament as “Scriptures which could not be broken”.

The NT authors recognized that the OT had functioned for hundreds of years in the life of Israel as the Word of God, which was to be obeyed, and that it was being fulfilled in their days.

The NT authors also show awareness that what they were writing themselves to their immediate addressees was a message from God, that it had relevance for the Christian Church of all future time, and consequently, that it was to be classed together with the OT as Scriptures (see e.g. 1 Cor 7:10 (cf. with 1 Cor 7:6; 25); 1 Th 4:2, 15; 1 Tim 3:14-15; 2 Tim 3:16; 1 Pt 1:10-12; 2 Pt 1:20; 3:15-16).

Finally, the reason why the leaders and Fathers of the Christian Church produced the Canon of the NT was because they believed that the books thus included were especially designed by God to have validity for all future time. Accordingly, for two thousand years the Christian

Church has based its confession and preaching on the New Testament and believed in its continuing relevance.

## *6. How to Interpret the New Testament*

One may, however, ask: “If the NT contains some things whose meaning is crystal clear and equally binding today, some things which are no longer binding, and certain other things which are culturally conditioned but with an underlying relevance, how should we be able to distinguish the wheat from the chaff?”

The answer to this question is: Through meticulous exegesis based on sound Hermeneutics.

### *a. Exegesis*

Exegesis is the discipline concerned with the actual explication of texts. Exegesis has many, very many handmaids doing ground work for it in order that the meaning of the text may become clear. Each of these handmaids treats different aspects of very varied nature and all of them together combine in offering their results so that the exegete will arrive at sound exegetical judgments.

Perhaps the primary handmaids of exegesis are grammar and philology. They are the disciplines of texts

*par excellence*. The communication must be understood as a language event, as a linguistic communication. But the situation is complicated here because although the NT authors write in Greek, they are Jews, with Aramaic as their mother tongue and Hebrew as the language of their OT Scriptures. In addition to this basic linguistic equipment, NT exegesis demands knowledge of the Greek language and literature as a whole. Knowledge of the Jewish background is an important presupposition. History and archeology are also significant. Insight in the thought-patterns of the ancients, such as mythology, philosophical thinking, the aesthetic arts, ancient rhetoric, history of ideas, sociology, anthropology not infrequently contribute to clarifying certain aspects of the NT, while the modern disciplines of semantics and text linguistics are important tools of analysis. Finally, a number of methodological approaches, developed during the last two hundred years, despite inevitable shortcomings, have put in the hand of the exegete invaluable tools for a correct explication of the NT text.

### ***b. Hermeneutics***

Hermeneutics is the discipline dealing with the set of principles applied in the interpretation of texts. It is impossible to do justice to this important discipline at

present<sup>128</sup>. At this point I will content myself with suggesting a few principles which will be stated very briefly.

In the interpretation of the NT the first principle is that one must always begin with historical exegesis, never with the subjective question: "What does this particular text mean to me in my present circumstances?" Historical exegesis will place the matter on the objective, historical plane asking, for example, the question: "What did the NT mean by these particular words?" Only when we have understood what the original message was, can we go on to ask about its possible relevance or non-relevance today as well as about its significance for our time. Here it is obvious that in the subject under discussion we do not begin with what we would like to think about homosexuality, but with what the NT meant. Thereafter we can consider whether the NT position on this issue is one of perennial validity or only for the first generation of Christians.

A second principle is that the meaning we apply today to a text cannot be contrary or different to the meaning which the text had in its original setting. The meaning of the text is constant not contradictory. A text may, of course, be seen in a new light or as having further applications, but the meaning should always point to the same direction and never assume a

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<sup>128</sup> I hope one day to devote a study to it.

significance which was not intended from the outset by the original authors.

Thirdly, in questions in which the original recipients of the NT literature and we share common concerns and categories, that is, we participate in contingencies that were characteristic of them, the NT word is as applicable to us today as it was to them when it was first written. Obviously here we must bear in mind the distinction made above between essence and form, and that it is things of essence that are in view here. Thus, a statement such as “all have sinned” is as true of modern man as it was of the first generation Christians. Similarly, the statement “flee from illicit sexual relationships ... do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Cor 6:18-19) is just as valid today, because this is a demand made upon the followers of Jesus based upon the holiness of God, who through his Spirit dwells in those who confess him. It is in this light that the NT says in 1 Cor 6:9 “Neither sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor active homosexuals, nor passive homosexuals<sup>129</sup> ... will inherit the Kingdom of God”.

The above investigation into the question of whether the NT is relevant or not for our time has

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<sup>129</sup> I need hardly remind the reader that the terms “active homosexuals” and “passive homosexuals” do not refer to practising and non-practising homosexuals respectively, but, as we have seen above, to those who played the more active or the more passive role in these relationships.

hopefully made it clear that there are neither historical nor theological grounds for claiming that its relevance has ceased. We saw that the most favorite and frequently used argument at present, the so-called cultural gap argument, which tries to antiquate the NT and to show it as primitive and archaic, cannot stand a closer, critical scrutiny. The argument is at variance with the ancient evidence. Moreover, we saw that the heart of the NT message is not concerned with scientific discoveries and technological progress, but with man's Godward relationship, with the meaning of life, with man's achieving the purpose for which he has been put on earth, with the question of eternal salvation and everlasting life.

We may therefore conclude, that the statements found in the NT about the issue of homosexuality are as relevant today as they were when they were first propounded.

## 9. THE PROBLEM TODAY AND THE CHRISTIAN ANSWER

In the above discussion I have tried to present the evidence from the ancient Near East, Greece (and Rome) and to discuss the attitude of the Old Testament and especially of the New Testament to the problem of homosexuality as well as the reasons for this attitude.

Now, in closing, I would like to make a few comments on the attitude of the New Testament to this problem, which might help guide the Church today in its attitude towards persons with homosexual propensities.

1. The above discussion has hopefully shown that the various kinds of homosexuality practised in the ancient world, i.e. cultic, non-cultic adult homosexuality, common *paidierastia*, philosophical or ideal *paidierastia*,

homosexuality understood as an innate disposition and as a stable relationship between consenting adults as well as Lesbianism, were all widely known and openly discussed in the ancient world, that they could not possibly have escaped the notice of the New Testament authors. The modern claim that the ancients, and hence also Paul, knew only of crude homosexuality, but were unaware that some people were such by nature, i. e. 'genuine homosexuality', is contradicted by Aristotle's statements,<sup>130</sup> as far as male homosexuality is concerned, by Loukianos' statements<sup>131</sup> as far as Lesbianism goes, and finally by Paul's own words in Rom 1:27, which imply an ideal, stable relationship.

2. Even the most 'ideal' and 'purest' forms of homosexuality were condemned by ancient philosophers and other authors as unnatural and perverse.

3. Paul's position was that male homosexuality and Lesbianism, like other vices, were the result of men's rejection of God, of his will and his law. Paul was aware of the philosophical type of homosexuality with all its emphasis upon deep human fellowship, friendship and devotion to the point of giving one's life for his lover or beloved, but in the light of God's revelation, he saw it as

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<sup>130</sup> See above, references to Aristoteles, *Nikomacheian Ethics*, VII. v. 3-5 (1148-1149).

<sup>131</sup> See above, references to Loukianos, *Dialogues of Courtesans* V.4 (291-292).

the result of mankind's depravity following their rejection of God. In these and other practices men thought they had become wise. For Paul, the truth was that they had become foolish and their mind had been darkened. They were incapable of healthy thinking.

4. For Paul, as for the entire Early Church, homosexuality was contrary to the ethos of the gospel and to what was basic to the Christian faith. Large portions of his letters are concerned with pastoral advice to his Churches to live in purity and holiness, as worthy followers of God and of Christ.

5. There was no way in which the Early Church could accept practising homosexuals in its bosom, any more than it could accept liars, idolaters or murderers.

6. It does not appear that the Early Church pointed its fingers especially at homosexuals more than at practitioners of other vices. From the biblical point of view all vices were equally reprehensible. Therefore, in 1 Cor 6:9-10 Paul gives a long list of practitioners of various vices who are going to be excluded from the Kingdom of God.

7. However,—and this is of paramount importance—Paul and the Early Church did not stop at that. Paul and the Early Church believed that they had the answer to the problem of homosexuals, as indeed to the problem

of all others. When the Church's Master forgave the adulterous woman, whom the Jews wanted to stone, he said to her: "Go and sin no more"<sup>132</sup>. At the heart of the biblical message lies the conviction that God's gracious forgiveness is accompanied by a new creation brought about by the Holy Spirit and an enabling for every sinner to live a new life.

At the very text which we have discussed in 1 Cor 6:9-10, directly after listing for them the various vices, Paul reminds the Corinthians:

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed from these things, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”!

In the Church of Corinth, we may assume, there were Christians, who once had been homosexuals, prostitutes, perhaps also temple prostitutes. They had now been forgiven, cleansed and had received a new life free from their previous vices. Paul condemned homosexual practices, but loved the homosexual! It was for such that Christ had died, not that they might

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<sup>132</sup> Jn 8:11. Even though the passage is missing in the oldest manuscripts, there is nothing in this story that could not have been said or done by Jesus. A similar command is given to the lame at Bethesda, Jn 5:14

continue in their sin, but that they might be delivered from it and be transformed into new creatures. Thus, the homosexuals were not condemned by the Early Church, but a hand of love and mercy was extended to them. They were invited to come with their problem to the Cross and leave it there!

8. Modern medicine and modern psychiatry may have their solutions or partial solutions. The Church has the solution of her Master and should remain faithful to it. The Church has no right to compromise the Word of God. Such compromises, will not only erode its witness and impede its message of salvation, they will also eventually prove a betrayal and a failing of these people in the hour of their need. And they can only lead to greater problems, because they are not God's solution.

9. The homosexual, whether man or woman, must come to understand that to continue in homosexual activities is to continue to break the law of God, to resist his salvific love, and to put oneself outside the sphere of God's saving activity. The homosexual needs to see that not only is it not God's will for him or her to live in this way, but that through the death of Christ on the cross, God has done all that is necessary for their forgiveness and deliverance from this type of living.

10. Finally, from the way in which the NT deals with various problems that had arisen among those to whom it was first addressed, we must conclude that the Christian Church today should take a firm stand in its dealings with homosexuals, while at the same time show understanding and compassion for the homosexual's problem. However, understanding and compassion is not the same as compromising God's demand for holiness. The truth must be spoken. Faced honestly, the NT claims, it will bring forgiveness and deliverance.

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