

The Church of England
Evangelical Council

**Studies on the Bible and
same-sex relationships
since 2003
Summary**

Martin Davie



Gilead Books Publishing
Corner Farm
West Knapton
Malton
North Yorkshire
YO17 8JB UK

www.GileadBooksPublishing.com

First published in Great Britain, March 2015

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Copyright ©CEEC 2015

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Summary: ISBN: 978-0-9926713-9-6

Full Report: ISBN: 978-0-9926713-8-9

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Scripture quotations are from Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The publisher makes every effort to ensure that the papers used in our books are made from trees that have been legally sourced from well-managed and credibly certified forests by using a printer awarded FSC & PEFC chain of custody certification.

Cover design: Nathan Ward

1. Introduction

The current debate about same-sex relationships in the Church of England and the wider Christian Church is a debate about a number of different issues:

- There is a debate about what Christian discipleship means for those who experience same-sex attraction or who are in a same-sex relationship.
- There is a debate about how the Church and individual Christians should minister to those in that situation.
- There is a debate about who it is right for the Church to marry or ordain.
- There is a debate about whether, and if so how, the Church can live with differences over these issues.

Underlying all these issues, however, there is a debate about the teaching of Scripture and it is this last debate which is the subject of this report.

In 2003 *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* stated in paragraph 4.4.34-35:

The various suggestions for revising the traditional view of the biblical material have not succeeded in changing the consensus of scholarly opinion about the meaning of the key passages in Leviticus and the New

Testament. At the moment, the traditional understanding of these passages remains the most convincing one in the minds of most biblical scholars.

Unless this situation changes, it is difficult to see that an appeal to a revisionist interpretation of the passages in question provides an adequate basis for a Church that takes the scholarly reading of Scripture seriously to alter either its traditional teaching about homosexuality or its traditional practice, however much it might seem desirable to do so on the basis of the pastoral considerations noted earlier.¹

By contrast, in 2013 paragraph 312 of the *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality* (the Pilling Report) declared: 'In the face of conflicting scholarship, as well as conflicting beliefs, we believe that the Church should be cautious about attempting to pronounce definitively on the implications of Scripture for homosexual people.'²

The question which is explored in this report produced on behalf of the Church of England

¹ *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*, London: CHP, 2003, pp.157-158.

² *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Sexuality*, London: CHP, 2013, p.91.

Evangelical Council is whether a survey of studies of the biblical material relating to same-sex sexual activity produced since 2003 justifies the shift from the confidence in the biblical basis of the Church's traditional teaching shown in the first quotation to the caution expressed in the second.

No one can deny the existence of conflicting scholarship, or conflicting beliefs about how to understand and apply the Bible in relation to the issue of homosexuality. It is a simple matter of fact that scholars hold different views and people hold different beliefs about this matter. However, the mere fact of the existence of conflicting scholarship and conflicting beliefs would not in itself justify the Church being cautious about declaring the implications of the teaching of Scripture for homosexual people and their behaviour. This is because there are three possible scenarios:

- It could be the case that the existence of conflict shows that the teaching of Scripture on this matter is inherently unclear and that therefore caution is required.
- It could be that case that the scholarly debate about the teaching of Scripture on this matter is currently inconclusive and that for this reason caution would be sensible.

- It could be the case that the teaching of Scripture is clear and that the conflict is due to the fact that the people on one side of the conflict have simply failed to interpret Scripture properly. In this last case caution would not be justified. The Church should declare the clear teaching of Scripture.

The issue that needs to be addressed, therefore, is which of these three possible scenarios is correct. Is Scripture itself unclear? Is the current scholarly debate about the teaching of Scripture inconclusive? Is the teaching of Scripture clear and the conflict due to faulty interpretation by one side in the conflict?

In order to answer this question, the full report from the Church of England Evangelical Council looks in detail at material from both sides of the current debate in the Church about same-sex relationships produced since 2003 with the aim of seeing (a) whether a survey of this material still allows us to say that Scripture gives us clear teaching about homosexuality and (b) what this teaching is. The report also looks at the prior question of the nature of the Bible and its proper use in the debate about sexuality, again looking at material from both sides of the debate.

For the sake of convenience, it refers to those writings and texts which challenge the Church's traditional

teaching in this area, either in whole or in part, as 'revisionist' and those which support it as 'traditionalist.' What is meant by the Church's traditional teaching is the belief that Scripture regards the existence of same-sex sexual attraction as a result of humanity's alienation from God and that it explicitly and implicitly prohibits both gay and lesbian same-sex sexual relationships.

The use of these terms, which have been employed by those on both sides of the debate about sexuality³, is intended to be purely descriptive rather than to imply any judgement about the value of the material. There is currently no agreement about the best terminology to use when describing the two sides in the sexuality debate. Terms that have been suggested include 'change affirmers' for those this reports calls revisionists, 'revisers' and 'conservers', 'liberals' and 'conservatives,' or simply 'Side A' and 'Side B.' Nothing in this report hangs on the use of the specific terms 'revisionist' and 'traditionalist' and readers should feel free to substitute any alternative term should they wish to do so.

This summary contains the text of the final chapter of that report, which evaluates the material the report has looked at. It contains page references which indicate where the full account of the material

³ See, for example, James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans 2013 and Ian Paul, *Same Sex Unions – The Key Biblical Texts*, Cambridge: 2014.

referred to can be found in the other chapters of the main report and a bibliography which lists the works referred to in the report plus some additional reading. The figures in brackets after an author's name give the date of publication of the work referred to in order to help you find the full details of that work in the bibliography.

2. The nature of the Bible and its use in the debate about human sexuality (pages 12-33 and 160-179)

If we begin by looking at the revisionist approaches to this issue, the first point is whether it is legitimate to distinguish between Jesus as the Word and the word of God in Scripture and to give authority to the former over the latter in the way that Christopher Rowland (2005) and Adrian Thatcher (2008) propose.

It is true that there is a distinction in Scripture between Jesus as the Word as referred to in the prologue to John's gospel and the word of God in Scripture. One is God present in a person and the other is the revelation of God given through written words. However, it is incorrect to suggest that the former has more authority than the latter. This is because as John Wenham (1972) points out, if we look at what Jesus the Word actually taught what we find is

that 'to him, what Scripture said, God said' and that this something that can be seen to apply to both the Old and New Testaments.⁴ Because what Scripture says is what God says it follows that we cannot contrast the authority of God the Word and the word of God. Both are God speaking to us.

Furthermore, because this is so, we do have to draw a 'firm line' between Scripture and tradition contrary to what Thatcher (2008) suggests. This is because all human tradition, however venerable, is human and therefore subject to error, whereas Scripture, as God's inspired word, is not.

Secondly, while Maggi Dawn (2007) is undoubtedly right to say that there is no method that will 'unerringly elicit 'right answers' from the Scriptures' and that we have constantly to be aware that our interpretation of Scripture may be wrong this does not mean that we have to permanently suspend judgement and simply learn to live with conflicting interpretations. There are times and there are issues when decisions have to be made and at that point the Church has to come off the fence and make a decision one way or another using best scholarly tools available and praying for the guidance of the Spirit.

⁴ John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, Leicester: IVP, 1972, pp. 37 and 123.

Thirdly, because Scripture is God's word we cannot say, as Dan Via (2003) does, that it is only authoritative 'in those parts that are existentially engaging and compelling.' Scripture has authority in and of itself, if we don't find it compelling or convincing then the problem lies with us and not with Scripture. Also, because all of Scripture is God's words we cannot say that 'some texts are simply disqualified by the whole meaning of the gospel.'

This is because, as Oliver O'Donovan (1993) says

Unless we can think that Scripture is readable as a whole, that it communicates a unified outlook and perspective, we cannot attribute doctrinal authority to it, but only to some part of it at the cost of some other part. The authority of Scripture, then, presupposes the possibility of a harmonious reading; correspondingly, a church which presumes to offer an unharmonious or diversifying reading may be supposed to have in mind an indirect challenge to the authority of Scripture itself.⁵

Fourthly, because Scripture is God's word it is not right to follow Tobias Haller (2009) and to give experience 'a limiting function even over the fundamental authority of Scripture.' If Scripture's

⁵ O M T O'Donovan *On the Thirty Nine Articles* Exeter: Paternoster Press 1993, pp.56-57.

authority is truly fundamental then nothing, including experience, can limit it. What Haller (2009) really means is that we should be prepared to correct Scripture, including its moral teaching, on the basis of our experience, which effectively means making our interpretation of our experience, rather than Scripture, the norm for theology.

Fifthly, because Scripture is God's word, it is not legitimate to do as Deirdre Good, Willis Jenkins, Cynthia Kitteridge and Eugene Rogers (2011) suggest, and read the Bible in ways that 'challenge the perspective of the biblical authors.' If what Scripture says, God says, to challenge the perspective of the biblical authors is to challenge the perspective of God himself, something that as creatures we cannot rightly do.

Sixthly, while the fact that tradition can be wrong means that we have to be aware that traditions of interpretation can distort our reading of Scripture, K Renato Lings' (2013) suggestion that biblical interpretation of the post-biblical era was all based on misplaced asceticism and misogyny and can therefore be simply set aside fails to take seriously C S Lewis' (2008) point that we should be wary of thinking that we are the first people to understand the meaning of a

text and that we need to allow the witness of the past to challenge our current preconceptions.⁶

Finally, we need to not only have proper guidelines for reading Scripture, but also apply them properly. Thus Jack Rogers' (2009) seven guidelines for reading Scripture are all excellent, but he arguably applies them badly.

For example, his second guideline is 'Let the focus be on the plain text of Scripture, to the grammatical and historical context, rather than to allegory or subjective fantasy.' This is very helpful. However, his application of it is to say that reading the Bible in this way leads him to ask:

...whether biblical statements that condemn idolatrous and immoral sexual activity can appropriately be applied to the sexual relationships of contemporary Christian gay and lesbian people who are neither idolatrous nor immoral. Is it right to take verses that condemn the worship of other gods and use them against Christian people who are worshipping the one true God who Jesus called us to worship?⁷

⁶ See C S Lewis, 'On the reading of old books' at <http://www.theelliots.org/Soapbox2008/OntheReadingofOldBooks.pdf>

⁷ Ibid, p.57.

As we shall see below, this interpretation of the biblical passages prohibiting same-sex relationships is not in fact a reading of the plain text of Scripture, but a reading into the text of Scripture what is not there.

A better approach to understanding the nature of the Bible and its use in the debate about human sexuality is provided by the traditionalist writers we have looked at.

First of all, they remind us that for the Christian the Bible is the norm given to us by God for making or evaluating ethical decisions. In the words of Thomas Cranmer in his homily 'A fruitful exhortation to the reading and knowledge of Holy Scripture,' 'As many as be desirous to enter into the right and perfect way unto God, must apply their minds to know Holy Scripture, without the which they can neither sufficiently know God and his will, neither their office and duty.'⁸

Secondly, this is because, as David Torrance (2012) argues, Scripture in all its parts not only contains but *is* God's word, called into being by God through the Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21) and given to us for our instruction. Because of this Scripture is a unity with a single overall coherent message.

⁸ Ian Robinson (ed), *The Homilies*, Bishopstone, Brynmill/Preservation Press, 2006, p.4.

Thirdly, because Scripture is inspired by the Spirit this means, as Gordon Kennedy, Jane McArthur and Andrew McGowan (20013) remind us, both that we need to seek the mind of the Spirit when interpreting the Bible and also that 'the Spirit will never contradict what is given to us in Scripture.

Fourthly, as John Goldingay, Grant Le Marquand, George Sumner and Daniel Westberg (2011) write, the aim of biblical interpretation is to 'try to achieve an objective understanding of the text according to its own presuppositions and concerns.' As they go on to say, this will involve reading the Scriptures as a whole and in the company of the Church as whole.

Fifthly, as they remind us, and as John Richardson (2012) also maintains, we need to take seriously the continuing validity of the Old Testament law in the life of the Church. The law cannot save us and aspects of the law such as the food laws or the laws regarding sacrifice have been fulfilled in the coming of Christ and therefore do not apply directly to the Church. Nevertheless, the witness of the New Testament is that the moral laws contained in the Old Testament, including its laws relating to sexual ethics, do still apply to Christians today.

Sixthly, we need to take seriously Michael Brown's (2014) point that 'the Bible is a heterosexual book.' Obviously, the use of the term 'heterosexual' is an

anachronism given that that concept of heterosexuality was not invented until the nineteenth century. However, the point that Brown is making by his use of the term is a valid one. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible assumes that the norm for sexual activity is sex between a man and women in marriage. That is the norm from which everything else is a deviation. This feeds into Robert Gagnon's (2003) point that accepting the authority of the Bible means accepting its core values and an approach to sexual activity that limits it to marital sex between a man and a woman is among these.

Finally, as John Goldingay (2010) points out, the Church has changed its mind over the interpretation of Scripture because it has been driven back to ask fresh questions about the biblical text and come back with a fresh way of reading it. As he says 'one way of formulating our dilemma over same-sex relationships' is to see it as a debate over whether the same conclusion applies:

The universal Christian tradition and its interpretation of scripture see scripture as viewing same-sex relationships as irregular and morally inappropriate. The question is whether human insight, particularly in the Western world, is opening our eyes to other possibilities within scripture.

This is the challenge this report is seeking to explore.

Bearing all these points in mind, we shall now go on to evaluate the ways in which revisionist and traditionalist writers have interpreted the biblical texts.

Genesis 1-3 (pages 34-52 and 180-200)

If we begin by looking at the narratives of the creation and the Fall in Genesis 1-3 the first thing we find is that there is nothing in the creation stories in Genesis 1-2 to suggest that humans were originally androgynous or should be viewed as androgynous today.

Genesis 1:27 is constructed in terms of Hebrew parallelism with the second half of the verse explaining the meaning of the first half. Thus the meaning of the statement in the first half of the verse that God created humanity (the meaning of the word *adam* here) is made clear when it is said in the second half of the verse that God created human beings as male and female.

That this is the correct reading of the verse is shown by the explicit statement in Genesis 5:1-2

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them man when they were created.

This is a clear recapitulation of what is said in Genesis 1:27 and it makes clear that 'man' is the generic term for human beings, who have been created by God in two sexes, male and female.

It is also shown by the command to the first humans to be fruitful and multiply in Genesis 1:28, a command which, as Richard Davidson (2007) observes, can only be fulfilled by a pair of sexually differentiated human beings.

It is further shown by the second creation account in Genesis 2:4-25, which in terms of the structure of the book of Genesis is intended as a narrative expansion of what has already been said in Genesis 1:26-28. This second account can be read in two ways. It can be read in terms of an originally sexually undifferentiated human being becoming divided into two sexes by God's action in verses 21 and 22, or it can be read in terms of God creating a female complement to an existing male human being. Given that there is no hint of any change taking place in the makeup of the 'man' (*adam*) as the result of the creation of the first woman, the latter reading seems a better one, and it has support from 1 Corinthians 11:8 and 1 Timothy 2:13. However, even if the first reading is adopted, it delivers the same end result, the creative action of God has resulted in the fact that human beings exist in two sexes, male and female and that

they are to fulfil their God given vocation within this context.

The existence of people with intersex conditions does not fundamentally challenge the biblical picture. The fact that some people are congenitally blind or deaf does not mean that human beings were not created by God to be creatures who see and hear. Similarly, the fact that there is a small minority of people whose sex is biologically ambiguous does not mean that humanity was not created to be male and female. It means that in a fallen world this basic binary sexuality does not always find clear biological expression.

Secondly, in Genesis 1 the image of God is something that human beings bear as individual male and female human beings. It is not simply, as C Norman Kraus (2011) suggests, a spiritual quality that belongs to the community of God's people collectively. However, this does not mean that human beings have to be married to a member of the opposite sex in order to be in the image of God. The Bible recognizes that some human beings will be unmarried (Matthew 19:10-12), but it never suggests that this makes them less than human.

As Robert Gagnon (2012) suggests, what does mar the image of God is a failure to live as male and female human beings by having sex with someone of one's own sex. As Genesis 2 explains, to live rightly as God's image bearer is to live in obedience to God's

commands and not transgress the limits that God has laid down (see 2:15-17) and later biblical material makes it clear that sex with a member of one's own sex (along with any other form of sexual activity outside marriage) is such a transgression.

Thirdly, Genesis 1 and 2 describe human beings as not only similar, but also different. The point in both Genesis 1 and 2 is that both men and women are human, but that they are human in different ways and human beings are called to fulfil their vocation as God's image bearers in the light of this unity in difference. Contrary to what Haller (2009) seems to suggest, Genesis does not talk about humanity as being like a pair of scissors with two identical blades (as would have been the case if God had created another male human being to be Adam's helper). Instead they are like a pair of scissors with blades that are alike, but not identical - as with a pair of scissors where one blade is flat and the other is serrated. It is this unity in difference that is meant by the language of male-female 'complementarity' and this does seem to be what Genesis teaches.

It is true that Genesis 1 and 2 do not spell out in any detail what this complementarity involves, but it clearly involves a sexual complementarity that will enable human beings to fulfil the vocation given in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply.

Fourthly, we learn from Genesis 2:24 that marriage is intended to give expression to this complementarity. The 'therefore' at the beginning of verse 24 indicates that it is because God has created human beings as male and female that men and women come together in marriage. Marriage is thus built on the foundation of the complementarity between men and women.

It is not the case, as both Andrew Mein (2007) and William Johnson (2006) suggest, that the Genesis account gives room for a parallel form of marriage for those who feel a companion of the same sex is more appropriate. In Genesis 2 it is not because he delights in her that Eve is the appropriate companion for Adam. Rather, he delights in her because she is the appropriate, God given, complement to him as a male human being. In Genesis it is God who decides who is the appropriate companion for male and female human beings in marriage and his decision is that it is a member of the opposite sex.

It is true, as James Brownson (2013) argues, that according to Genesis 2:24 marriage creates a new kinship group, but it is a kinship group with a very specific foundation. It is a new social unit based on the coming together of the two parts of humanity, male and female, in an exclusive sexual union. This is what is emphasized in Genesis 2:24. Meg Warner's (2013) idea that the text is about the transgression of the normal Israelite rules about who people can marry

reads more into 'a man leaves his father and his mother' than the text itself contains. There is nothing in the context in Genesis to suggest that this is how we are meant to read this verse.

There is no specific reference to procreation in Genesis 2:24, but in the wider context of Genesis the coming together of men and women in the way that this verse describes is what enables them to fulfil the mandate to reproduce given in Genesis 1:28. We can see this because, having been brought together by God in the prototype for all later marriages, Adam and Eve go on to fulfil the reproductive mandate in Genesis 4:1-2.

Fifthly, contrary to Deryn Guest's (2006) reading there is nothing in Genesis 3:16 to suggest that women might 'justifiably' walk away from having sexual relations with men. The text acknowledges that after the Fall the relationship between men and women will be distorted by sin, and that part of this distortion will be that the male-female relationship will be marked by domination rather than equality, but there is nothing in the Genesis text that suggests that this means that people are free to walk away from what God has established in Genesis 1 and 2.

The biblical message is not that human beings are free to escape the consequences of sin by establishing their own versions of reality, but that they have to

face up to the challenge of living in obedience to the way that God has created them in a context that makes this much more difficult than it would have been had humanity not fallen.

Genesis 19 and Judges 19 (pages 52-64 and 200-213)

The first thing to note about the story in Genesis 19 is that, contrary to what is suggested by Lings, it does involve a sexual element. There are four pieces of internal and external evidence that make this clear.

- The use of *yada*, 'know,' in an unambiguously sexual sense in Genesis 19:8 and the fact that Lot offers his daughters to the crowd indicates that 'know' in Genesis 19:5 also has to be understood in a sexual way. In the literary context of Genesis 19 it does not make sense to read Genesis 19:5 any other way.
- As James De Young (2000) has pointed out, following Robert Alter, (1981) Genesis 19 fits into a wider section of Genesis running from Genesis 18-20 which consists of a series of stories to do with sexual sin and its punishment. A sexual reading of the Sodom story fits best into this structure.
- The literary similarities between Genesis 19 and Judges 19 show that the latter is clearly intended to echo the story of Sodom and

Judges 19 is unambiguously concerned with sexual wrongdoing. The earliest biblical commentary on Genesis 19 thus understands it as having to do with sex.

- Ezekiel 16:49-50 in the Old Testament and Jude 7 and 2 Peter 1:6-8 interpret the story in sexual terms.

The suggestion that Genesis 19 is simply about the punishment of inhospitality thus fails to do justice to the biblical evidence.

Secondly, there is nothing in the text to support the idea that the men of Sodom knew that Lot's visitors were angels. Verse 5 tells us that the men of Sodom referred to them as 'men.' The reader of Genesis knows that the visitors are angels. The men of Sodom do not.

Steve Schuh (2007) is therefore incorrect to suggest that the story in Genesis 19 is about sex with angels. It is not. It is about men wanting to have sex with other men. This is also true in Judges 19 where angels are never an issue.

Thirdly, the ideas that the men of Sodom were motivated by xenophobia, or homophobia, or that they were intent upon rape are all read into the text. As Victor Hamilton (1990) has pointed out, Hebrew has a vocabulary to describe rape and it is not used in this text. All that Genesis 19:5 tells us, therefore, is

that the men of Sodom wanted to have sexual relations with Lot's visitors. It does not limit what the men of Sodom were contemplating to rape even if the context suggests that this may have been what the crowd had in mind.

The fact that the text leaves it at that and that it says nothing about the motivation of the crowd, or about whether they were homosexual or bisexual, is theologically significant. In order to make it clear that Sodom was a gravely sinful place all the text has to say is that its inhabitants wanted to have sex with men. That in itself constitutes a wicked act (Genesis 19:6) which illustrates the more general wickedness for which Sodom, Gomorrah, and two neighboring cities are going to be destroyed.

In Genesis 19, and in Judges 19, the desire for homosexual sex is in itself evidence of the wider sinfulness of a society that has turned from God. This is the same point that is made on an even wider canvas by Paul in Romans 1:26-27.

Fourthly, it is a mistake to read the texts as if the behavior of Lot and the old man in Gibeah were meant to provide an example for the readers of these texts to emulate. This is what Thatcher (2008) and others seem to assume, but there is nothing in the text to suggest that we are not meant to be appalled by their actions.

Part of the point of story in Genesis is that despite the fact that Lot is a righteous man (2 Peter 2:7-8) he and his family are as deeply flawed as anyone else and are only saved by the unmerited grace of God, and like many characters in Genesis they go wrong when they seek their own solutions to the problems they are facing (see, for example, how Abraham does this in Genesis 16:1-6 and 19:30-38) In Judges, the story in chapters 19 and 20 is meant to illustrate that because 'every man did what was right in his own eyes' (Judges 21:25) Israelite society in its entirety has reached the same level of corruption that brought the judgment of God on the previous inhabitants of the land of Canaan such as the men of Sodom. The action of the old man, just like the homosexual desires of those outside his house, are a sign of a society that has reverted to paganism.

The behavior of Lot and the old man do not therefore provide examples to emulate, but are instead a warning to us about the endemic and multi-faceted nature of the fallenness of human beings (which is again similar to the point that Paul makes in Romans 1).

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (pages 64-77 and 213-234)

The first point that needs to be made about these two texts is that the language used is, as Davidson (2007)

notes, untechnical in character and involves a permanent negative prohibition. What these texts say is simply that men should not have sex with a man instead of a woman. Furthermore, the fact that both parties deserve punishment in 20:13 indicates that even consensual homosexual sex is forbidden.

There is nothing in these texts to suggest that what is forbidden can be limited to anal penetration as Stephen Greenberg (2004) and Jay Michaelson (2011) suggest. What is forbidden would clearly include anal penetration, but it is not limited to it any more than the various forms of incest listed in Leviticus 18:6-18, or the prohibition of adultery in Exodus 20:14, are limited to vaginal penetration. In both instances general terms for sexual activity are used. It is true that later Rabbinic commentary on Leviticus 18:22, seeking to be as legally precise as possible, focused on anal sex, but that is not something that can be derived from the text itself.

Furthermore, there is nothing to suggest either that what is forbidden is male-on-male incest as David Tab Stewart (2006) argues. In both Leviticus 18 and 20 where incest is forbidden the degree of relationship that is prohibited is what is specified (see 18:6-18 and 20:11-12 and 14), whereas in 18:22 and 20:13 it is the sex of the people concerned rather than their relationship that is specified.

Secondly, the prohibition cannot be limited to the people of Israel or to the land of Israel as Jacob Milgrom (2004) suggests. As Brown (2014) points out, Leviticus 18:3 sees the offences listed in the chapter as actions that are wrong wherever they are committed, whether in Egypt or in Canaan, and 18:26 makes it clear that they are also binding on the 'stranger (i.e. non-Israelite) who sojourns among you.' Furthermore, the New Testament sees them as applicable to Gentile Christians living outside the land of Israel.

Thirdly, there is nothing in the text to suggest that there is a limited reason for the prohibition, such as a concern with the importance of procreation, or a belief in the superiority of men over women, or an association between homosexuality and pagan idolatry.

To take the first of these suggestions, the fact that the prohibition on male-to-male sex in Leviticus 18 and 20 sits alongside offences of incest and adultery which have procreative potential, but are nonetheless prohibited, suggests that the absence of procreative potential in homosexual sex is not the underlying issue. The existence of a range of offences, which includes offering children to Moloch and bestiality, also suggests that male superiority, and hence a prohibition on treating a man like a woman, is likewise not the issue at stake, since the issue of male

superiority does not apply in relation to the other offences mentioned.

The idea that the prohibition of homosexuality is linked to idol worship or the practices of the Canaanites is again ruled out by the range of offences prohibited in these chapters, since it is hard to think that every case of incest or adultery was somehow linked to a pagan cult and by the fact that the word *toevah* ('abomination') used in 18:22 and 20:13 is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to apply to serious moral offences and not just to ritual transgressions or actions that are culturally unacceptable.

As Davidson (2007) notes, the reason that a reference to sacrificing children to Molech is included in 18:21 is because it was regarded as an offence against the sanctity of family life and thus a sexual offence. This means that the fact that the prohibition on homosexuality comes next cannot be used as an argument that homosexuality was prohibited because of a link to idolatry.

Fourthly, if we ask what the motivation behind the prohibition of all male-to-male sexual activity was, Jonathan Burnside's (2011) careful analysis of the structure of Leviticus 20 suggests that it was forbidden, like all the other sexual offences prohibited there, because it came under the overall category of

adultery. That is to say, the starting point for the thinking about sexual morality in the Torah is a marriage between one man and one woman in line with the way that God created the human race. All the prohibited sexual offences are offences because in various ways they involve sex outside this context, sex before marriage, sex with someone other than your wife, sex with someone of the same sex, or sex with another species. The issue is therefore the way that God has created the world and the calling of human beings to behave in a way that corresponds to that.

Lesbianism would seem to fit into this list of prohibitions just as well as male homosexual activity and this raises the question of why it is not mentioned in Leviticus. Davidson (2007) may well be right in his suggestions that a prohibition of lesbianism may be implicit in the general prohibition in Leviticus 18:3 against following the practices of the Egyptians and the Canaanites, as the Rabbis thought, or that the prohibitions in the masculine singular may have been seen as applying generically to both men and women. Certainly Paul sees lesbianism as forbidden alongside male homosexuality in Romans 1:26, and this would seem to indicate that he understood the Levitical prohibitions inclusively.

Fifthly, Thatcher's (2008) claim that a consistent attitude towards the continuing validity of the laws in Leviticus would involve wanting to apply the death

penalty to homosexual activity today fails to take note of the point noted by Sam Allberry (2013) and others that what the text may in fact be saying is that homosexual practice is worthy of death rather than that the death penalty should be applied, and the fact that from a New Testament the death penalty for sin has already been paid by Christ (see 1 Peter 2:24) and that the proper response of the Church to sexual offences is church discipline, not the death penalty (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

Deuteronomy 23:17-18 (pages 77-78 and 234-239)

There is continuing debate amongst Old Testament scholars about the existence and nature of cultic prostitution in Old Testament times. However, as noted by Davidson (2007) and Gagnon (2012), there does seem to be evidence that the *qedeshim* (cult prostitutes of the sons of Israel) mentioned in Deuteronomy 23:17 were male homosexual cult prostitutes and that the *keleb* ('dog') mentioned in 23:18 was a non-cultic male prostitute.

This material in Deuteronomy reinforces the Old Testament's witness against all forms of homosexual activity as 'abomination' (Deuteronomy 23:18) and may possibly underlie the references to 'dogs' in Revelation 22:15.

What is unlikely, for the reasons explained above, is Schuh's (2007) argument that the sort of cultic prostitution mentioned in Deuteronomy is what is specifically forbidden in Leviticus. For reasons explained below it is also unlikely that this is what Paul is referring to in Romans 1:26-27 either.

Romans 1:26-27 (pages 78-97 and 239-256)

The first point to note in relation to Romans 1:26-27 is that Lings' argument that Romans 1:18-32 are the words of a Jewish opponent of Paul in Rome rather than the views of St. Paul himself builds on an idiosyncratic suggestion by Douglas Campbell (2009) that has not been accepted by any other major commentator on Romans. There is a debate about whether Romans 15 and 16 were originally part of Romans,⁹ but not about the Pauline character of Romans 1:18-32.

This is for two reasons:

- There is nothing in the vocabulary or theology of these verses that suggests that they could not have come from Paul.
- They form an integral part of Paul's argument in Romans.

⁹ See Charles Cranfield, *Romans*, vol. 1, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975, pp.5-12.

As the 'for' (*gar*) at the beginning of verse 18 indicates they connect back to what Paul says in Romans 1:16-17 because they being to illustrate why the 'righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith.' The universal sinfulness of human beings which 18-32 begins to describe, illustrates why human beings cannot become righteous on any other basis than faith in what God has done for them in Christ.¹⁰

They also link to what Paul says in Romans 2:1 ff as the word *dio* ('therefore') at the beginning of 2:1 shows. It is because what is said in 18-32 is true of humanity in general that the Jewish objector addressed in chapter 2 has no basis for claiming moral superiority.¹¹ If Paul does not agree with what is said in Romans 1:18-32 then what he says in chapter 2 makes no sense.

Secondly, there is also general agreement amongst commentators that, contrary to the arguments of Haller (2009), Schuh (2007) and others, 1:26 does refer to lesbianism rather to some form of non-coital heterosexual activity. There are four reasons for this consensus

¹⁰ For this interpretation of Romans 1:18 see *ibid*, p.108.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp.140-142.

- The linguistic parallels between the wording in verses 26 and 27 and the fact that Paul uses the word 'likewise' (*homoios*) to link them indicates that he is describing the same sort of activity in both verses. As verse 26 is explicitly about same-sex activity between men this therefore indicates that the previous verse is about same-sex activity between women.
- The idea that same-sex relations were 'unnatural' (*kata phusin*) was a standard critique of such relations among both Jewish and Greco-Roman writers and therefore the description in verse 26 of women abandoning natural for unnatural relations reads most naturally as a reference to lesbianism.
- If what is described is a deviant form of heterosexual activity it is hard to see why women alone are singled out for mention in verse 26. Heterosexual sex has to involve men as well!
- If what Paul is describing is a very specific and unusual form of heterosexual activity in the context of cultic activity, as Schuh (2007) suggests, it is not clear that his intended readers in Rome would know what he was referring to. Simply talking about 'unnatural relations' would be a very oblique and obscure way of referring to this.

It is true that Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius and Augustine interpret 1:26 in terms of non-coital heterosexual activity, but their comments have to be weighed against the evidence of the text itself and other early interpreters of the verse, such as the fourth century commentator known as Ambrosiaster, and St John Chrysostom, do see the verse as being about lesbianism.

If verse 26 is about lesbianism then this means that the argument put forward by Sarah Ruden (2010) that what St. Paul is attacking in verses 26-27 is pederasty falls away. This is because pederasty was an exclusively male form of same-sex activity and therefore by bracketing together both male and female same-sex activity Paul shows that pederasty is not the focus of his criticism. A specific reference to pederasty is also ruled out because of the general nature of the language used. The vocabulary used to describe pederastic relations is not employed here.

Thirdly, it is unlikely that St. Paul is only talking about same-sex activity in the context of cultic activity. It is true that Paul sees same-sex activity as one of the results of a world in which idolatry is rampant, but he nowhere makes a specific link between the sins he describes in verses 24-32 and cultic activity in pagan temples. No one would argue, for example, that there was a link between disobedience to parents (v30) and pagan worship and there is no reason to make this

link in verses 26-27 either. In addition, as the Evangelical Alliance (2012) report points out, the language of men being 'consumed with passion for one another' seems hard to apply to the impersonal relationships of temple prostitution.

Fourthly, there is also no reason to think that Paul objects to same-sex relations in Romans 1 because they break social conventions about gender roles, because they are non-procreative, or because they involve an excess of passion. These ideas all have to be read into the text. There is nothing in the vocabulary used in verses 26-27, or the overall argument of Romans 1, or what St. Paul writes about sexual ethics elsewhere, which supports them.

Fifthly, as the majority of commentators of Romans hold, what Paul is criticizing is a violation of the order of creation. Both the fact that Paul's whole argument in Romans 1:18ff is about how human beings have turned away from the evidence for God and his will presented by the created order and the numerous intertextual echoes of Genesis 1 and 2 in these verses indicate that Paul has the creation accounts in mind. Furthermore, as has already been noted, the standard Jewish and Greco-Roman critique of same-sex relations was that they went against the created order

and were therefore ‘unnatural’ (which is what Paul says in Romans 1:26-27).¹²

These two converging pieces of evidence point to the fact that what Paul thinks is wrong with both female and male same-sex activity is that it is a violation of the created order laid down by God as witnessed to by Genesis 1 and 2 and that it involves a refusal to accept the witness of creation in that it entails human beings ignoring the obvious fact that male and female human beings are so designed physically as to be sexually complementary. It is this latter point, alongside the strong Jewish dislike of homosexual relations as a distinctively Gentile form of vice, which explains why Paul chooses to use them as his prime example of the result of human beings turning away from God.

Thatcher’s (2008) contention that the whole basis of Paul’s critique is flawed because we no longer accept the ‘mythological structure’ underlying Paul’s argument is unpersuasive because there is still a good case for the view that monotheism was in fact prior to

¹² Against the argument of Scroggs and others this also means that the ‘exchange’ in Romans 1:26-27 is not about men and women who are heterosexual by nature engaging in homosexual acts, as if this mean that some people are not created to be heterosexual. Paul’s point is that all human beings were created to be heterosexual in the sense of being intended to have sex only with a member of the opposite sex and is *for this reason* that the fact that some people have homosexual desires is a problem.

polytheism¹³ and because even if it could be shown that all human cultures were originally polytheistic this would not undermine Paul's argument that the witness of the created order shows that this ought not to have been the case and was the result of some universal and primordial turning away from God.

This brings us to the sixth and final point which is that, while same-sex relations are not the only forms of sin highlighted by St. Paul in Romans 1, and while it is true that they are the result of the outworking of God's universal judgment on the human race as whole, nevertheless, as Gagnon emphasizes, the vocabulary that Paul uses indicates that they are a grievous form of sin and his use of similar vocabulary in Romans 6:19 and 13:13-14 makes it clear that they are a form of sexual immorality incompatible with Christian discipleship.

This point addresses the suggestion that Paul's argument does not address the case of contemporary Christian same-sex couples who have not turned away from God, but are seeking to live lives of faithful discipleship. According to the argument of Romans the fact that they are engaging in sexually immoral behavior indicates that, in this area of their lives at

¹³ See chapter IV of G K Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993, for what is still a persuasive argument on this point.

least, they are not living out their discipleship as faithfully as they should be.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11, I Timothy 1:10 (pages 97-110 and 256-271)

The first point that needs to be noted in relation to these verses is that David Wright's (1984) argument that *arsenokoitai* was a word coined either by St. Paul himself, or by some preceding Hellenistic Jewish writer, on the basis of the Septuagint version of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and that it is a general term for men who sleep (i.e. have sex) with other men, is one that has stood the test of time. No one has yet successfully refuted it.

The term *malakoi* that precedes it in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is a term that can simply mean 'soft' in the sense of 'effeminate,' but in this context, when it is paired together with *arsenokoitai* as part of a list of sexual offences, by far the most likely interpretation is that it means the passive partner in male same-sex sexual intercourse with *arsenokoitai* referring to the active partner.

In 1 Timothy 1:10, where it stands on its own, *arsenokoitai* has to be read less specifically as referring to same-sex activity in general.

Secondly, what Paul is doing by his use of these terms is describing same-sex activity in general. He is not

addressing specific forms of such activity. There is nothing in either of the passages involved to suggest that Paul has in mind pederastic or exploitative same-sex activity or that he has in mind only same-sex activity involving adultery or incest or that takes place in the context of pagan idol worship.

The language of pederastic activity is not used in either passage and the attempt by Brownson (2013) , Rogers (2009) and Dale Martin (1996), to link together *arsenokoitai* and kidnappers in 1 Timothy 1:10 (with the latter being those who kidnap boys for sex and the former being those who have sex with such boys) fails to observe two points:

- (1) That kidnapping was not solely for the purposes of prostitution and that this therefore cannot be assumed to be the meaning here.
- (2) That 1 Timothy 1:10 is based on the Decalogue and that in this framework *arsenokoitai* belongs with 'immoral persons' as terms for those who violate the seventh commandment against adultery (understood in terms of extra-marital sexual activity in general) in heterosexual and homosexual ways, while kidnappers are those who are guilty of a separate offence against the prohibition of stealing in the eighth commandment (in this case the stealing of people).

In 1 Corinthians 6:9 adultery and the activities of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* are clearly distinguished as two separate offences and there is nothing that links either to the incest referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:1 as Alan Cadwallader (2012) suggests. In Leviticus the offences of incest and homosexual sex are clearly distinguished so the argument that Paul is conflating the two here does not make any sense.

There is also nothing to be said for Schuh's (2007) suggestion that idolatry is the controlling offence in the vice list in 1 Corinthians. What we have in this list is a series of separate vices, which cannot all be plausibly linked to pagan cultic activity. No one would argue, for example, that adultery or theft have any necessary connection with pagan cults so why should this be so in the case of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*?

Thirdly, in both passages Paul makes it clear that the Old Testament prohibitions against same-sex relationships are still in force (and apply to Gentiles as well as Jews) and that such relationships are to be repudiated by Christians as contrary to the new status they have in Christ (1 Corinthians) and as contrary to the 'gospel' and 'sound doctrine' (1 Timothy).

Jude 7 (pages 110-116 and 271-278)

There is general agreement that Jude is referring to the story of the destruction of Sodom and the surrounding cities in Genesis 19. The common view

among revisionist writers, which is supported by Richard Bauckham (1983) in his commentary on Jude, is that both Jude 6 and 7 are concerned with the topic of sex with angels:

The revisionist view is that 'just as' at the start of Jude 7 means that just as the angels in verse 6 sinned by lusting after mortal women as recorded Genesis 6:1-4 so in a parallel manner the inhabitants of Sodom sinned by lusting after the angels who were staying with Lot.

This interpretation notes that the literal wording of the second half of verse 7 is that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbouring cities were 'going after other flesh (*sarkos heteras*)' and it claims that this reference to other flesh cannot mean homosexual desire.

On the other hand, there are five points that can be made on the other side:

1. There is nothing in the Genesis story itself that suggests that Sodom, Gomorrah and the surrounding cities were judged for desiring to have sex with angels. First of all, as Dave Miller (2004) correctly notes, they were not judged simply on the basis of what happened to the visitors to Lot. What happened on that occasion was simply the presenting example of a wider pattern of sinfulness, including

sexual sin, most of which had nothing to do with angels. Furthermore the story in Genesis 19:4-11 indicates that the men of Sodom did not know the visitors were angels and so could not have desired to have sex with them on the basis that they were. All this would have been as obvious to Jude as to any other reader of Genesis.

2. Subsequent Jewish interpretations of the Sodom story both in the Bible and in other Jewish sources say nothing about a desire for sex with angels. Bauckham (1983) suggests that this idea can be found in the *Testament of Naphtali*, but, as Davids (2006) points out, it is not necessary to read this text in that way.
3. The term 'other flesh' does not itself carry any implication of sex with angels. What 'other' means is determined by the context and, as Davids (2006) says, it could perfectly well mean 'other' in the sense of 'different, not from themselves, but from the women they were supposed to desire.'
4. It is possible that the comparison between the two stories is not about the sexual component, but about the fact that both acts of sin resulted in acts of divine judgment.
5. 2 Peter, which draws on Jude, and as such constitutes the earliest commentary on its meaning, also refers to the Sodom story,

talking about the 'licentiousness' and (v7) and 'lust of defiling passion' (10) which were characteristics of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, but saying nothing about sex with angels.

These five points mean that there is no necessity to read Jude 7 in terms of wanting sex with angels, rather than more straightforward homosexual lust, and good reasons for not reading in that way.

The most likely readings are either Davids' (2006) suggestion that 'going after other flesh' means 'desiring homosexual sex' or Gagnon's (2003) grammatically possible suggestion that it means that 'in the course of committing sexual immorality they inadvertently lusted after angels.' In both cases homosexual desire is seen as a reason for God's judgment.

The teaching and practice of Jesus (pages 117-136 and 279-299)

As Tom Wright (1996), argues in detail in his book *Jesus and the Victory of God* when undertaking serious study of the historical Jesus it is vital to explain how the proposed picture of his teaching and practice makes sense both in terms of the teaching and practice of the Judaism of his day and in terms of the subsequent teaching and practice of the Early Church.

An account of Jesus that isolates him from both is necessarily historically implausible.

This is the key point in mind when considering the idea that the Gospels can be read in terms of Jesus being sympathetic to, or accepting of, homosexual practice.

If this was the case then the first thing that has to be explained is why there is no trace of this in the gospels.

As traditionalist writers have pointed out, the fact that there are no recorded sayings of Jesus specifically relating to the issue of homosexuality can be perfectly satisfactorily explained because this was a non-issue in the Palestinian Judaism of Jesus' day. Same-sex activity was seen by Palestinian Jews as contrary to creation, forbidden by the Torah and a characteristic vice of idolatrous Gentiles. There was therefore no need for Jesus to remind people that it was wrong. As Gagnon (2012) observes, he would have been 'preaching to the choir.'

However, if Jesus had supported same-sex relationships, then this would have caused enormous controversy for the reasons just given and there would be a record of this in the Gospels, just as there is a record of the ways in which he challenged the thinking of his contemporaries on other matters.

Furthermore, if Jesus did take this revolutionary approach, then there is a further question about why this apparently had no effect whatsoever on the Early Church which, as far the evidence goes, seems to have remained universally opposed to same-sex practice. When the Church moved out into the wider Greco-Roman world it simply said, as we have seen above, that homosexuality was wrong, just as Judaism had always done. We can see how the Early Church followed the teaching and practice of Jesus on a whole host of other matters¹⁴ so why they did they not follow him on this issue? The most plausible explanation was that there was nothing to follow.

The 'argument from silence' over homosexuality thus points strongly in the direction of Jesus taking the same negative attitude to homosexual practice as Palestinian Judaism and the Early Church.

However, we are not left simply with the argument from silence. We also know:

- That Jesus founded his sexual ethic on the fact that God created human beings as male and female and joined them together in marriage as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2 (Matthew 19:1-9, Mark 10:2-12).

¹⁴ See for example, David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999 and *Did St Paul Get Jesus Right?*, Oxford: Lion Books, 2010.

- That Jesus did not reject the teaching of the Torah on sexual ethics, but rather intensified it by including desire as well as action and by taking a stricter line on divorce (Matthew 5:27-32).
- That the Gospels tell us that Jesus included *porneia* as one of those things that renders an individual unclean in the sight of God (Matthew 5:19, Mark 7:21). In spite of the arguments of Haller (2009) to the contrary, the lexical evidence still suggests that *porneia* was a catch all term that included not only adultery, but also incest, homosexuality and bestiality. Obviously, Jesus himself probably did not use the actual term *porneia* because he would normally have spoken in Aramaic rather than Greek, but by using this term Matthew and Mark are testifying that Jesus regarded homosexuality as something that made people unclean before God.

These three known facts together do not seem to leave any space for Jesus to have approved homosexuality.

Furthermore, Gagnon's (2012) points that in a first century Jewish context Jesus' references to the judgment of Sodom (Matthew 10:14-15, Luke 10:210-12) would have been taken to include the fact that it was judged by God for homosexual vice and that

Jesus's saying about not giving that which is holy to dogs (Matthew 7:6) may include an intertextual echo of Deuteronomy 23:17-18 seem to be well made and provide additional evidence that Jesus accepted what the Old Testament had to say about God's judgment on homosexual practice.

It is true, as Browne (2007) says, that Jesus' primary call was to follow him and it is also true, as numerous revisionist writers have pointed out, that Jesus welcomed the outsider and the outcast, including those rejected by contemporary society because of their sexual misbehaviour. However, it is also true that we cannot separate Jesus call to follow him and his welcoming of sinners from a call to repentance and discipleship (see Matthew 16:24-25, Mark 1:15, Luke 5:32, 19:1-10) and if we ask what repentance and discipleship involved according to Jesus then we are led back to Jesus' rigorous sexual ethic as set out above.

As Allberry (2013), Brown (2014) and others have pointed out, it is also illegitimate to appeal to Jesus' saying about eunuchs (Matthew 19:10-12) or the story of his healing of centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10) as indicating that Jesus approved of same-sex relationships. What Jesus saying about eunuchs tells us is that he saw the only alternative to (heterosexual) marriage as celibacy and in the case of the story of the centurion's servant: (a) there is

nothing in the language used in the story to indicate a sexual relationship, (b) the Jewish authorities would not have regarded the centurion as a 'righteous man' had he been in such a relationship, (c) Jesus endorsement of such a relationship would have meant endorsement of a exploitative relationship involving pederasty and probably rape.

It is also illegitimate to appeal to John 10:10 in support of same-sex relationships as Via (2003) does, since, as Gagnon points out in his response to Via (2003), the abundant life Jesus offers involves living in obedience to Jesus' command which in turn means either living a faithful married life or a faithful celibate one.

Finally, what about the ideas of the 'Queer Jesus' and the 'queer disciples' on the road to Emmaus?

On the first, it is perfectly acceptable to say that Jesus can be identified with all those who suffer, whether because of homophobic violence or for any other reason. Jesus' identification with the human race in his incarnation, death and resurrection means that he identified with everyone. However, Jesus identified with sinners not in order to endorse their sinful lifestyle, but in order to enable them to break free from it. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 'we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live

might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.'

On the second, there is nothing in Luke's story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) that gives any support at all to Goss' (2006) notion of people experiencing Jesus' resurrection through 'embodied erotic experiences.' On the contrary, the message of the Bible is (a) as the Emmaus road story itself reminds us, the risen Christ makes himself known to us through word and sacrament and (b) that in so far as the erotic experiences to which Goss (2006) refers involve same-sex activity the power of the resurrection is encountered when people are given the ability to forsake such experiences and live a new life that is free of them (see Romans 6:1-14).

Examples of same-sex relationships in Scripture (pages 137-157 and 300-312)

David and Jonathan (pages 137-145 and 300-305)

The arguments of Greenberg (2004), Thatcher (2008) and Jennings (2005) that there was a homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan are called into question even by revisionist scholars such as Michaelson (2011), Ken Stone (2006) and James Harding (2013) and fall away completely in the face of the detailed examination of the relevant evidence by Jonathan Rowe (2014), Brown(2014) and Davidson (2007). What the narrative in 1 Samuel 18-20 is about

in its canonical context is not a homosexual relationship, but Jonathan's steadfast loyalty to David as God's chosen successor to Saul as king of Israel. Jonathan acts as a foil to Saul by showing loyalty to the Lord's anointed while Saul seeks to kill him.

This narrative also tells us about the importance of loving friendships between those of the same sex within the company of God's people (an idea that is also present in the story of Ruth and Naomi), though Harding (2013) steps outside the biblical witness when he suggests that it might be legitimate for such friendships to be sexual in nature.

Theodore Jennings' (2005) argument that there was a homosexual love triangle involving Saul, David and Jonathan, that this taught David how to love, and that he in turn then taught God how to love through a homoerotic relationship between them has no grounding in the biblical text.

As has already been noted, there is no evidence for a two way relationship between David and Jonathan, let alone a love triangle. God is never depicted in Scripture as being in a homoerotic relationship with anyone (the biblical picture of the relationship between God and his people is that of heterosexual marriage). The idea that God ceases to inflict judgment and becomes loving in the course of his relationship with David falls foul of the biblical

affirmation of the changelessness of God (Numbers 23:19, Malachi 3:6, James 1:17) and the biblical witness that both God's love and his willingness to perform acts of judgment remain constant before, during and after David's time.

Ruth and Naomi (pages 145-151 and 306-308)

Brown (2014) and Davidson (2007) also demolish the argument that the relationship between Ruth and Naomi is depicted as a lesbian relationship. The book is about how God brings about the birth of David (and therefore in wider biblical terms the birth of Christ) through a heterosexual marriage and through familial loyalty between Ruth and Naomi that is rooted in heterosexual marriage in the sense that it is because of heterosexual marriage that they are related to each other in the first place.

To use modern phraseology what the book teaches is a 'heteronormative' view of both marriage and family life. This means that the attempts by Jennings, Ruth Mathieson (2013) and Mona West (2006) to invoke this story as providing 'survival strategies' for queer people and their relationships in a heteronormative world goes completely against the grain of the text.

In addition, Mathieson's (2013) argument that because Ruth is a member of an 'excluded minority' her actions provide 'a biblical precedent for modern day minorities to participate in the reinterpretation of

biblical laws which may currently exclude them from the church and prohibit them marrying' ignores the fact that the point of story is that Ruth the Moabitess has renounced her status as part of an excluded minority. She has by her own choice renounced being a member of the people of Moab and become a member of the people of Israel and subject to Israel's God and his laws.

A genuine modern day parallel to the Ruth story would be Rosaria Butterfield (2012) renouncing her status as a lesbian and tenured professor in women's studies to become a Christian and live according to the disciplines of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Jesus' relationships (pages 151-157 and 308-312)

Gagnon (2008) explains in detail the reasons why the suggestion by Jennings, Goss and Keith Sharpe (2011) that Jesus and the Beloved Disciple were lovers is untenable. Put simply, he points out that (a) the evidence is not there, (b) the existence of such a relationship is impossible to conceive given what else we know about Jesus' teaching and practice and (c) the existence of such a relationship does not make historical sense in a first century Jewish context.

Jennings' (2003) interpretation of Mark 14:51-52 quoted by Thatcher (2008) is similarly improbable. The entire evidence that there is any homoerotic element to the story rests on the fact that the person

was concerned was young and nude. The fact that he was young is irrelevant (young does not equal 'in a pederastic relationship') and the fact that he was nude was not because of any involvement in gay sex but because he lost his garment by accident when escaping arrest. Moreover, any appeal to the conventions of 'Hellenistic pederastic culture' ignore the fact that this is a story involving Jewish people in a Jewish setting for whom pederasty was religiously and culturally unacceptable.

The most plausible explanation of the story is that it is Mark's modest signature to his gospel, saying 'I was there' and most plausible explanations for his only having one garment are either that he had come from his house to warn Jesus of his impending arrest or, as John Wenham (1984) suggested, because the garden belonged to his family and he sleeping out there to alleviate overcrowding at home over the Passover period.

Thatcher's (2008) comment that 'Jesus we may speculate was just the sort of company with whom a sexually exploited young man could relax and feel accepted' rests on the assumption that the young man was sexually exploited and also ignores the evidence outlined above that in so far as he was engaged in homosexual activity Jesus would have made clear to him that he must repent of it.

Secret Mark remains a much debated text, but even if it even if it is genuine rather than a forgery it seems probable that it represents an expansion of the canonical gospels in the interest of Gnostic theology rather than a genuinely independent source of information about the historical Jesus.¹⁵ It would thus be unwise to use it as a basis for sexual ethics.

Finally, Martin's (2006) homoerotic reading of the gospels is based on a consistent misreading of the gospel texts. Thus, as Brown (2014) points out, there is nothing in John 11 to suggest that Lazarus and his sisters were gay, when we are told that Jesus 'loved' the rich young ruler (Mark 10:21), there is nothing in the text that suggests that Mark has erotic love in mind, the account of the washing of the disciples feet in John 13 says nothing about a 'special seduction' of Peter and the '*nolli me tangere*' in John 20:17 has to do with Jesus' coming ascension and not with his dislike of physical contact with a woman.

Conclusion

The conclusion that emerges from the evaluation in this chapter, is that the work of revisionist writers since 2003 has failed to successfully challenge Brown's (2014) contention that 'the Bible is a

¹⁵ See the discussion in R H Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, pp.603-623.

heterosexual book.’ There is no instance covered in this report in which it can be shown that a revisionist reading of the biblical material makes more sense than a traditionalist one.

Of the three scenarios sketched out at the beginning of this report it is the last one that is accurate.

Nothing we have looked at suggests that the Bible is unclear in its teaching about homosexual conduct.

Nothing we have looked at points to the conclusion that the debate about the matter must be judged inconclusive. Although writers about the issue continue to disagree, the traditionalist position has not been successfully called into question.

This means that the continuing conflict about the teaching of Scripture has to be judged to be the result of the revisionist side failing to interpret Scripture properly in accordance with the principles for biblical interpretation discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

This being so, the existence of conflict is not a legitimate reason for the Church of England to be ‘cautious about attempting to pronounce definitively on the implications of Scripture for homosexual people.’ Such caution would constitute a failure by the Church of England to follow St. Paul’s example by

teaching clearly the 'whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27).

Those on the traditionalist side are still entitled to say that a proper, detailed, and informed study of the biblical material supports the traditional belief of the Church of England:

- That God created human beings in his image and likeness as male and female
- That marriage involves a sexual union between one man and one woman and that marriage should be open to the procreation of children
- That sexual relations are intended by God to take place solely in this context and that the only alternative to this is either temporary or permanent celibacy
- That all forms of same-sex sexual activity, both gay and lesbian, are a result of humanity's having turned away from God and are themselves sinful. In the Old Testament such activity is therefore prohibited by God's law, is seen as deserving of death, and provokes God's judgment. In the New Testament, it is seen as defiling people in God's sight, it is incompatible with the new life believers have been given in Christ and is a barrier to people inheriting the kingdom of God.

However much we may rightly be concerned about homophobia and homophobic violence, however much we may sympathize with the struggles faced by those who have same-sex attraction, and however much we may feel that the Church's teaching makes mission more difficult in our current context, the fact remains that if the Church of England is to remain loyal to Scripture these four points need to remain the basis of its teaching and practice.

Bibliography

Church of England reports

Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality, London: CHP, 2013.

Some Issues in Human Sexuality, London: CHP, 2003.

Revisionist approaches

Brownson 2013 - James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans 2013.

Browne 2007 - Arnold Browne, *The Call of Christ: Reading the New Testament*, in Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris (eds), *An acceptable sacrifice? Homosexuality and the Church*, London: SPCK, 2007, pp. 33-45.

Cadwallader 2012 – Alan Cadwallader, 'Keeping Lists or Embracing Freedom: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 in context' in Nigel Wright (ed), *Five Uneasy Pieces*, Adelaide: ATF, 2012, pp. 47-67.

Carden 2004 - Michael Carden, *Sodomy – A History of a Christian Biblical Myth*, London: Equinox, 2004.

Dawn 2007 - Maggi Dawn, 'Whose text is it anyway?' in Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris (eds), *An acceptable sacrifice? Homosexuality and the Church*, London: SPCK, 2007, pp.10-21.

Greenberg 2004 - Stephen Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

Guest 2005 - Deryn Guest, *When Deborah met Jael*, London: SCM, 2005.

Good, Jenkins, Kitteridge and Rogers 2011 - Deidre J Good, Willis J Jenkins, Cynthia B Kitteridge and Eugene F Rogers, 'A Theology of Marriage including Same-Sex Couples: A view from the Liberals,' *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol 93, No 1, Winter, 2011.

Goss 2006 - Robert Goss, 'Luke' in Deryn Guest, Robert E Goss, Mona West, Thomas Bodache (eds), *The Queer Bible Commentary*, London: SCM, 2006, pp.526-547.

Haller 2009 - Tobias Haller, *Reasonable and Holy*, New York: Seabury Books, 2009.

Harding 2013 - James Harding, 'Opposite sex marriage a biblical ideal? The case of David and Jonathan,' in Alan H Cadwallader (ed), *Pieces of Ease and Grace*, Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2013, pp. 35-52.

- Jennings 2003** - Theodore Jennings, *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament*, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003.
- Jennings 2005** - Theodore Jennings, *Jacob's Wound- homoerotic narrative in the literature of Ancient Israel*, New York & London, Continuum, 2005.
- Johnson 2006** - William Stacy Johnson, *A Time to Embrace – Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law and Politics*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Kraus 2011** - C Norman Kraus, *On being human - sexual orientation and the image of God*, Eugene Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011.
- Lings 2013** - K Renato Lings, *Love Lost in Translation*, Trafford Publishing, 2013.
- Martin 1996** - D B Martin 'Arsenokoites and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences' in R L Bawley (eds), *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Martin 2006** - Dale Martin, *Sex and Single Savior*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Mathieson 2013** - Ruth Mathieson, 'Ruth and Naomi' in Alan H Cadwallader (ed), *Pieces of Ease and Grace*, Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2013, pp.17-33.
- Mein 2007** - Andrew Mein, 'Threat and promise, the Old Testament on Sexuality' in Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris (eds), *An acceptable sacrifice?*

Homosexuality and the Church, London: SPCK, 2007, pp.22-32.

Michaelson 2011 - Jay Michaelson, *God vs. Gay?*
Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.

Milgrom 2004 - Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus*,
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

Rogers 2009 - Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2ed, 2009.

Rowland 2005 Christopher Rowland 'The letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life. Christian biblical interpretation' in Nicholas Coulton (ed), *The Bible, the Church and Homosexuality*, London: DLT, 2005.

Ruden 2010 - Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among the People*, New York: Image Books, 2010.

Schuh 2007 - Steve Schuh, 'Challenging conventional wisdom – How a conservative reading of the biblical references to homosexuality fails to support their traditional interpretation' at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/book_resources/docs/Challenging_Conventional_Wisdom-Schuh.pdf

Sharpe 2011 - Keith Sharpe, *The Gay Gospels*, Washington D.C. and Winchester: O Books, 2011.

Stewart 2006 – David Tabb Stewart, 'Leviticus' in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, pp. 77-104.

Stone 2006 – Ken Stone, '1 and 2 Samuel' in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, pp. 222-250.

Thatcher 2008 - Adrian Thatcher, *The Savage Text*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2008.

Warner 2013 - Meg Warner, 'Set in tradition and history: Genesis 2:24 and the marriage debate' in Alan H Cadwallader (ed), *Pieces of Ease and Grace*, Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2013, pp.1-15.

West 2006 – Mona West, 'Ruth' in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, pp. 190-194.

Traditionalist approaches

Allberry 2013 - Sam Allberry, *Is God anti-gay?* The Good Book Company 2013.

Brown 2014 -Michael Brown, *Can you be Gay and Christian?* Lake Mary: Front line, 2014.

Burnside 2011 - Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice and Society*, Oxford: OUP, 2011.

Dauids 2006 - Peter H Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Grand Rapids/Nottingham: Apollos, 2006.

Davidson 2007 - Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007.

Evangelical Alliance 2012 - Andrew Goddard and Don Horrocks (eds), *Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality*. London: Evangelical Alliance, 2012.

Gagnon 2008 – Robert Gagnon, 'Was Jesus in a sexual relationship with the Beloved Disciple?'

<http://www.robagnon.net/articles/HomosexBelovedDisciple.pdf>

Gagnon 2012 – Robert Gagnon, ‘How seriously does the Bible treat the issue of Homosexual Practice?’ in David Torrance and Jock Stein (eds) *Embracing Truth – Homosexuality and the Word of God*, Haddington: Handsel Press, 2012, pp. 151-178.

Goldingay 2010 - John Goldingay, *Key Questions about Christian Faith*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

Richardson 2012 - John Richardson, *What God Has Made Clean*, The Good Book Company, 2ed, 2012.

Sklar 2014 - Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, Downers Grove/Nottingham: IVP, 2014

Torrance 2012 - David Torrance ‘The Authority of Scripture; is the Bible the Word of God or does it only contain the Word of God?’ in David Torrance and Jock Stein (eds) *Embracing Truth – Homosexuality and the Word of God*, Haddington: Handsel Press, 2012, pp. 57-66.

Writings with material from both sides

Via and Gagnon 2003 - Dan O Via and Robert Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible – Two Views*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Other works cited.

Campbell 2009 - Douglas Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Re-reading of Justification in Paul*, Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 2009.

Butterfield 2012 - Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Secret Thoughts of a Reluctant Convert*, Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2012.

Lewis 2008 - C S Lewis, 'On the reading of old books' at <http://www.theelliots.org/Soapbox2008/OntheReadingofOldBooks.pdf>

O' Donovan 1993 - O M T O'Donovan *On the Thirty Nine Articles* Exeter: Paternoster Press 1993.

Wenham 1972 - John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, Leicester: IVP, 1972.

Wenham 1984 - John Wenham, *Easter Enigma*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984

Wright 1996 - Tom Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, London: SPCK, 1996.