

# **The New Testament and Homosexuality? Part 2: The Traditions Influencing Paul's Thinking in Romans 1**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The New Testament and Homosexuality? Part 2: The Traditions Influencing Paul's Thinking in Romans 1**

*In this, the second of two parts of a continuous argument, the focus falls on the various traditions that could have influenced Paul's thinking behind his statement in Romans 1 about same-gender sexual relations and draws conclusions to the developed argument on the prevalence of homosexuality in the New Testament era. The social system within which and from which his statements had meaning is considered in the first part of this argument, which appeared in **Verbum et Ecclesia** 23 (1) 2002.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

In Part 1 of this argument (Malina 2002:141-150) the language Paul used in Romans 1 was considered behind a Judean background, while also considering the Roman allusions. The Jewish Christians in Rome lived in a Roman-Hellenistic world. An analysis is made of Paul's terminology, and they are understood, as used in his argument, against their social-historic background.

In Part 2, the argument developed in Part 1 is continued. The Judaic and Israelite traditions underlying Paul's thinking is considered, and the prevalence of the 10 commandments to this thinking is expounded. The argument then indicates that Paul offers two sets of behaviour to demonstrate the wrath of God towards non-Israelites for their culpable idolatry. Behaviour is understood in light of either being in harmony with nature or in opposition to it.

## **2 ISRAELITE TRADITION**

For any first-century Israelite, whether Judean, Galilean, Pereaean, or emigré, there would be little doubt concerning the centre of the inhabited earth. Israelite orientation was focused on the central place of the land of Israel, Jerusalem. And even more sharply, the central focus of Jerusalem was the Temple of the God of Israel. Traditional Israelite ideology was

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pivoted on the awareness of the holiness of the God of Israel. Holiness here means social exclusivity, and the God of Israel demanded such exclusivity from the people whom he had chosen to be exclusively his - or so went Israel's story line.

While the sacred has to do with what was exclusive to the deity, the profane or non-exclusive to the deity consists of all creation categorised in terms of a system that would allow everything and everyone a certain meaning-endowing, sense-making situation or place. This is the purity system of Israel, providing a place for everyone/thing, and expecting everyone/thing in its place. This purity system derives from the God of Israel who created all that exists, and in that act of creation set up the system of categories into which all created beings properly fit (Gen 1:1:1-4a). Thus Israel's purity laws are in fact natural laws established by the Creator himself (this was the prevailing, priestly view; however, in Genesis 2 Adam sets up the initial categories, a feature noted in Rabbinism; see Eilberg-Schwartz 1990:202-6, 226). It was up to Israel, as a sacred people, to live in purity. And it was notably up to the sacred attendants of the deity, Israel's priestly tribe, as God's divinely chosen retainers, to see to the observance of purity rules, both for themselves and the people at large. To approach the sacred, one had to be sacred and pure. To approach the sanctuary in general, one had to be pure.

As for morality, if Israelites were to be exclusive as their God was exclusive, they too would have to behave in a manner befitting their exclusivity over against the rest of humankind. This exclusivity includes living according to the categories established by Israel's God when the God of Israel created the world. It is these categories that serve as the matrix for Israelite definitions of what is in place (pure, clean) and what is out of place (impure, unclean). With purity a condition for access to the exclusive, only the clean can approach the God of Israel with any hope of success in the interaction (for an excellent summary see Frymer-Kensky 1983).

Thus the orientational map of Israel consists of two major category sets: the holy and profane (exclusive and non-exclusive) and the pure/clean and impure/unclean (in its proper place/out of place). These category sets cut through the five classifications typical of all societies: self, others, animate and inanimate creatures, time, space. Temple arrangements point to the application of these category sets to space and to selves permitted in this space.

However, there are some categories of behaviour that fall outside Israel's God-given purity system. These are the prohibitions that are simply anomalous. Those who perform actions prohibited by the God of Israel must be punished; their actions are irrevocable and irretrievable.

These are crimes prohibited by God and expressed in Israel's conventions and customs. Such crimes are full of danger, consisting in a permanently applicable divine sanction for the deed. As a rule the culprit cannot exonerate him/herself.

The divinely ordained sanction will be applied in one of two ways: either by God or by the Israelite community. The *sanctions applied by God* include the connection of *karet* (being cut off), penalties for persons defiling the sacred, and thus violating the distinctions between sacred and profane, the foundational category for the whole system of meaning. Since God is exclusive (sacred), like the realms God marks off as exclusive, so too Israel is an exclusive people and must observe the boundaries of the sacred (Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26).

“The violator is therefore expected to incur the *karet* penalty; in other words, his deed is expected to result in calamity to his entire lineage through the direct intervention of God (“automatically”) and without necessitating societal action. This belief in automatic retribution protects the realm of the sacred by deterring acts which would encroach upon it” (Frymer-Kensky 1983:406).

However, crimes whose sanction is the *death penalty to be applied by society* fall outside the boundaries of behaviour controlled by *karet*. These include the behaviours prohibited by the Ten Commandments. The first set of prohibitions covers crimes that dishonour the God of Israel to such an extent that the requirement for satisfaction of honour is irreversible and irrevocable, including Sabbath observance. Then come crimes against parents, and finally crimes that dishonour a male's family honour, requiring vengeance and resulting in feuding<sup>2</sup>. As Josephus observes (2.215):

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<sup>2</sup> While in the Israelite tradition guilty persons alone are to be killed, not members of their family (Deut 24; 16: “every man shall be put to death for his own sin”), the death penalty attaches to all of the Ten Commandments apart from coveting (i.e., stealing). Idolatry: those serving and worshiping other gods (Deut 17:7), as well as false prophets (Deut 13:5), are to be put to death. Blasphemy: Blasphemers of the name of YHWH shall be put to death (Lev 24:16). Temple Defilement: In Exod 19:12, going up Mount Sinai or touching the border of it while Moses was up there required the death penalty for the offender. The same rules were then applied to the tent (and Temple: the altar and what is within the veil) where God dwelt in Israel (Num 1:51.; 3:10; 18:7). Sabbath Observance: Infractions of the Sabbath required the death penalty for the offender (Exod 31: 14-15; 35:2; Num 15:35). Parents: The death penalty is required for anyone who strikes father or mother, or who curses father or mother (Exod 21:15, 17; Lev 20:9); this is also the fate of a recalcitrant son disobedient to parents (Deut 21 21). Adultery: the death penalty is commanded for adulterer and adulteress (Deut 22:22), consenting betrothed woman and another man (Deut 22:24), rapist of unconsenting betrothed woman (Deut 22:25), a wife without

“Now the greatest part of offences with us are capital, as if anyone be guilty of adultery; if anyone force a virgin; if anyone be so impudent as to attempt sodomy with a male; or if, upon another’s making an attempt upon him, he submits to be so used. There is also a law for slaves of the like nature that can never be avoided”.

Significantly, for Romans 1 the Torah prohibition of males lying with males as with a woman is found in the passage running from Leviticus 18-20, in a subset of crimes judged to be typical of non-Israelite behaviour. In Israel such crimes deserve the death penalty, to be applied by Israelite society as explicitly commanded in the Torah: “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you” (Lev 18:3). Hence these are behaviours typical of the non-Israelites that Israel knew. Here they are typical of the non-Israelites Paul knows as well. The listing of behaviour in Leviticus 18 is outfitted with penalties in the parallel Leviticus 20; actions requiring the death penalty, should they be found in Israel, include: offering children to Molech (Lev 20:2); cursing father or mother (Lev 20:9); adultery (20:10); incest with mother/mother-in-law (Lev 20: 11) or daughter-in-law (20:12); a male lying with a man as with a woman (Lev 20:13); male or female lying with a beast (Lev 20: 15-16, and the earlier Exod 22: 19: “Whoever lies with a beast shall be put to death”); and acting as medium or wizard (20:27). While some of these behaviours are found elsewhere in the Torah, the prohibition of a male lying with a male as with a woman is found only here (Lev 18:22 & 20:13; see especially Olyan 1994; Satlow 1994; Boyarin 1995; Halperin 1993). Such acts are said to pollute the land of Israel, and the pollution of the land cannot be rectified by ritual purification.

It seems that Paul's categories in Romans, “according to nature” (*kata physin*) and “contrary to nature” (*para physin*), are a Hellenistic Judean appropriation of traditional Israelite categories, as follows:

- a. according to nature = according to the conventions (*nomos*) and customs (*ethos*) of Israel, i.e., holy and pure behaviour as well as clean and unclean behaviours that can be “naturally” purified.

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tokens of virginity (Deut 22:21). Murder: “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death” (Exod 21:12; also Num 35: 16-21). Murderers must be put to death; specifically, “the avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death, when he meets him”; for in Israel “you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death; but he shall be put to death” (Num 35:31; also Lev 24: 17; 24:21). The owner of an ox known to kill must also be killed if the ox kills again (Exod 21:29); one disobedient to a priest-judge’s judgment in a homicide case likewise gets the death penalty (Deut 17:12). Kidnappers must be put to death (Exod 21:16; Deut 24:7). False witnesses are to be put to death (Deut 19: 19).

b. against nature = prohibitions in the conventions and customs of Israel sanctioned by a communal death penalty or direct divine punishment. Thus:

*Israelite according to nature:*

Exclusive (holy, sacred)

Non-exclusive (profane)

{ In place (clean, pure)  
Out of place (unclean, impure)

*Israelite contrary to nature:*

No place (anomalous)

{ To be eradicated (death penalty)  
To be left to God (divine penalty)

### 3 JUDEAN TRADITION

Aside from the prohibition of bestiality there is little in the first century Judean tradition about “unnatural” behaviour of women directed to women. Josephus notes that Israelite law only allows for sexual intercourse “according to nature with one’s wife and for the procreation of children” (*Against Apion* 2,24.199). This presumably is the frontal position mentioned by Artemidoros, “according to nature”. There is a Rabbinic anecdote, dating to the period of the beginnings of the Jewish religion (fifth century C.E.), that is relevant here. Boyarin (1995:339) writes:

Further evidence for the absence of a category of the “homosexual” in talmudic culture may be found in (the admittedly very rare) discussions of female same-sex genital practices, for instance, Babylonian Talmud *Yevamoth* 76a:

Rav Huna said: “Women who rub each other may not marry priests,” but even Rabbi Eliezer who said that “an unmarried man who has intercourse with an unmarried woman without intending to marry her makes her a *zonah* [and thus unfit to marry a high priest],” his words only apply to a man [who lies with a woman] but as for a woman [who lies with a woman], it is mere lasciviousness.

Also Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat* 65a-b:

Shmuel’s father did not allow his daughters to lie with each other ... Shall we say that this supports the view of Rav Huna, for Rav Huna

said: “Women who rub each other may not marry priests”? No, he forbade it in order that they should not learn [the feel] of another body [and they would then lust to lie with men (Rashi)].

The only reason, according to this text, that unmarried women should not excite each other sexually is because it might lead to immorality, that is, sex with men.

It seems that female to female sexual orientation is omitted in the Torah tradition because women cannot “spill the seed”. Female sexual stimulation by rubbing the genitals (i.e., tribadism, from Greek *tribem*) does not result in loss of seed, hence is not really sexual intercourse!

However, there are a number of passages in Judean documents more or less contemporary with Paul concerning “unnatural” behaviour of men, and the type of male-to-male gender contact specified seems to refer to what Paul intimates. Consider Philo’s observations in his running commentary on Leviticus 18, under the heading of the commandment, “you shall not commit adultery” (Spec. Laws III.7.37-42):

Moreover another evil, much greater than that which we have already mentioned, has made its way among and been let loose upon cities, namely, the love of boys, which formerly was accounted a great infamy even to be spoken of, but which sin is a subject of boasting not only to those who practice it, but even to those who suffer it, and who, being accustomed to bearing the affliction of being treated like women, waste away as to both their souls and bodies, not bearing about them a single spark of a manly character to be kindled into a flame, but having even the hair of their heads conspicuously curled and adorned, and having their faces smeared with vermilion, and paint, and things of that kind, and having their eyes pencilled beneath, and having their skins anointed with fragrant perfumes (for in such persons as these a sweet smell is a most seductive quality), and being well appointed in everything that tends to beauty or elegance, are not ashamed to devote their constant study and endeavors to the task of changing their manly character into an effeminate one. And it is natural for those who obey the law to consider such persons worthy of death, since the law commands that the man-woman who adulterates the precious coinage of his nature shall die without redemption, not allowing him to live a single day, or even a single hour, as he is a disgrace to himself, and to his family, and to his country, and to the whole race of mankind. And let the man who is devoted to the love of boys submit to the same

punishment, since he pursues the pleasure which is contrary to nature, and since, as far as depends upon him, he would make the cities desolate, and void, and empty of all inhabitants, wasting his power of propagating his species, and moreover, being a guide and teacher of those greatest of all evils, unmanliness and effeminate lust, stripping young men of the flower of their beauty, and wasting their prime of life in effeminacy, which he ought rather on the other hand to train to vigor and acts of courage; and last of all, because, like a worthless husbandman, he allows fertile and productive lands to lie fallow, contriving that they shall continue barren, and labours night and day at cultivating that soil from which he never expects any produce at all. And I imagine that the cause of this is that among many nations there are actually rewards given for intemperance and effeminacy. At all events one may see men-women continually strutting through the market place at midday, and leading the processions in festivals; and, impious men as they are, having received by lot the charge of the temple, and beginning the sacred and initiating rites, and concerned even in the holy mysteries of Ceres. And some of these persons have even carried their admiration of these delicate pleasures of youth so far that they have desired wholly to change their condition for that of women, and have castrated themselves and have clothed themselves in purple robes, like those who, having been the cause of great blessings to their native land, walk about attended by body-guards, pushing down everyone whom they meet. But if there was a general indignation against those who venture to do such things, such as was felt by our lawgiver, and if such men were destroyed without any chance of escape as the common curse and pollution of their country, then many other persons would be warned and corrected by their example. For the punishments of those persons who have been already condemned cannot be averted by entreaty, and therefore cause no slight check to those persons who are ambitious of distinguishing themselves by the same pursuits (*Spec. Laws* III.7 .37-42).

I cite this passage at length to demonstrate that for Philo males engaging in same-gender sexual relations are actually "heterosexuals" or "bisexuals", not what we would call "homosexuals". Furthermore, his "bisexuals" are males with physical male and female sexual characteristics, that is, androgynous persons, hermaphrodites, what physicians call "intersexed" persons today. This seems to be the common view. Given the fact that the ancients were anti-introspective and not

psychologically-minded, it would be totally anachronistic to consider the human beings in question as persons with stable male and female gender or sexual orientations rooted in their personality or psychological makeup. The main reason why male same-gender sexual conduct is wrong is that individuals who participate in it are “not only seeking to violate the marriage bed of others, but lusting unnaturally, and seeking to deface the manly character of the nature of man, and to change it into a woman-like appearance, for the sake of the gratification of his own polluted and accursed passions” (*Spec. Laws* 11.14.50).

What is immoral, then, is mixture, crossing same-gender boundaries and thereby dishonouring the male. We find a similar perspective in Philo’s explanation of the types of persons found in ancient Sodom, persons worse than the Greeks and barbarians of his day (*On Abraham* 26.133-36).

And what is signified by this is indicated in a most evident and careful manner by the events which ensued. The country of the Sodomites was a district of the land of Canaan, which the Syrians afterwards called Palestine, a country full of innumerable iniquities, and especially of gluttony and debauchery, and all the great and numerous pleasures of other kinds which have been built up by men as a fortress, on which account it had been already condemned by the Judge of the whole world. And the cause of its excessive and immoderate intemperance was the unlimited abundance of supplies of all kinds which its inhabitants enjoyed. For the land was one with a deep soil, and well watered, and as such produced abundant crops of every kind of fruit every year. And he was a wise man and spoke truly who said: “The greatest cause of an iniquity is found in overmuch prosperity.” As men, being unable to bear discreetly a satiety of these things, get restive like cattle, and become stiff-necked, and discard the laws of nature, pursuing a great and intemperate indulgence of gluttony, and drinking, and unlawful connections; for not only did they go mad after women, and defile the marriage bed of others, but also those who were men lusted after one another, doing unseemly things, and not regarding or respecting their common nature, and though eager for children, they were convicted by having only an abortive offspring; but the conviction produced no advantage, since they were overcome by violent desire; and so, by degrees, the men became accustomed to be treated like women, and in this way engendered among themselves the disease of females, and intolerable evil; for they not only, as to effeminacy and delicacy, became like women in their persons, but they made

also their souls most ignoble, corrupting in this way the whole race of man, as far as depended on them. At all events, if the Greeks and barbarians were to have agreed together, and to have adopted the commerce of the citizens of this city, their cities one after another would have become desolate, as if they had been emptied by a pestilence

Once more the problem is treating males as though they were females. This, of course, is changing the order of nature set out in Genesis. Note the explanation in *Testament of Naphtali*:

“But you shall not be so, my children, recognising in the firmament, in the earth, and in the sea, in all created things, the Lord who made all things, that you become not as Sodom, which changed the order of nature. In like manner, the Watchers also changed the order of their nature whom the Lord cursed at the flood, on whose account He made the earth without inhabitants and fruitless” (3:4-5, Charles 1913).

The Watchers crossed boundaries from their celestial being to have sexual relations with human females (Gen 6:1-4), thus “defiling themselves with women” (Rev 14:4). Philo equally makes reference to the wasting of the seed in such relations (and others as well, e.g., marrying a barren woman: Philo, *Special Laws III passim*). In this discussion it is perhaps useful to recall what the male ejaculate was for these learned ancients. Seneca (*Naturales Quaestiones* 3,29,3) explains:

Whether the world is an animated being, or a body governed by nature, like trees and plants, there is incorporated in it from its beginning to its end everything it must do or undergo. In the semen there is contained the entire record of the man to be, and the not-yet-born infant has the laws governing a beard and grey hair. The features of the entire body and its successive phases are there, in a tiny and hidden form.

Human seed, which only males have, are much like Russian nesting dolls or Chinese boxes, each containing the whole of forthcoming humankind. As Philo explains: “But we must be well assured that humans have from an eternity sprung from other humans in constant succession, the male implanting the seed in the female as in a field, and the female receiving the seed so as to preserve it” (*On the Eternity of the World* 13.6 9). Thus all Arabs and Hebrews were to be found in Abraham’s seed, just as Jesus was (Gal 3:16-18). To spill the seed, to “waste their seed of one’s own deliberate purpose” (Philo, *Special Laws* III.6.34), is tantamount to killing micro-human

beings, and more. Again Philo (*On the Posterity of Cain* 53.181), addressing a male who would spill his seed:

You will put an end to the honour due to parents, the attention of a wife, the education of children, the blameless services of servants, the management of a house, the government of a city, the firm establishment of laws, the guardianship of morals, reverence to one's elders, the habit of speaking well of the dead, good fellowship with the living, piety towards God as shown both in words and in deeds: for you are overturning and throwing into confusion all these things, sowing seed for yourself alone, and nursing up pleasure, that gluttonous intemperate origin of all evil

Since only males had this seed, the crimes Philo lists are obviously male-specific.

## **4 MEANINGS AVAILABLE TO PAUL**

### **4.1 Romans 1**

From Philo, Artemidoros, Josephus, and other Hellenistic documents it seems the meanings available to Paul about some sexual behaviour being against nature included the following: for females, sexual relations against nature essentially meant taking control in sexual relations and employing sexual positions other than frontal; for males sexual relations against nature included pederasty, bisexuality, and above all male-adopted androgyny. It is androgyny that Paul seems to have in mind when he speaks of males exchanging their male nature, perhaps by a life dedicated to acting like a female through castrations. As Philo explains, the real problem of such male-male sexual behaviour is that it confuses male gender lines, thus dishonouring the male. Sexual relations were intended "by nature" to be between genders; same-gender sexual relations, like cross-dressing or cross-marriage, are against nature. Since females had no seed and could not penetrate, they really could not perform sexual relations with other females, but tribadism did make females prone to unlawful sexual relations with males.

Furthermore, any consideration of the list of prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 sanctioned by the death penalty, such as male-male sexual intercourse, should also take note of the first-century Israelite appropriation of the command not to offer one's children to Molech. At the time of Paul, Israelites were believed to offer their children to Molech if they allowed them to intermarry with non-Israelites, i.e., mixed marriage. For example (*Jub* 30:7-8, Charles 1913):

“And if there is any man who wishes in Israel to give his daughter or his sister to any man who is of the seed of the Gentiles he shall surely die, and they shall stone him with stones; for he hath wrought shame in Israel; and they shall burn the woman with fire, because she has dishonoured the name of the house of her father, and she shall be rooted out of Israel”.

Similarly, “Again Moses commands, do not either form a connection of marriage with one of another nation, and do not be seduced into complying with customs inconsistent with your own, and do not stray from the right way and forget the path which leads to piety, turning into a road which is no road” (Philo, *Special Laws* III.5.29).

Outside Israel presumably, God himself will deliver up such perpetrators to some proper punishment.

## 5 TEN COMMANDMENT LISTS

After demonstrating how God is dishonoured by non-Israelites because of their "unnatural" sexual behaviour contrary to Israel's conventions and customs revealed in the Torah, Paul goes on to list typical non-Israelite wickedness that likewise dishonours God as follows (Rom 1:29-32):

They were filled with all manner of wickedness: (1) evil, covetousness, (2) malice, envy, (3) murder, strife, (4) deceit, malignity, (5) gossips, slanderers, (6) haters of God, (7) insolent, haughty, (8) boastful inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, (9) foolish, faithless, (10) heartless, ruthless

The list is simply a disguised listing of the Ten Commandments of Israelite tradition. Josephus reports that in the Israel of his day, just as it was forbidden to utter the sacred Tetragrammaton, YHWH, the most sacred name of the God of Israel, so too it was forbidden to utter the “Ten Words” given on Sinai to Israel. While these are the very Ten Words “which Moses has left inscribed on the two tables”, yet “these words it is not permitted us to state explicitly, to the letter”. Nevertheless, Josephus indicates their “power” [*hous ou themiton estin hemin legein phanerōs pros lexin, tas de dynameis auton dēlōsomen*] (*Ant* 3,90 LCL). After all, these very words, “the ten commandments which God himself gave to his people without employing the agency of any prophet or interpreter” (Philo, *Special Laws* III, 2,7) were the direct words of the God of Israel, hence full of power. They must not be repeated verbatim”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> But they could be written verbatim. Since these words were put in *tephelim* and *mezuzoth* by no command of God (unlike the *Shema* of Deut 6:4-9), it seems their

While it was forbidden to recite the Ten Words in the exact wording and order found in the Torah passage recounting the Sinai incident, first-century Israelites did not refrain from quoting them. They simply disguised them or reordered them. In the synoptic tradition, for example, Jesus offers a listing to the Greedy Young Man as follows: “You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt 19:18-19; Mark 10:19 omits love of neighbour as does Luke 18:20, who inverts adultery and killing). Romans 1:29-32, in turn, is a disguised version. The same is true of lists in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11.

These lists collocate males who lie with males as with a woman (*arsenokoitai*) and those taking the woman's place (*malakoi*) with adulterers (Philo does the same thing in *Special Laws* 3); they impugn the honour of the male (see Malina 1993:143-46)<sup>4</sup>. What is distinctive of Israel is that breaches of the Ten Commandments, aside from coveting (i.e., stealing property), all require the death penalty. Yet as Paul describes it, outside Israel such behaviours are dealt with by God.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Paul offers two sets of behaviour to demonstrate the appropriateness of the wrath of God toward non-Israelites for their culpable idolatry. His argument is tit for tat. If human beings exchange non-gods for the God of Israel (known simply as “God”), even though they know God, God delivers them up to exchanging female passivity for activity even though females know femininity, and maleness for femaleness even though they know maleness, God, then, delivers them up to their own wickedness in a set of behaviours that produces social disharmony due to the non-observance of God’s Ten Commandments for Israel.

1 In Israel, same-gender sexual relations are ascribed to alien ethnic custom, alien popular custom, alien traditional convention, or some other

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presence there, “to the letter”, was to serve as apotropaic, a prophylactic device to ward off hostile power, the evil eye, and the like.

<sup>4</sup> There are further truncated listings. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount the antitheses (Matt 5:21-36) cover five of the Ten Commandments. In the list of evils proceeding from the heart, while Mark 7:21-22 has three parallel categories: a. fornication, b. theft, c. murder; a. adultery, b. coveting, c. wickedness; a. licentiousness, b. envy, c. slander and pride and foolishness, (I would consider this only five of the ten: 3 x 3 plus pride and foolishness that is, other gods before God and idolatry). Matt 15: 19 has a list of six (or seven or five), but these are the last five of a listing, just as in the antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount: evil thoughts: (1) murder, (2) adultery, fornication, (3) theft, (4) false witness, (5) slander.

group-specific social practice. It did not belong in Israel and was forbidden as non-Israelite behaviour bound up with non-Israelite idolatry. Same-gender sexual relations are a manifestation of idolatry.

2 The exchange of roles indicates the demeaning and dishonouring of roles according to nature and revealed in Torah, just as idolatry indicates the demeaning and dishonouring of God.

3 Idolatry, with the demeaning of God and God's entitlements, in the first part of Paul's argument makes the idolater worthy of death. Further, the demeaning of male roles, male entitlements, as well as disrespect for females, and switch in female roles, fall under the listings of prohibited behaviours deserving death in the Ten Commandments. This is the reason for the second part of the argument with Paul's listing of wickedness.

4 There is perhaps an unexpressed concern about wasting seed. As a rule this is a concern with Israelite seed, not that of outsiders. What bothered Judean authors about male same-gender sexual relations in Israel was that it wasted seed that traced back to Abraham himself and was quite limited in amount.

5 All same- (usually male) gender sexual relations are contrary to nature largely because what Paul does, and perhaps what Hellenistic Judaism did before him, that is, subsume the category "contrary to nature" to cover all those behaviours in Israel that are anomalous and punishable by death at the hands of the community (for Israelites) or by God in God's own way. The scenario here depicts the latter.

6 The insertion of same-gender sexual contact under the category of adultery, taken from the very Ten Commandments uttered directly to Israelites on Mount Sinai, means that behaviour is viewed, like adultery, as dishonouring a male. Presumably same-gender sexual relations can only lead to social disorder and disturb social harmony. From the viewpoint of Israel's covenant with God, it breaks the covenant stipulations required by God. And from the perspective of Israel's purity rules it is an anomaly, a confusion of gender boundaries that lie at the basis of self-definition (like cross dressing, cross-ethnic marriage). What is distinctive in Paul's argument in Romans is that God is punishing idolatry among non-Israelites. Israelites need not kill Israelites for their idolatry, since God hands over these idolaters to their punishment. The implied punishment, in Philo at least, is lack of offspring with a resulting diminishing of population in city and ethnic territory!

## **7 POSTSCRIPT**

If we return to the twenty-first century, after this excursion into the first century, we can see that Paul's perspectives, if taken consistently, simply

do not make sense. Paul's teaching is rooted in Israel's creation story, with purity laws grounded in the nature described in that story of creation. We, who live in a relatively uncentered universe presumably controlled by regularities of physics and chemistry, have a different creation story. Most would not take Israel's purity rule to be natural law itself, rooted in creation. Paul's viewpoint derives from his being immersed in Israel's boundary markers, between the Israelite in-group and the non-Israelite outgroup. We no longer share this sort of ethnocentrism as a principle of morality. Paul's teaching is based on a biology in which males have seed containing veritable *homunculi*, while females offer only nourishment to the seed in the formation of humans. We explain the process of human generation quite differently today, since we believe both male and female parents equally contribute genetic material to their offspring.

Then, if we follow Israel's conception of nature in the Ten Commandments, any breach of these prohibitions (aside from coveting, i.e. stealing) requires the death penalty, and this death penalty cannot be waived, under penalty from God! It is curious that people today are little concerned about breaches of the Sabbath, about waiving the death penalty for murder, adultery, kidnapping, or perjury, yet have great emotional concern about "homosexuality" - something not envisioned in our terms by biblical authors.

Finally, and rather interestingly, Paul intimates that the presence of non-Israelites in Jesus groups is contrary to nature (*para physin*, Rom 11:26, the same phrase as in Rom 1:26). Their presence, of course, is a form of social bonding not unlike that involved in handing over one's children to Molech, wedding Israelites with non-Israelites. Such behaviour was punishable by death. This is perhaps one reason why Paul and his Jesus group members were in conflict with their fellow Israelites. Be that as it may, Paul clearly is redefining Israelite purity rules. In this he is not unlike those Pharisees who countered the priestly natural law of Genesis 1 with Adam's, i.e. human determination of purity rules in Genesis 2: 19-20.

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