

Paul Who?

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This is an expanded version of Dr. Blair's keynote address at connECtion87, the summer conferences of Evangelicals Concerned. The section on homosexuality was also presented at the 199th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1987. Dr. Blair is a psychotherapist in private practice in New York City. A member of The American Orthopsychiatric Association, The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues of The American Psychological Association, The Christian Association for Psychological Study, and The Evangelical Theological Society, he is a graduate of Bowling Green State University, The University of Southern California Graduate School of Religion, and The Graduate School of The Pennsylvania State University. He also studied at Bob Jones University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary.

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He was not the first Jew for Jesus. He would not be the last. But more than any other Jew or Gentile in nearly 2,000 years, and time and again, he has jolted his readers back to a Jesus that neither he nor they, by orthodox religious tradition or wild wishful thinking, were ever prepared to recognize.

A very few years after Jesus' execution, he was offending fellow Pharisees with a shocking law-free proclamation of good news: Jesus' death and resurrection opened God's kingdom to everyone everywhere -- without their having to become Jews or obey commandments in the Hebrew Bible. Some 15 years later, this rebel rabbi dictated a letter to faithing assemblies in Galatia. He warned them not to let legalistic religionist "trouble-makers" load them up with rules and rituals and thereby deprive them of their freedom in Jesus Christ.

Twenty centuries later and half a world away, the most powerful leader on earth was copying one of these sentences, inscribing it into a book already containing several of the rabbi's letters.

The first century rabbi was Paul. The twentieth century leader was Ronald Reagan. The book? A Bible purchased by Ollie North and autographed in the Oval Office in October, 1986. It was intended for Iranian officials ruling ancient Persian territory some 900 miles east of where Paul's Galatians had lived. The inscription was this: "And the Scripture, farseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blest in you.'" It isn't clear why the President chose these words to bless the secret sale of *weapons* from what *they* call "the Great Satan" to what *he* called "loony tunes" of an "international version of Murder Incorporated." It's been suggested that it was to confirm some

sort of brotherhood between Moslems, Jews, and Christians. Church Lady would snap: "Well, isn't that special." It's enigmatic how weapons meant to kill Iraqis (half way back to old Galatia) are expressions of the *good* news of God's grace and peace, justification by faith, and blessings to *all* nations. Actually, maybe it wasn't even meant to be read for it wasn't in Persian or Kurdish or Farsi. This Bible was in *English*.

But we shouldn't be too hard on the President for not quite getting Paul's point, even in translation. After all, Paul's contemporaries didn't always get it. His own dear "foolish Galatians" were confused. And II Peter warns that Paul's letters "contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort." There have always been people who never take the trouble to understand. People who like what they say Paul says and people who hate what they say Paul says maybe don't much know what Paul says. And maybe they don't much want to know. They invent appalling pop Pauls. Such pseudo Pauls are anti-sex, anti-women, anti-gay, anti-Semitic, anti-everything someone might innocently value. It's hard to believe that the earliest pop Paul was an "anything goes" antinomian. That would surprise Dudley Moore who fictionalized Paul writing: "Ah, dear Ephiscans, ... stop enjoying yourself ... stop having a good time, resign yourself not to have a picnic, cover yourself with ashes and start flailing yourselves."

But the more we learn of the *real* Paul, the more we can say with biblical scholars that Paul "is probably the most vilified Christian since Pentecost" [Keck and Furnish]. They agree that "Paul has always been a dangerous radical for the established church." According to F. F. Bruce of Manchester, there's "nothing artificial or merely conventional in what Paul says. ... [Paul was] the most liberal and emancipated of first-century Christians." Maybe this explains in part why among the some 300 popes of history, only 6 have been Pope Pauls. It took 100 popes to reach the time of Paul I (757) and almost 250 popes to get to the gay Pope Paul II (1464) -- the time of Martin Luther's parents. Perhaps some of the pillars of convention understood only too well what Paul was all about. The ecclesiastical domestication of Paul turned a once vibrant and liberal proclaimer of the most radical good news ever heard into a morbid moralizer of conventional bad advice. It was done in Paul's lifetime, as his letters make plain. And for at least 300 years after his death, his message of good news was virtually lost. As Bruce puts it: "By the last quarter of the second century, Paul's memory was venerated and his writings were canonized. But this did not mean that his teaching was understood. The tendency to subject Christian life to regulations was too powerful, and when, as happened from time to time, someone appeared who really grasped Paul's intention, the effort was liable to be revolutionary. Many of the fathers would not have thought it possible that Paul really meant what he said about Christians being no longer under law but under grace. ... the apostle who had been criticized by moralists in his lifetime as an antinomian was highly esteemed by their spiritual successors as an ascetic." According to Stendahl "At least three hundred years after its writing and distribution the basic insight of Paul's theology -- justification by faith (alone), without the works of the law -- seems to have been more or less lost in the teaching and thinking of the church." He reminds us that "It was not until

Augustine, more than three hundred years after Paul, that a man was found who seemed to see, so to say, what made Paul 'tick,' and who discerned the center of gravity in Pauline theology: justification." Stendahl says it is a mystery why Paul's message fell away but perhaps it was to be expected. Human beings want to be in control; we want to save ourselves. From time to time an Augustine, a Luther, a Wesley, a Barth has come along to discover anew Paul's message of grace and peace but too often, in the words of J. Gresham Machen, "the Pauline doctrine of grace was too wonderful and too divine to be understood fully by the human mind and heart" and as he also noted, "the same lack of understanding has been observable only too frequently throughout subsequent generations."

One recent example of this perversion is the fact that the uptight marketing guardians of contemporary American church values and customs refused entrance into this country of the British Bruce's biography of *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit*. The book had to come into America subtitled *Apostle of the Heart Set Free*.

We must admit, though, that for all his rabbinic question and answer format, Stoic diatribe, and debater's agility, Paul's writing can be difficult. Michael Bauman of Northeastern Bible College acknowledges that "Paul's words occasionally are infuriatingly vague or unclear." Herman Ridderbos notes that the "form and expression of [Paul's] gospel" is both "profound and complicated." Michael Grant speaks of Paul's "highly idiosyncratic ways of thinking and expressing himself ... and his blend of Jewish thought with Greek expression." He recognizes that scholars "of the highest mental capacity and integrity throughout the ages have stumbled into the thousand pits of ambiguity [Paul] involuntarily left for puzzled questioners." Bruce gives some explanation for this. He reminds us that "time and again Paul starts a sentence that never reaches a grammatical end, for before he is well launched on it a new thought strikes him and he turns aside to digress. Then, when he comes back to the main line, the original opening of the sentence has been forgotten. All this means that Paul is not the smoothest of authors, or the easiest to follow. Paul's style is not always easy to follow. This is partly on account of his habit of dictating his letters to an assistant. At times the impetuous torrent of Paul's thought seems to rush forward so swiftly that it outstrips the flow of his words, and his words have to leap over a gap now and then to catch up with his thought. We can only surmise how the assistant contrived to keep up with his words."

Perhaps we're separated from Paul's world by too many centuries, too many cultures. Hasn't someone said that "the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there?" A Scandinavian bishop says that "it is perhaps not totally true ... that [people are] the same through the ages. ... It is quite clear," he says, "that in the very basic understanding of [the human] predicament there is a gulf not only between Paul and us, but between the New Testament and our time" [Stendahl]. But is this too strong? Of course there are differences between our world and Paul's, but psychiatrist Robert Coles may make more sense when he observes: "Nothing I have discovered about the makeup of human beings contradicts in any way what I learn from the Hebrew prophets ... and from Jesus and the lives of those he touched. Anything that I can say as

a result of my research into human behavior is a mere footnote to those lives in the Old and New Testaments." And Malcolm Muggeridge, once of *Punch*, draws attention to ways Paul's world is ours when he says that "human beings in all ages [have] a wonderful faculty for becoming preoccupied with what matters least and averting their eyes from what matters most." He says that people back then were "very like their 20th century equivalents, with their passion for always *telling and hearing something new*. There was so much in Paul's world to remind us of ours; like the demonstration at Ephesus when the mob shouted monotonously for two hours on end: *Great is Diana of the Ephesians*, or, for that matter, the games, with their presentation of spectacles of violence and eroticism for the edification of multitudes of listless viewers." Historian Robert Banks notes that: "while in many respects Paul was very much a man of his times, in others he was astonishingly ahead of them." Still, Stendahl's biblical scholarship should alert us to a recognition that his observations on a differentness in some sense between Paul's day and our own is useful and not completely eradicated by the observations of Coles, Muggeridge, and Banks. Such an awareness of differences can be helpful when we try to understand such culturally conditioned phenomena as the role of women and homosexuality in our two societies.

Paul's personal world was geographically wide for his day. He was a man-on-the-go. The Mediterranean metropolises and the long, dangerous stretches between them -- these were the scenes of his world. Today, the name of this "Apostle to the World" names cities and towns in hemispheres he never even heard of -- from Brazil to the Philippines, from Oregon through the Midwest to Virginia and South Carolina. The St. Paul River flows through Liberia. San Pablo Bay nestles north of San Francisco. St. Paul Islands dot the Indian Ocean and the Bering Sea and the St. Paul Rocks bake on the Atlantic Equator. But Paul was not only on-the-go geographically; he was on-the-go *theologically*. And that made him an *outsider*, both geographically and theologically. He was the *Apostle to the Outsiders*: God's ambassador to "the dogs."

For three decades -- ten times longer than his Lord's earthly ministry-- Paul ministered back and forth through the eastern Mediterranean world, finally going all the way to Rome, perhaps even to Spain.

Based on what we know of travel in the 1st century, the many thousands of miles Paul covered were filled with more dangers than he reports in his letters. He sailed on cargo boats -- there were no passenger lines. An archaeologist reminds us that the "sea was considered dangerously alien ... [and] farewells tended to assume that the friend taking the ship might never be seen again" [Murphy-O'Connor]. So when Paul was more fortunate, he walked. But land travel wasn't much better. We're told that "Robbers were almost as pervasive as bedbugs [in the inns along the way] ... and on occasion [Paul] found himself far from human habitation at nightfall." He hiked between Thessalonica and Beroea where wolves, bears, and wild boars were captured for the gladiatorial shows in Corinth -- according to the ancient *Golden Ass*. It wasn't even safe to reach a town for often the "spoiled brats" of a town's leading citizens would gang up on strangers, beat and rob them. Still, as Murphy-O'Connor puts it: "If the towns were chaotic, anarchy ruled in the

countryside." Paul himself mentions only some of the beatings, muggings, animal attacks, shipwrecks, and other harrowing experiences he had in reaching out to people with the good news. He wrote that if it were not for the fact that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead, and that therefore so would he and they be raised, he'd be crazy to risk his life the way he did. Otherwise, he said, why not eat, drink, be merry and die and be done with it!

Literary Sources on Paul

We can't know who Paul was unless we have some good sources. The earliest are in the New Testament and probably date from about AD 49 to before AD 67. They're Paul's own letters and a history about Paul written as Luke's second volume.

Paul left at least six genuine letters, and very likely ten. Conservative scholars say he left thirteen. He wrote and spoke much more, of course. But all that's lost. The letters scholars agree are certainly from Paul are Galatians, I Thessalonians, I and II Corinthians, Romans, and Philemon -- written between AD 49 and 61. Many scholars think that II Thessalonians, Philippians, Colossians and Ephesians are also, with little doubt, from Paul. Conservative scholars would add Titus and I and II Timothy to the Pauline corpus.

According to Richard Longenecker of the University of Toronto, "there are good reasons for accepting the thirteen letters of the New Testament which claim to have been written by Paul as being authentic." He says that "Scholarship of late, in fact, has begun to realize that its criticism of the Pastorals [Titus and I and II Timothy] has been extreme and is returning to a consideration of the authenticity of these three letters as a live possibility." Gordon D. Fee of Regent College argues for Pauline authorship of these three letters, saying that though he is "fully aware of the many difficulties that entails [he is] ... convinced that theories of pseudopigraphy have even greater historical difficulties." Bruce adds that "If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt," but since they are used to make such earth-shaking claims to our commitment they are subjected to more demanding scrutiny and have evoked more profound resistance.

When it comes to historical accuracy, scholars generally tend to have more trouble with Luke's account of Paul in The Acts of the Apostles than they do with Paul's own letters. Some think that it is likely that a more sanitized account of 1st century Christianity poured from Luke's literary pen than from Paul's spontaneous dictation. But is this defensible? Where is the romanticization in writings that, as Bruce says, "make it plain that the reality did not always match the ideal?" Luke's gospel depicts Jesus' disciples with "warts and all." These disciples were the leaders of this Christianity. Luke writes the Acts without cleaning up the acts of the lying Ananias and Sapphira, the scheming Simon Sorcerer, the defecting Mark, the bickering Paul and Barnabas, and other uncomplimentary church history.

Addressing the question of Luke as historian, I. Howard Marshall of the University of Aberdeen asserts: "We do not wish to make exaggerated claims for [Luke's] reliability, nor to suggest that

his views of the historian's task were identical with those of the modern historian. But it is unfair to suggest that he is a thoroughly tendentious and unreliable writer, freely rewriting the history of the early church in the interests of his own theology." According to Bruce Metzger of Princeton: "Luke's skill as a historiographer, when his accomplishments are judged in the light of his sources, is of a high order." As Bruce sees it, "A man whose accuracy can be demonstrated in matters where we are able to test it is likely to be accurate even where the means for testing him are not available. Accuracy is a habit of mind, and we know from happy (or unhappy) experience that some people are habitually accurate just as others can be depended upon to be inaccurate. Luke's record entitles him to be regarded as a writer of habitual accuracy." With some twenty years of experience as a student and professor of classical Greek and Roman literature and history, Bruce made the transition to a nearly forty year career in biblical studies after nearly ten years of writing on a commentary on the Greek text of Acts and finding it to be "a distinguished example of Hellenistic history writing." Now retired, Bruce recently updated this work on Acts and wrote earlier this year that he "still regard[s] Acts as a distinguished example of Hellenistic history writing."

In spite of such solid bases for confidence in our sources on Paul, there is continuing confusion as to what we can honestly believe about Paul and his message. I was prompted to tackle these questions on Paul when a friend, a novelist in New York, asked me about a recent popular attack on Paul entitled *The Myth-Maker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* by the Jewish writer Hyam Maccoby. My friend is a brilliant novelist with rave reviews in *The New York Times* and an excellent Yale education behind him. But he was not prepared for the assaults on Paul and Christianity that Maccoby waged in his book. In the interest of the continuing evangelistic purposes of Evangelicals Concerned, I thought that it could be useful to follow last year's discussion of JESUS WHO? with a look this year at PAUL WHO? Perhaps we can then, with even more reason, redouble our efforts at proclaiming the good news Jesus inaugurated and Paul brought to those of us outside a self-proclaimed "chosen people" -- especially to those even the outsiders shut out: lesbians and gay men.

Maccoby's main theme is that both Paul and Luke lied about Paul and that, actually, Paul simply abandoned the teachings of Jesus and invented the religion of Christianity. Paul is said to have thereby created an anti-Semitism that is "inseparable from the myth" of Christianity, "deified" himself by claiming "straightforwardly that he is himself the incarnation of the Son of God," either "self-inflicted" or "psychosomatically" created physical "stigmata" on his body, and to have been no Pharisee. Maccoby adds to these errors the erroneous claim that Jesus' "whole life was directed ... against [Rome's] military power." With such silly statements -- typical of his polemic -- it is amazing that anyone would take Maccoby seriously. Of course the scholars do not. But, alas, a familiarity with, much less a grounding in, the New Testament, is hardly a hallmark of otherwise educated readers today. Instead of proving his point that Paul "invented" Christianity, Maccoby proves that he himself *invented his own Jesus, his own Paul, and his own Christianity to fit his own agenda*. Maccoby's book has been dismissed in scholarly reviews as a

"volume [that] cannot be accepted as a serious scholarly contribution" and as a book of "scholarly thinness." The reviewer for the liberal *Christian Century* wrote that Maccoby's argument is "simply conjecture on Maccoby's part; he has little or no documentary evidence or secondary literature to back him up." Nonetheless, we Christians must realize that it is sadly more likely that the educated non-Christians we would reach with the gospel today are more likely to have been introduced to Paul and the gospel by books like Maccoby's than by more honest presentations.

Maccoby has simply repeated, with more pizzazz, some rather threadbare contentions of a long line of Jewish writers who, in Bruce's words, "have had difficulty in recognizing [Paul] as the product of a rabbinical education [because] ... his reappraisal of the whole spirit and content of his earlier training was so radical." However, as biblical scholar Donald Hagner has shown, Palestinian Judaism as an explanation for Paul's background is now replacing the older views being popularized by Maccoby. Several modern Jewish scholars such as Schalom Ben-Chorin, Leo Baeck, Joachim Schoeps, and others argue that Paul's view of Law was truly Rabbinic and Pharisaic. Richard L. Rubenstein, in his book, *My Brother Paul*, lays stress on Paul's Pharisaic background, concluding: "In reality it was not Paul but Jesus who instituted the irreparable breach with established Judaism." Ben-Chorin sees Paul's uniqueness, but he rightly insists that Paul remained a Jew. He is saying what Glasgow biblical commentator William Barclay said: "To the end of his life Paul was proudly, stubbornly, unalterably a Jew" and what classical historian Michael Grant said: "although Paul's expression was externally Hellenic, his inward meaning and the structure of his thought remained Jewish."

Paul's Early Years

Paul was born at the beginning of the 1st century of the Common Era. His hometown was Tarsus on the Mediterranean coast of modern Turkey. His parents were fairly well-to-do Diaspora Jews -- Jews outside of Palestine. He was of King Saul's tribe of Benjamin so when he was circumcized eight days after his birth he was named Saul. Since little Saul's father held Roman citizenship, an unusual possession for a Jew, he was also named Paulus. He was always both Saul and Paul, though later, among Gentiles, he preferred to be known as Paul. His native tongue was Armenian, but he also knew Hebrew and Aramaic (a popular form of Hebrew) and wrote in *Koine* Greek, the commercial language of the first century Roman Empire. When he quotes the Hebrew Bible he most often recalls from memory the Greek translation called the Septuagint.

He grew up to become a zealous young Pharisee, one who was separated for holy living. Having studied under the famous Gamaliel in Jerusalem, he advanced impressively within Judaism. As the new Jewish sect known as "the Way" began to develop following eyewitness reports that the executed Jesus of Nazareth was alive, Paul joined his religious cohorts in persecuting the followers of Jesus. Paul viewed them to be bad Jews just as fundamentalists today view gay Christians as bad Christians -- if Christians at all. And just as fundamentalists today have their

proof-texts to clobber gay Christians, the Pharisee Paul had his proof-texts to clobber Christian Jews -- proof-texts from Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy.

The Commissioning of Paul

Paul's life divides at about AD 35 when AD can signify both *anno Domini* and *after Damascus*.

One day the 25 to 35-year-old Paul was going from Jerusalem to Damascus in Syria, under authority of the high priest and ruling body of Jews as well as the protection of Roman authority interested in public order, to implement an extradition treaty and bring back to Jerusalem some Jewish refugees belonging to "the Way." They were to be disciplined. On the road just south of Damascus, something happened to Paul that would ever after alter profoundly his own life, the history of the followers of Jesus, and the history of the world -- including yours and mine. Around noon there was a sudden blinding blaze of light and powerful sound that knocked Paul to the ground. Within the sound Paul heard a voice. It was known to the rabbis as "the daughter of God's voice" [Bruce]. The voice was in Jesus' Aramaic mother tongue: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Paul thought he was prosecuting Jesus' followers; he learns he was persecuting Jesus! Jesus then commissioned Paul to go to the Gentiles to "open their eyes." Still blind from the flash of the light, Paul was led into the city where he fasted for three days in the home of his host on the fashionable, colonnaded avenue known as "the street called Straight."

The case of each of the disciples who had been with Jesus during his ministry and final week of trial and execution was now duplicated in this man who, so far as is known, had never encountered Jesus in the flesh. As it was not until their encounter with the risen Christ that the original disciples experienced a dramatic change, so it was now with Paul. In those disciples' experience and now in Paul's, meeting the risen Christ evoked a total reorientation in commitment and outlook. This was not a conversion from Judaism to Christianity, though, for as has been said, Paul remained a Jew all his Christian life. But now he was a Jew who saw in Jesus the one through whose atoning death and vindicating resurrection God was reconciling the world. Critics who would try to find an explanation outside the New Testament witness for the radical transformation in the lives of either the disciples or Paul must find an alternative more believable than their flimsy fantasies about epilepsy and self-hypnosis. What better than the biblical accounts of meetings with the risen Christ explain why the disciples and Paul so quickly and so completely turned their backs on all that had been most dear in life to all that would spell rejection, suffering, persecution, torture, and death?

New Testament translator J. B. Phillips has described his own profoundly exciting experience in the course of translating Paul's witness to the resurrection. "Quite suddenly I realized that *no man had ever written such words before*. As I pressed on with the task of translation I came to feel utterly convinced of the truth of the resurrection. Something of literally life-and-death importance had happened in mortal history, and I was reading the actual words of people who

had seen Christ after his resurrection and had seen men and women deeply changed by his living power. ... On the one hand these Letters were written over quite a period of years, but there is not the slightest discernible diminution of faith. And on the other hand it was borne in upon me with irresistible force that these Letters could never have been written at all if there had been no Jesus Christ, no crucifixion and no resurrection. ... There had been a stupendous Event, and from that was flowing all this strength and utter conviction."

What Was Paul Like?

Was Paul really an overbearing dictator? A prude? A vindictive jerk? A liar? A fool? We don't know his nick-name but "Mr. Controversy" will do. One scholar strings together "the very embarrassing traits of [Paul's] personality: the hard, bitter, and inexorable resoluteness of his decisions; the impassioned outbursts in his letters; the fact that the judgments he passed on his opponents were probably in more cases than one unjust; the forcefulness with which he pressed onward; the almost fantastic scope of his aims, and so on." Then he wisely notes: "all of it simply manifests the truth of [Paul's] own words: 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels (II Cor 4:7). Both are equally true: earthen vessels -- treasure" [Bornkamm].

And for all his obvious arrogance, Paul could appreciate versatility. He vigorously fought for the liberty of all his fellow faithers. London Bible scholar Donald Guthrie observes that when Paul set his goal "to be all things to all" he meant to have a "genuine desire to see the other person's point of view." Alec Vidler of Cambridge explains that "to be all things to all" was "a very good, splendid kind of inconsistency which only a [person] who lives by the Spirit, and not by a rigid adherence to law, can compass." Bruce avers that "Where the principles of the gospel were not at stake, [Paul] was the most conciliatory of [anyone]." And judging from the long personal greetings in his letters he must have had a genius for intimate friendship, though he avoided the term, speaking rather of "brotherly love." How could he have written the great love section of I Corinthians 13 if not from his own deep experience?

For thirty years Paul carried the good news of God's reconciliation throughout the Mediterranean world. Then, according to early and substantial second century tradition, Paul was executed during Nero's persecution of Christians, perhaps in AD 67. We're told he was beheaded on the left bank of the Tiber River, three miles from Rome. His most significant contribution was his steadfast proclamation of the good news of grace and peace from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ. But not only because that good news is so very important and because it is so often misunderstood, but also because two other topics are so misrepresented that Paul's good news is not heard by many gay men and lesbians today, we must first turn our attention to Paul on women and homosexuality before moving to his grand theme.

Paul and Women

A reader recently wrote to *The Advocate*: "As long as women look to the God of the Bible for liberation, they will remain the slaves of men." Unfortunately, this is the sentiment of many, perhaps most, gay men and lesbians these days.

According to Paul's contemporary, the Jewish historian Josephus: "The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, ... that she may be directed; for the authority has been given by God to the man." The synagogues required a quorum of ten Jewish *males*. In the Qumran community, women were only peripheral and, of course, there were no women in the ascetic sect of Essenes. Even in the Greek cults of Isis and other mystery religions, there were more men than women.

Writing of marriage in the Roman Empire, historian Paul Veyne asserts that "A woman was like a grown child; her husband was obliged to humor her ... she was but one of the elements of a household, which also included children, freedmen, clients, and slaves. ... A man was the master of his wife." Veyne says we cannot know even if husband and wife made a "couple."

Bruce assumes that "It is not unlikely that Paul himself had been brought up to thank God that he was born a Jew and not a Gentile, a freeman and not a slave, a man and not a woman [as a number of Jewish morning prayers expressed]. If so," Bruce continues, "he takes up each of these three distinctions which had considerable importance in Judaism and affirms that in Christ they are all irrelevant." It was Paul, the alleged Number One Enemy of women, who wrote to the Galatians (3:28): "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no 'male and female'; for in Christ Jesus you are all one." Bruce notes that the "slight change of construction" when Paul comes to "male and female" is "probably the influence of Gen 1: 27... 'he made them male and female.'" In contrast to Genesis, Paul says that, in Christ, "there is no 'male and female.'" According to Bruce, "Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, ... they are to be understood in relation to Gal 3:28, and not *vice versa*."

Parenthetically jumping ahead to the issue of homosexuality, it follows from Paul's statement about there now being no theological significance to the "male and female" nature of the creation story that the gender of one's mate is of no biblical or theological significance. Jerry Falwell smirks that God created "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." Paul says there's no theological significance to the genders.

Moving back to Paul and women, New Testament professor Victor Paul Furnish asserts that "There is nothing in Paul's concrete teaching on matters pertaining to women that is incompatible with the principle he had affirmed" in Galatians 3:28. Further, he reminds us that "There is ample evidence that the principle was affirmed by Paul not only in words but also in practice." Some of that evidence will be detailed later. But first, let's look at Paul's other revision of scripture with reference to women.

Paul revised other scripture to put men and women on an equal footing. For example, he adds the words "and daughters" to the text of II Samuel 7:14. To the Lord's words "you shall be my sons" Paul adds "and daughters" in II Corinthians 6:18. On marriage, Paul adds mutuality to equality for women and men. Paul "regards the men and women as fully equal partners and mutually responsible for the quality of the relationship. It is difficult," Furnish says, "to find real parallels to this emphasis in the ethical writings of Paul's contemporaries, either Jewish or non-Jewish." Paul teaches that the woman and the man are to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph 5:21) To say as Paul did that part of this mutuality is expressed when the "wife rules over the husband's body" was as shocking as any idea of marriage could be in the 1st century world.

There's a long list of women on the honor roll of Paul's co-workers. It includes Lydia, the first "European" convert; Claudia; Tryphaena; Tryphosa; Persis; Junia (whom Paul identifies as an "outstanding apostle"); Euodia; Syntyche; Phoebe (a deacon Paul says ruled over many including himself); and Priscilla (Paul's traveling companion who was a theology teacher to the eloquent Apollos at Ephesus, correcting him on some of what he was preaching. She may well have been the author of the canonical Hebrews sermon). It is to be noted that Ephesus is the city to which is addressed the supposed proscription on women teachers (I Tim 2:12) -- an interpretation at variance with Priscilla's teaching Apollos there. And contrary to the ideas put forth by fundamentalists, Phoebe was a full deacon. Bruce points out: "That the duties of a *diakonos* could be performed by either men or women is suggested by I Timothy iii, 11, where 'their wives' (AV, NEB) is more probably to be rendered 'women' (RV), i.e. 'women-deacons' (cf. RSV, 'the women'; NEBmg 'deaconesses')." An example of the male chauvinism which Southern Baptist theologian Dale Moody says "hangs like a chain around [fundamentalists'] necks to obscure women as deacons" is to be seen in the typical fundamentalist handling of Phoebe, the deacon they downgrade to a "servant" (Rom 16:1). They render the same Greek word as "deacon" when it is connected with a man. The note on the verse in Romans in the *Criswell Study Bible*, for example, falsely asserts that the office of deacon "was held only by men." Moody sadly states: "Recent tradition had to be put above the Scripture. "

Among the church leaders in Paul's day were John Mark's mother Mary at Jerusalem, Nympha at Colossae, and possibly Chloe at Corinth. Apphia was a leader in Philemon's house church and Philippi's church developed around a core of faithful women.

Paul *assumes* that it is the *normal* practice for women to be prophesying in the churches. Banks well observes that Paul's "mention of female prophets is most significant for ... Paul believed that prophesy was the most important activity that could take place in church." Prophecy consisted of a "ministry of sharing a direct word from God with others [and] had precedence over the activity of the teacher" [Banks]. William Orr and James Walther explain that "At Corinth some women were assuming leadership roles, and Paul seems to have had no hesitation about working with them. Elsewhere there appears to have been no problem (e.g. Philippi, Colossae/Laodicea), but in Corinth there was some difficulty. Exactly what its nature was is impossible to determine. ...

There is no question that women were engaging in prayer and prophecy in public worship in Corinth. ... The specific problem that elicits the theological analysis ... has to do with how women ... should wear their hair when taking part in worship leadership. Paul is trying to ensure that the appearance of women in the church concurs with acceptable standards of decency and order." Bruce comments: "Needless breaches of convention were to be discouraged." Though much has been made of veils and hats on women in church, on the basis of this text, the text itself says nothing of veils and hats. The "covering," as Furnish explains, is a matter of hairstyle. He points out that "No general theory of women's inferiority is presumed or promoted in this passage, nor is it the Apostle's intention here to argue that women must always be subordinate to men in the church or in their marriages." (I Cor 11)

Earlier in this same letter (I Cor 3), Paul teaches that Christians are no longer in bondage to any other human being. Bruce notes that, here, the understanding of headship is "source" or "origin" rather than "chief" or "ruler." In this interpretation, other conservative New Testament scholars agree (e.g. Gilbert Bilezikian of Wheaton, Aida Besancon Spencer of Gordon-Conwell, and Catherine Kroeger of the University of Minnesota). "The point of this whole discussion," Furnish says, "is not to suppress the Christian women of Corinth, but to make their participation in the congregation's worship more meaningful and effective." In 11:11, "Paul in effect reaffirms the principle that 'there is neither male nor female'" when he repeats: "In any case, in the Lord woman is not different from man nor man from woman."

Further on in the letter (14:33b-36) there seems to be some contradiction. Here we find the directive: "Let the wives be silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to talk. Then let them continue to be subordinate just as the law also says. If they want to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a wife to talk in church." Scholars say that "unless Paul is contradicting himself (or, as some have suggested, there is a non-Pauline interpolation) he here enjoins silence in matters other than praying and prophesying. Since good order is a major emphasis of the context, he may be referring especially to speaking in tongues or even to any sort of clamorous discussions of controversial issues which have arisen in the assembly" [Orr and Walther]. Some scholars distinguish between women giving their own prophesy in an orderly manner (11) and some wives interrupting in a disorderly way (14).

Writing in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Kroeger reminds us of the madness, glossolalia, and prophecy that was shouted in the "clamor or religious hubbub of the rites" of Cybele and Dionysos. She says that "Two of the names for Dionysos arose from the cries emitted by his followers. ... 'He is called lord of the loud cry, mad exciter of women.'" She goes on: "If we may trust Aristophanes, women were not above using these sacred shouts to drown out what the men were saying, even in solemn assemblies." Kroeger reasons: "In a passage that calls for no noise without meaning (14:9, 11-13, 28) and even meaningful utterance to be restricted to one at a time (29-31), an injunction against the tumultuous cries of women is appropriate."

That these proscribing words might be a later intrusion into the text or even a derisively quoted sentiment contrary to Paul's own receives support even from conservative biblical scholars. It is ironic that this prohibition may well be a slogan of the Judaizers, quoted and sarcastically rejected by Paul but cited today as the fundamentalist God's "gospel truth" on women preachers. Gilbert Bilezikian writes: "Recent scholarship has called attention to the disjunctive force of the particle $\bar{\epsilon}$ that introduces verse 36. It has the impact of an emphatic repudiation of what precedes it." There are nine other places in the same letter where Paul uses this particle to utter a strong "nonsense!" to a cited idea.

Paul was well aware of the Hebrew scripture's feminine imagery for God. Fundamentalists today seem to be ignorant of it. For example, David Noebel's *Journal of Summit Ministries* was used recently to try to alarm readers by reporting that among gay Christians God was called "Mother," "Mother Eagle," "Midwife," and "Hen." In the editor's snide report, he exposed his own biblical illiteracy by asking meanly: "Anyone smell blasphemy? How about brimstone?" Noebel was doing Church Lady and didn't even know it. But Paul knew that God is pictured in Deuteronomy and Isaiah as a mother. He knew that God was like a mother eagle in Deuteronomy, a midwife in Isaiah and Psalm 22, and a hen in Psalm 57. Paul also knew that in the Hebrew Bible God's Spirit was feminine. Following the precedents of Moses and Jesus, both of whom took on feminine images for themselves, Paul pictured himself as a nursing mother in his letter to the Thessalonians (I Thes 2:7) and as a woman "in the pains of childbirth" in his letter to the Galatians (4:19). Unfortunately today, the shibboleths of feminism are such that some people, pro and con, get more excited over the fact that someone prays to his Mother God than they do over the fact that She hears his prayer.

This brief review of the place of women in the preaching and practice of Paul should permit us to agree with Bruce who calls Paul's "alleged misogyny ... the most incredible feature in the Paul of popular mythology." As Banks observes from his wide classical reading: "Paul's approach resulted in the elevation of women to a place in religious work for which we have little contemporary parallel" and Guthrie concludes: "There is no doubt that few outside the Christian Church in Paul's day would have maintained any form of equality of the sexes" as Paul did.

A non-feminist at the recent Evangelical Theological Society meetings debated the feminist members and concluded in a tolerant spirit that "People are divided on this issue, obviously. But it does not seem to be an issue which makes people unable to talk and work together in other areas on the basis of common evangelical faith." In reviewing an evangelical feminist's book in an evangelical journal, the non-feminist reviewer thought that the writer's version of Paul "was forced," objecting that her conclusion "assumes knowledge on the basis of conjecture." He admits, though, that alternative exegetes "have done as much" and that "If the author's argument is not compelling, it is certainly suggestive [that] when Paul affirmed no distinction between male and female, he really meant it." The reviewer then concludes with his own "assume[d] knowledge on the basis of conjecture." He allows that "this book makes an admirable case for what Jesus and Paul would certainly teach in the ninth decade of the twentieth century [even

though] Readers must decide whether the case is as strong for what they actually taught in the first century." As we turn to the subject of Paul and homosexuality, I cannot imagine any such charitable warmth, agreement to disagree, and recognition of cultural differences from those evangelicals who disagree with our interpretation of Paul and homosexuality.

Paul and Homosexuality

Sooner or later, all anti-gay harangue blasts Bible verses at us. The New Testament verses are from Paul.

In I Corinthians 6, Paul is castigating Christians for suing fellow Christians. He's shocked: How dare you sue each other! For more than eight clearly reasoned verses -- that's three-quarters of some whole books of the Bible -- Paul argues that such litigious actions injure the Christians directly involved as well as the whole church. He urges that they all rather put up with being defrauded than to defraud each other by such litigation. Fee summarizes that Paul here "alternates between statements of horror (vv. 1 and 6), rhetorical questions (vv. 2-4, 5b-6, 7b), sarcasm (v. 5), and threat (vv. 8-11) ... [including] the most biting sarcasm in the letter. ... [Paul] warns ... that those who act [in such lawsuits] are in grave danger of forfeiting their inheritance of the kingdom." In his warning to them, Paul lists some others who are in the very same danger: the covetous, revilers, extortioners, thieves, idolaters and others. Into this vice list he inserts two ambiguous terms -- at least they're ambiguous to us today, however they may have been understood when first read. For many centuries they have been taken to mean all sorts of things. Lately, fundamentalists have brashly insisted on linking them to all homosexuals. Older Bible commentaries (e.g. Luther's, Calvin's, Wesley's, Massie's, Erdman's) and even some newer ones (e.g. Leon Morris') rightly focus on Paul's focus, namely his argument against lawsuits between Christians. Often the commentators have made no mention of homosexuality. But new fundamentalist commentaries (e.g. John MacArthur's) rationalize away Paul's challenge that Christians would be better off to suffer wrong rather than to cause others harm by dragging them before the secular courts. MacArthur argues contrary to Paul, recommending that property rights demand that Christians haul other Christians to court. Such fundamentalists ignore what Paul directs them to do, they sue each other and use Paul's words at this point to wage war against gay people.

This spring we've seen the spectacle of reviling and counter-reviling, lawsuits and counter lawsuits waged by fundamentalists and charismatic Christians against each other. Swaggart, Ankerberg, Hahn, Roper, the Bakkers, Falwell, Thomas and others rush from news conference to talk show and back again, between tapings of their own shows, to slander others with their smirking self-righteous accusations. Missing Jesus' point about adultery in the hearts of the religionists of his day -- and in all of our hearts -- Swaggart and Falwell brag in the national press that they've never committed "adultery." Swaggart boasts that he's kissed and held hands only with his wife. Then they hire the nation's top non-Christian lawyers to sue each other. Gorman sues Swaggart for \$90 million, Robertson sues for \$35 million, Falwell sues one for \$40

million and another for \$45 million. Threats of lawsuits in the \$600 million range are traded between representatives of the PTL "Partners" and Falwell. Across America anti-gay congregations split and sue each other for real estate. Pro-gay Christians follow suit: a gay preacher sues Falwell and Father Curran sues Catholic University. And there is no end in sight.

These public sins have saddened many evangelicals whose reactions are well expressed by Philip Yancey in his *Christianity Today* column [October 16, 1987]. Yancey concludes: "This year evangelicals have received more hours of network air time and appeared on more magazine covers than ever before. But I doubt very seriously that the watching world has had longings for God awakened while listening to the endless news reports. I wonder whether anyone has seen a glimpse of the *difference* God can make in a people transformed by him. Tragically, the evangelicals who dominated the news in 1987 came across looking just like everybody else, only more so.

Getting back to those two designations of groups Paul says are in the same spiritual danger as the Christians who sue other Christians: they are the *arsenokiotai* and the *malakoi*. Pauline scholar Robin Scroggs notes that *arsenokoitai* "has no prehistory in Greek literature." He says that "the term is strange ... its earliest extant occurrence is in I Cor 6:9. Apparently, then, *it has no recoverable history prior to Paul's use of it.*" It's important to see that this rarity is itself rare for as Westminster Seminary scholar Moisés Silva observes: "so much Greek literature was written and preserved, that the number of words occurring only once or twice are proportionately very few." That one of these words is *arsenokoitai* should give preachers pause before they rush into cock-sure attacks against gay men and lesbians on the basis of this word. Fundamentalists' use of this verse in their battle against homosexuals far exceeds their understanding of the verse. And since Paul uses both words in a list, even the context doesn't help us in determining meaning.

According to evangelical New Testament scholar Gordon Fee, both terms are "difficult." About *arsenokoitai*, Fee says: "This is its first appearance in preserved literature, and subsequent authors are reluctant to use it, especially when describing homosexual activity." If writers closer to the usage of Paul's day are "reluctant to use it, especially when describing homosexual activity," what warrant do late twentieth century fundamentalists have for reading all homosexuality into it? About *malakoi*, Fee says: "one cannot be sure what it means in a list like this, where there is no further context to help. What is certain is that it refers to *behavior* of some kind, not simply to an attitude or characteristic." The same reasoning applies, of course, to *arsenokoitai*.

Even some fundamentalists themselves admit that "These words are difficult to translate" -- as Paul D. Feinberg admits in his *Fundamentalist Journal* article. He goes on to acknowledge that he has no first century evidence for translating or interpreting either word in question. Sadly, this does not stop him from insisting that the words nonetheless must somehow mean all homosexuals anyway.

Some interpreters have tried to figure out Paul's meaning through the use of etymology, the study of word derivations. But according to experts, "Etymology ... gives a false idea... Words are not used according to their historical value. The mind forgets -- assuming that it ever knew -- the semantic evolutions through which the words have passed" [Vendryes]. At best, etymological practice can be tricky, and yet, as Silva observes: "ironically, the use of etymology by ministers may be directly linked to a *lack* of genuine familiarity with the biblical language."

Ten years ago, in Los Angeles, I was in a roundtable debate on homosexuality with some fundamentalists including John MacArthur and Sherwood Wirt, editor of Billy Graham's *Decision* magazine. During that debate I was confronted with a farcical but tragic example of the amateur's misuse of etymology. I was saying to Wirt, MacArthur and the others that informed Bible scholars don't really know for sure what in the world *arsenokoitai* means but that they agree that it doesn't simply mean homosexuals. I mentioned the term several times and finally Wirt interrupted to demand: "What was that word?" I replied: *arsenokoitai*. "That's it," he shot back. "It *does* mean homosexual. Arse! Arse! They put the penis in the arse!" There he was, leaping languages and winding up in a perverted use of an Old English "arse." His cohorts didn't even notice his perversion. They were not only etymologically illiterate but they didn't realize that not all homosexuals put the penis in the arse -- especially lesbians -- and that there are heterosexuals who do put it there. Whatever Wirt puts wherever, that day he was putting his foot in his mouth -- an oral-podiatrick. I was later told by the moderator that the "right" side -- the fundamentalists -- had lost miserably and so the debate could not be published by the evangelical publication that sponsored it. Besides, the "ex-gay" the debate showcased had now "gone back to the gay lifestyle." Shortly thereafter the sponsoring publication folded.

Fundamentalist commentators say that *arsenokoitai* means "all homosexuals" because the first part of the word means "male" (*arsen*) and the last part means "bed" (*koitai*) and, by metonymy, means "have sex with." They put a male into a bed and say: Ah ha! Homosexual! When Jerry Falwell, the Moonies, and the Mormons join together to bash homosexuals we say they're "strange bedfellows" but we don't mean they all pile into bed and get kinky! Silva warns against approaching a word by such cut and paste method. He states: "It is important to understand that such an identification ... does not *necessarily* take us to primitive times; in fact, a Greek writer may easily coin such a compound at the moment of writing." Fundamentalists do exactly what Silva warns against when it comes to their reading of Paul's coined *arsenokoitai*. There are other Greek examples of such misleading split and paste method. Take the word *monogenes* for instance. Chopping it in two and defining the components separately as "only" or "one" and "begotten" and putting them back together as "only begotten" -- as is commonly done -- is erroneous. What about the *monogenes* Isaac? He was not an only begotten son. Usage allows the word to mean "precious," "dearest" or "darling" (cf. Heb 11:17). Clearly, as Silva says: "usage is more important than etymology. ... the association of a particular word with a particular meaning is largely arbitrary, a matter of convention." Our problem is that when it comes to 1st century usage of *arsenokoitai*, we're in the dark.

Silva cautions that "misunderstanding occurs when we hear a word with which we are not familiar; either the word is completely new to us or we have not heard it in a sufficient number of contexts to identify its sense." In a situation like the unique *arsenokoitai*, we can well heed Silva's instruction and admit that we are "at an exegetical impasse; no resolution is perhaps possible." Silva, however, suggests what he calls the "eminently reasonable ... rule of maximal redundancy." That's just a fancy way of saying: "The best meaning is the least meaning." That makes good sense. An ambiguous word should be defined "in such a fashion as to *make it contribute least to the total message derivable from the passage where it is at home*, rather than, e.g. defining it according to some presumed etymology or semantic history." But the anti-gay preachers run roughshod over the clear argument of the passage as a whole, i.e. Paul's fierce rebuttal to Christians suing other Christians, in order to load the ambiguous word with their most pivotal preaching from the passage. I

n Paul's vice list, *malakoi* -- a word associated with "softness" -- would seem reasonably translated as "morally soft" rather than as "effeminate." Yet the fundamentalists' New King James Version and the New American Standard Version still follow the old King James Version and render it as "effeminate." Unlike the case of *arsenokoitai*, however, we may not be at such a total loss for a conventional use of *malakoi* in the 1st century. Furnish points out that "It is significant that this is the very term the critics of 'call boys' often used to describe those who offered their bodies for pay to older males. That Paul is using it this way here seems likely." Scroggs agrees. And Fee puts it quite precisely when he writes that "In many instances young men sold themselves as 'mistresses' for the sexual pleasure of men older than themselves." His use of the term "mistresses" is right on target, for that is the way these young men were viewed by the older men. Fee asserts that when Paul uses *malakoi* he is "most likely referring to the younger, 'passive' partner in a pederastic relationship." John Boswell cautions that "many people are denigrated as 'malakoi' in ancient literature but this does not disqualify the connections made by Furnish, Scroggs, and Fee.

Scroggs sees similarities between the vice lists of I Corinthians 6 and I Timothy 1 and suggests that they might be instructive for interpreting the *arsenokoitai* who appear in both. He argues that the "male prostitutes" and "slave dealers" who bracket the *arsenokoitai* in the Timothy list could mean that they are the "males who lie" with the male prostitutes procured by the slave dealers. He sees the "male prostitutes" as functionally equivalent to the *malakoi*. Furnish renders the I Corinthians passage the same way: as the "youthful call boys (*malakoi*) and their customers (*arsenokoitai*)."

Scroggs states that "the likelihood is that Paul is thinking only about pederasty, just as was Philo. There was no other form of male homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world which could come to mind." He says: "The homosexuality [Paul] opposes is the pederasty of the Greco-Roman culture. ... Pederasty was the only *model* in existence in the world of this time." Fee calls pederasty "the most common form of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world" and acknowledges that Scroggs is "basically correct" in having concluded likewise. Homosexual love

relationship between peers as we see this today, Scroggs insists, "was, without question, entirely absent."

Pederasty involved boys from the onset of puberty to the middle or late teens. The boys were slaves who were sexually exploited by their masters and free boys who, as "effeminate call-boys," sold their sexual services to older males. Scroggs has found that "the adult male was most attracted to a male youth when the youth was in bodily form most like a female. As one third century CE writer said: 'For even boys are handsome ... only so long as they look like a woman.' " According to Veyne, the "pet boy" was kept for sex though he also "usually served his master as a squire or cupbearer, pouring his drink as Ganymede, Jupiter's boy lover, had done for the god. ... [But] The first sign of a mustache resulted in a major change ... The pretext of ambiguous sexuality having been eliminated, it would have been scandalous to treat the now adult male as a passive sex object." Michael Cosby reports that "The ancient Greek custom of men taking boy lovers continued to be a common practice well past the time [of] Paul. ... It was not limited to the Greek culture either, for there are numerous indications in Roman artwork and literature that their men engaged in these same activities." Plutarch, born a few years before Paul started to write to his churches, gives accounts of the way both boys and girls were encouraged into the art of prostitution for older men and women respectively.

We must carefully understand that this interest of older men in *female-like* boys is the very opposite of homosexual orientation or homosexual love as we know it today. It is the masculinity of the other male -- however idiosyncratically perceived -- that draws the homosexual male today. He's not looking for a man he can pretend is a woman. Homosexual men prize masculinity in their lovers; heterosexual men prize femininity in theirs. The ancient Greco-Roman custom was really about a male-dominated culture that, in excluding women from certain circles, found sexual substitution in the company of feminized, immature, or even castrated males. Wives were for dowries, procreation, and the rearing of heirs. Boys were for sex. Perhaps the closest phenomenon today to that of these feminized boy substitutes of Paul's day is the situational homosexual activity that takes place in all-male prisons. The most youthful, physically immature, and thus "feminine" inmates are the ones picked by other prisoners for sexual gratification. In neither the modern nor the ancient forms of such forced acts of physical gratification is there a parallel to what we see in the homosexual falling-in-love phenomenon of gay men and lesbians today.

Paul was surrounded with examples of exploitative boy-love at the highest levels of the Empire. Tiberius was known for his cruelty to both his women and boy lovers. He called his pet boys "minnows" and if he wasn't satisfied with their performance of fellatio he'd have them maimed or thrown over the high cliffs into the sea surrounding his get-away on Capri. Caligula, who sometimes dressed in drag to imitate Venus, turned a whole wing of his palace into a brothel of women and boys-for-hire. Claudius, who ruled as Paul began to write his now-famous letters, once had his son-in-law stabbed to death for sleeping with Claudius' own favorite slave boy. Orgies were common entertainments in the Gentile upper crust of Paul's day. While Paul was

writing his letters and crossing the Aegean, Caius Petronius was writing *Satyricon* and carousing with his pet boys.

So-called "Greek Love" has been confused by many anti-gay preachers and pro-gay apologists with the modern phenomenon of homosexual orientation and relationship. But as the best research indicates, it was really another form of ancient pederasty. As University of Minnesota classics professor Eva Keuls explains: "If the primary impulse had been to replace a heterosexual relationship, corroded by alienation and hostility, with a nobler one, where sex could be mingled with friendship and intellectual stimulation, the ideal partnership would have been that between two men of comparable age, status, and educational level. Instead, the homosexual connection favored by the Greeks was not so much homoerotic as pederastic; the archetypal relationship was between a mature man at the height of his sexual power and need and a young, erotically undeveloped boy just before puberty. The standard Greek nomenclature gives the older, aggressive partner the title of the 'lover' (*erastes*) and the young, passive male that of the 'beloved' (*eromenos*)." Those preachers who would try to read into Paul's two terms *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* the equivalent of these two partners -- one active and one passive -- must account for Paul's not using the standard Greek terms. This ancient pederasty took the form of an initiation rite, a rite of passage. In his *Homosexuality in Greek Myth* ancient Greek historian Bernard Sergent discusses the phenomenon of same-sex initiatory rituals in which the *erastes* "abducts" the *eromenos* and becomes, for a while, the youth's master, instructor in hunting and other skills, and sex partner. The purpose of such temporary custody was to initiate the boy into the powers of virile manhood.

In addition to such pederasty in the ancient world, there was *cultic prostitution* between same-sex persons throughout the Empire. An evangelical historian asserts: "When Paul warned the congregation at Corinth against immorality [I Cor 6], he was no doubt warning them in part against these cult prostitutes [of Aphrodite]" [Yamauchi]. Commenting on what Paul had in mind in I Corinthians 6:9, Dallas Seminary's Charles C. Ryrie alludes to this *religious* or *cultic* context of prostitution when he says in *The Ryrie Study Bible* that "Paul did not want Christianity confused with sects that permitted such things [as] ... incest, homosexuality, pederasty, and other unnatural sexual vices." Writing on "The Apostle Paul and the Greco-Roman Cults of Women" in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Kroeger makes the following comments about "the deliberate sex reversal practiced in some of the cults." She asserts that "sex reversal was a specific distinctive of the Dionysiac cult and by the second century AD was considered to be indispensable to the religion. Men wore veils and long hair as signs of their dedication to the god, while women used the unveiling and shorn hair to indicate their devotion. Men masqueraded as women, and in a rare vase painting from Corinth a woman is dressed in satyr pants equipped with the male organ. Thus she dances before Dionysos, a deity who had been raised as a girl and was himself called male-female and 'sham man.'" Kroeger continues: "The sex exchange that characterized the cults of such great goddesses as Cybele, the Syrian goddess, and Artemis of Ephesus was more grisly. Males voluntarily castrated themselves and assumed

women's garments. A relief from Rome shows a high priest of Cybele. The castrated priest wears veil, necklaces, earrings and feminine dress. He is considered to have exchanged his sexual identity and to have become a she-priest."

At this point we must turn to Paul's letter to the Romans for it is here that we have his clear reference to the cultic prostitution which exchanged male and female identities in the worship of creatures instead of the Creator. But before looking at Paul's text to the Romans we must first become better acquainted with the historical backdrop.

Since Paul spent almost three years in Ephesus and wrote the Corinthian letter there, an understanding of what E. K. Simpson called that "haunt of idolatry" can be helpful in understanding what Paul writes to Corinth and later to Rome. Since Corinth was the destination of the one letter and the place of origin of the other, an understanding of Corinth and its culture and habits is helpful for interpreting material in both letters.

The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was the largest building in Paul's day. The goddess was known as Diana of the Ephesians. She sported a mass of twenty-four breasts, testicles, or ostrich eggs -- nobody today is quite sure what they were -- and she was served by eunuch priests and female slaves. Even though hers was a fertility cult, it's significant that the public elements which were "sensuous and orgiastic" did not involve the female slaves since they were not the prostitutes. The eunuch priests were the prostitutes. Simpson comments: "It may be imagined how foul were the orgies ... sanctioned in the outraged name of religion." Paul, of course, was familiar with the famous cult of Diana. He had personally gotten into trouble with the idol-making silversmiths of Ephesus when their business began to fall off as Ephesians turned from Diana to Christ. They instigated a riot in the great open theater in AD 57, blaming Paul for bringing disgrace on their goddess and their city.

At Corinth "Paul knew converts who believed they could justify dealings with prostitutes on religious and philosophical grounds. They seem to have argued that sexual intercourse was an 'indifferent' and natural affair, comparable to eating whatever one chose. ... Paul's first letter to the Corinthians shows that he was well aware of the prevalence of temples and images," [Grant] and he certainly knew of the cultic prostitution associated with Aphrodite whose world-famous temple stood on the peak of the Acrocorinthus. Even while growing up in Tarsus, Paul had seen the sacred poles of Ashtoreth (Aphrodite) protruding from roofs where they were signs of altars of Baal. To the young Jew, they represented horrible rites of frenzied sexuality, infanticide, cannibalism, and idolatry.

Both "prostitution and lesbianism were associated" with the Temple of Aphrodite. Goldberg writes of Aphrodite: "She is both male and female -- a bearded face with full maiden breasts. ... They who come to worship her must hide their sex. Males come in female attire and females in the clothes of males. The greatest glory they can bring to Aphrodite ... is to physically efface their sex." Says Grant: "Hemaphrodites congregated in [Aphrodite's] temple." Whether

worshippers called her Aphrodite, Cybele, Astarte, or Ishtar, they practiced erotic flagellations, same-sex orgies, and climaxing castration rites in her temples all along the sea coasts of Paul's journeys.

Goldberg gives a colorful description of the rites of Aphrodite: "When the human being reaches the stage in which he is neither man nor woman, then he is in closest tune with the spirit of the great goddess of love. ... [Priestesses of Aphrodite], deprived of sexual pleasures, ... created for themselves tastes and desires that grew into passions for their vary companions. The unnatural passions thus awakened ... were fierce, overpowering, and implacable. ... On the nights of the full moon, ... They gathered in the innermost chamber where there were no windows and but two doors. Through one door they all entered; through the same door all were to depart, all save one. ... [There were] mystic night[s] of love in which [they] sought, without men, to drink the cup of love to its very last drop -- and to the final breath of one of them. "

Meanwhile, Attis -- Aphrodite's son and sometime consort was said to have castrated himself and committed suicide. Goldberg describes the rituals of his Galli or young priests of the pine groves. At the beginning of the "erotic blood-letting" rites, one of the young priests resembling Attis or Adonis would be found stabbed to death. "The sight of the dead priest ... aroused others to give of their own life fluid for the sake of the son of their goddess. The high-priest drew blood from his arms and presented it as an offering. And the inferior priests, wrought to the height of passion by the wild, barbaric music of cymbal, drum and flute and by the profusion of blood around them, whirled about in furious dance. Finally, overcome by excitement, frenzied, and insensible to pain, they savagely thrust the knives into their bodies, gashing themselves in violence to bespatter the altar with their spurting blood. The frenzy and hysteria of the priests spread to the worshippers, and many a would-be priest fell into the wave of religious excitement. He sacrificed his virility to the goddess, dashing the severed portions of himself against her blood-besmeared statue. ... [Onlookers joined in.] With throbbing veins and burning eyes, they flung their garments from them and with wild shouts seized the knives of the priests to castrate themselves upon the very spot. ... They ran through the streets of the Sacred Ring, waving the bloody pieces and finally throwing them into a house they passed. It became the duty of the households thus honored to furnish these men with female clothes, and they, made eunuchs in the heat of religious passion, were to serve their goddess for the rest of their lives. ... The priest ... who castrated himself in religious frenzy assumed feminine dress not without a purpose. He continued in the service of the temple and like the priestess served man for the required fee. There were male priests serving males in the temples of all the gods."

Their pagan neighbors sometimes thought that the early Christians themselves practiced cultic sex acts, confusing the Christians with other religious sects coming from the eastern Mediterranean. For example, as Benko recounts, "the *Golden Ass* by Apuleius described such a sect. A wandering group of emasculated male worshippers of the Great Goddess of Syria [Aphrodite/Ishtar, et al] went from town to town and accompanied their rites with the playing of cymbals, tamborrines, castanets, and horns. When the group reached a village they started an

ecstatic dance during which they bit and slashed themselves and one of them fell into a frenzy and began to confess his guilts, yelling loudly in prophetic tones. Then he whipped himself until blood oozed from his wounds. The group also included one physically normal man whom they used for acts of sexual perversion. Apuleius characterized them with terms like 'scum,' 'odious creatures,' 'disgusting creatures,' he thought that they looked absolutely hideous when they painted their faces and eyelids and put on their garish clothing and went out to perform their dances."

In the beginning of Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom 1), he ridicules these religious rites of the pagans, arguing that though they knew God, they "refused to honor God or to be thankful ... and instead made fools of themselves, exchanging the splendor of immortal God for an image shaped like mortals They deliberately gave up God and so God gave them over to the impurity of their own devices, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature instead of the Creator." The perversion here is, as Käsemann points out, the "set[ting of] idols in the place of the divine glory." He notes that "worshipped and served" refers to "religious veneration" and "cultic worship." Paul depicts the *sexual* forms of their degraded *religious* passions: "their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and personally getting the due penalty for their error." (Rom 1:26ff) Doesn't all this sound as though Paul is illustrating his main point about idolatrous human rebellion against God with what he and his readers knew about the coastal cults of Aphrodite and the frenzied orgies among her priestesses on the nights of the full moon, the castration orgies that made the priests of Attis incapable of natural relations with women, the loss of their testicles and sexual feelings as at least part of the "penalty for their error," and the cross-dressing temple prostitution between male worshippers and eunuch priests? Doesn't Paul's attack on Gentile religious rebellion better describe these idolatrous cultic rites of his day than it does the mutual love and support in the everyday domestic life of lesbian and gay male couples today?

Most Christians today don't have quite the flair for the dramatic that the Attis worshipers had, but I've heard conservative Christians preach sexual *mutilation* just as unreasonably and self-righteously and I've heard liberal Christians preach sexual *idolatry* just as unreasonably and self-righteously.

After Paul illustrates Gentile rebellion in terms of cultic practices he moves right on to caution his readers not to sit in condemnation of these Gentiles, for as Paul warns, such judges too are guilty: "So no matter who you are, if you pass judgment you yourselves have no excuse. In condemning others you condemn yourself, since really, you behave no differently." (Rom 2:1f) Obviously he didn't mean that they all had expressed their rebellion in the same outward manifestations. But he meant that they were all likewise just as guilty. According to Paul, the Law and circumcision and morality will not save anybody. Gentiles and Jews are all under Sin -- "there is none righteous, no not one."

It's curious that when fundamentalists preach the first chapter of Romans at gay folk they don't read on into the second and third chapters to get Paul's point. His point is that we who call ourselves the children of God are no less sinful than anybody he's just described as foolishly and deliberately worshiping the creature instead of the Creator. Fundamentalists don't read in context the other Pauline reference to so-called homosexuality either. (I Cor 6) They skip right over what Paul clearly says against their suing each other and fixate on an ambiguous term or two. In each of these two New Testament instances of what the fundamentalists erroneously insist are anti-gay verses, they miss the whole point Paul is making: that the self-righteously religious are no better than whatever is said of the sinners outside. Everyone is sin-sick to death. George Edwards' dealing with Romans 1:26f in the context of the entire letter is especially adroit, demonstrating that Paul's "rhetorical function" was the very opposite of fundamentalists' use of this first chapter as a bludgeon against people with whom they refuse to identify, "looking out in boastful disdain on the lawless goyim." Bruce says that "Such denunciation of pagan idolatry as we find in chapter 1 was common form in Jewish propaganda. .. [against] Gentile neighbors," and we may say that it is common form in fundamentalist propaganda against gay neighbors. But self-righteous fundamentalist preachers rarely do next what Paul did and urged his readers to do. They rarely then turn to their own group to confess: We're all guilty as hell!

In terms of Paul's specific illustration, though, the same-sex behavior is directly linked to idolatry and religious worship of the most specifically cultic kind. The behavior is well-known cultic prostitution. The Jewish "equation of irregular sex and idolatry [was] retained by the Pauline Christians," Meeks notes, adding that "Illicit sex and idolatry are juxtaposed in the vice catalogs I Cor 6:9 and Gal 5:19f and causally connected in Rom 1:23-27." This frankly *religious* and, more specifically *cultic* nature of Paul's reference here is in accord with the foremost conservative Bible commentators on Romans: Haldane, Hodge, Harrison, Hamilton, Murray, Tenney, Black, Ryrie and others. Paul illustrates the idolatry of the Gentiles with the picture of same-sex cultic prostitution in which the expected or usual is rolled upside down. That homosexual behavior as such is "not made the subject of separate theological statement, but that it appears only in the context of another, theologically fundamental statement and as an illustration of it," as is emphasized by evangelical theologian Helmut Thielicke, is of crucial importance to our understanding of Romans in general and of the first chapter in particular. Unless this is properly understood, one really does not even begin to grasp the whole thrust of the letter's proclamation of God's grace and peace to all -- the overarching good news Paul spent himself to preach.

Paul's Proclamation of the Good News

We've detoured through Paul's actual or alleged positions on issues of women and homosexuality in order not to be distracted upon reaching his overwhelming conclusion and proclamation of good news. Paul himself had to rebut the self-righteous and legalistic bad news bearers of his day in order to preach the good news. He had to contend with the pseudo-Christian crotch-watchers

who secretly wormed their way into Paul's meetings to sneak a peak at the penises of his Greek converts. They said that converts with foreskins weren't saved! (Acts 15) Paul had to combat Peter for hypocritically giving in to legalists who turned up their noses at choked chicken dinners. Whether the "troublemakers" were health-and-wealth "super apostles" preaching the will to personal power, or legalistic Judaizers with long lists of dos and don'ts, or incipient gnostics with their pet secrets, -- to Paul they were all *phonies*.

"Let them be God-damned!" That was Paul's startling opinion about anyone -- including himself or even an angel from heaven -- who would try to preach any other news than the good news he himself already had proclaimed. (Gal 1:18) But it wasn't an easy task to stand up to others' arguments. They had their evidence against him. After all, he was not at that time the great Saint Paul, greatest Christian in twenty centuries of church history. And they had their obviously impressive charisma over against his weakness and late start. They had their alleged letters of credential from Jerusalem as over against his poor relationship with that establishment. They had their clear proof-texts from the sacred books of Genesis, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy as over against his law-breaking liberalism. How did he answer them?

Paul confined himself to what he saw as crucial. He focused on the crux of his good news. And the *crux* was the good news; his good news was the cross. Acknowledging that fellow Jews demanded miraculous signs and that Gentiles looked for intellectual answers, Paul nevertheless proclaimed what appeared to them to be utter weakness and folly: an executed "nobody" from Nazareth. He said that this "message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is *God's power*." (I Cor 1:18). Paul said that God had chosen the insignificant things of the world, the despised ones, the "nobodies" -- in order that God might nullify the self-righteous "somebodies" so that nobody may boast in his or her moral self-actualization. To Paul, salvation was entirely God's work. He greeted his correspondents in every letter with the sum of the good news: "Grace and peace to you from God and the Lord Jesus Christ." This was the best news: The gift of unmerited favor and cessation of alienation to you all from God and the Lord Jesus Christ. "God has made peace through the blood of the cross" was the way he put it to the Colossians (1:20). Judaizers preached moralism and ritual; Paul preached the seeming sign of defeat -- the cross. Crypto-gnostics and self-serving "super apostles" -- the spiritual size-queens of his day -- preached humanly-achieved empowerment; Paul preached the cross. His critics attacked him as uncharismatic, a poor speaker, for lacking personal knowledge of Jesus, and for having a poor relationship with the mother church in Jerusalem. They said he tampered with the word of God. (II Cor 4:2) They accused him of perverting scripture. Some even doubted he was a Christian at all. They attacked him for being into leather. There he was, night and day, bent over his workbench to support himself with his leatherworking trade instead of living it up in the luxury of their flattering spirituality. And they ridiculed him for his "thorn in the flesh." Imagine: a sick apostle who couldn't even cure himself! Ridiculous! How did he respond? By boasting all the more in his weakness; the weakness in which he identified with his Servant Lord. He refused to trust in himself at all. He considered all past self-reliance and

morality as so much "shit" -- his own word for it. (Phil 3:8) He realized that the malignant power of Sin was so strong that it was capable of taking the law into its own hands. (Rom 7) So he died to the law.

More than nineteen centuries after Paul we see a lot of self-righteousness and legalism that was aimed at him. It's aimed against us as well. We see, too, the know-it-all New Age teaching that he encountered way back then. We, too, are told to create our own reality by realizing our own potential, by taking full charge of our lives and creating our own joy and inner' peace. This nonsense is what Emil Brunner politely called "the self-confident optimism of all non-Christian religions." Paul was blunt: he called it "shit" and "garbage." So should we. If we could save ourselves, what in hell was Jesus doing on that cross?

Moral Power and Pride? No. Political Power and Pride? No. National Power and Pride? No. Military Power and Pride? No. Ethnic Power and Pride? No. Financial Power and Pride? No. Orthodox Power and Pride? No. Establishment Power and Pride? No. Anti-Establishment Power and Pride? No. Gender Power and Pride? No. Gay Power and Pride? No. Orgasmic Power and Pride? No. T-Cell Power and Pride? No. Paul condemns all confidence in anything but Christ.

Contrasting so much of our own insight with that of Paul's, Shirley Guthrie concludes that "the tragedy of Christians who are committed to a do-it-yourself Christianity ... on the right and on the left ... is that they cannot discover the deliverance Paul discovered: 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!' (Rom 7:25) They are condemned either to give up the struggle in despairing self-contempt or to set out on an unending, self-defeating quest in this way or that to deliver themselves and make themselves into people who can point to *their own* righteousness and love. So long as they persist in this quest they are doomed to a Christianity that, no matter how well-meaning and serious it may be, is finally superficial and trivial because it understands neither the depths of human sin nor the depths of God's forgiving and renewing grace." Beverly Gaventa reminds us that "Paul does not ask that people repent and turn around, but that they acknowledge God's new creation (Gal 6:15; II Cor 5:17) and allow themselves to be appropriated by it." Paul's was a passive imperative: "Be reconciled to God!" (II Cor 5:19) James Denney has underscored that it is not our calling, as it was not Paul's "to tell [people] to make their peace with God, but to tell them that God has made peace with the world." That reconciliation is what Ralph Martin says represents "the quintessence of Paul's message." Paul announced God's amnesty: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to GodSelf." (II Cor 5:19) Faithers now live at the dawn of the New Age where Christ is the embodiment and empowerment of God's revelation and salvation. Death with Christ is death to all the old securities of orthodoxy, moralism, self-confidence, and domination -- all the demonic powers. (Cf. Rom 6:2-7, 11) But death is not the end. Death gets swallowed up in the victory of the Resurrection. Paul wrote that the power of God that raised Christ from the dead is the hope to which God has called us. (Eph 1:19ff) And he wrote this: "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, neither jealous angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither highs nor lows, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our

Lord." (Rom 8:38) That's Paul's refutation against the pop Pauls on homosexuality and women and any notion of salvation that is contrary to gospel.

Can we now understand something of what Paul wrote to the Galatians and Reagan so misused in Irangate? "And the Scripture, farseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by their trusting God to do just that, preached the gospel to Abraham in advance, saying, 'All the nations shall be blest with you'" -- in Christ, Abraham's offspring par excellence. Here, says Paul, there is continuity between Abraham's faithing and our day. This is plainly not mere conventional exegesis of the Genesis 15 passage. It's Paul's new vision of God's promise and fulfillment in the light of the risen Christ he met on the Damascus Road.

There is no better summary statement on Paul than the following concluding remarks by Bruce in his capstone volume of a lifetime of Pauline studies, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit*. Bruce concludes that "Paul, more (it appears) than any of the original disciples of Jesus, appreciated the universal implications of his Master's person and work and gave them practical effect. ... True religion is not a matter of rules and regulations. God does not deal with people like an accountant, but accepts them freely when they respond to his love, and implants the Spirit of Christ in their hearts so that they may show to others the love they have received from him. In Christ men and women have come of age, as the new humanity brought into being through his death and resurrection-life. ... People matter more than things, more than principles, more than causes. ... Unfair discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, class or sex is an offence against God and humanity alike. If these lessons are important, it is well to give grateful credit to one man who taught them."

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