

“Nicholas Wolterstorff’s Cheap Shots: Why the Christian Philosopher’s Case for Same-Sex Marriage is Shallow” by Wesley Hill, *First Things*, November 1, 2016; “The Tyranny of Decadence” by Peter Jones, *truthXchange*, June 5, 2017.

More than a decade before Wesley Hill graduated from college and two years before InterVarsity published the 1995 *Christianity Today* Book of the Year award-winner, *Philosophers Who Believe*, featuring Wolterstorff and ten others, Wolterstorff keyed an Evangelicals Concerned gay/lesbian-affirming summer conference. He’d have done so sooner, but for his heavy schedule of academic writing and speaking.

Hill hadn’t started elementary school when Wolterstorff was wrapping up his 30-year-tenure as philosophy professor at Calvin College. Before Hill was born, Wolterstorff was traveling the world, giving the Free University of Amsterdam’s Kuyper Lectures, Oxford University’s Wilde Lectures, The University of St. Andrews’ Gifford Lectures, Southern Methodist University’s Tate-Willson Lectures, Princeton Theological Seminary’s Stone Lectures, Yale University’s Taylor Lectures, Regent College’s Laing Lectures and major lectures, too, at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He’s also held Visiting Professorships at Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Oxford, Notre Dame, the University of Texas, the University of Michigan, Temple University, the Free University of Amsterdam and the University of Virginia. He’s “been around the block” – and not only as a solidly Christian philosopher.

While not responsible for *when* or even *if* we’re born, how about some humility later, before charging full blast against such a seasoned thinker as Wolterstorff? Hill mocks his case for same-sex marriage as “shallow”, “flippant”, “superficial”, full of “cheap shots” and even *unbiblical*. He cavils over Wolterstorff’s smiled aside on gay procreativity in this lecture given at a church, as if this grieving dad had never written *Lament For a Son*.

What’s most odd about Hill’s attempt to rebut Wolterstorff is how he *begins* his attack. He objects to Wolterstorff’s *following Jesus’ lead* in Jesus’ response to a question he was asked: “What is the *great* commandment?” Jesus summed up *all* the commandments and *all* the prophets in this twofold statement: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.” This *self-evident, pragmatic* rule of reciprocity is in all three Synoptics. Clearly, it was very well recalled.

Still, Hill objects to “the prominence Wolterstorff gives to the double love command”. Does he object to “the prominence” Jesus gave to the double love command? He admits it *is* “the governing criterion for all Christian ethical reflection”, but rejects Wolterstorff’s arguing, “it should govern the way Christians think about same-sex activity as well.” Here, Hill uses the old “yes, but” trick to which we’re all susceptible, as perpetrators and as the perpetrated against. It’s a “bait and switch” to dismiss the relevance of what one’s *seemingly* just affirmed with an impatient, “yeah, yeah”, so that one can then plunge headlong into what one *really* wants to hype that’s about to come out after the “but”.

To Hill, *same-sex marriage* is a *special* case, like *interracial* marriage to traditionalists of the past. *His* not going against *his* conscience in *his* case is right; *his* imposing *his* conscience on couples wishing to marry is something else. Yet, as a *celibate*, he’s not as insensitive as *happily married heterosexuals* who oppose marriage for *same-sex* couples.

Still, in advocating for Christian liberty, Paul asked rhetorically, “Who are *you* to pass final judgment (*krinon*) on another’s servant? It is before his own master that he stands or falls and he

will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” (Rom 14:4)

It should be noted, that, in terms of strict faithfulness to *biblical texts*, Jesus did *insert* “all your *mind*” into the quote from the Torah. Of course, in ancient anthropology, “all your heart”, “all your soul”, “all your mind” are not all that different. Still, we’re to bring *all we have at our disposal*, to do our duty in the double love command. And, loving *same-sex oriented* persons “with all our *mind*”, surely must mean, at least, that we must guard against anachronistic readings of what *we now understand* as same-sex *orientation* and same-sex *marriage*, into any and all misconstrued readings of, e.g., ancient rites of cultic prostitution and the social constraints and expectations in patriarchal culture.

The ancients had *no more of a notion* of *psychosexuality* or *egalitarian* expectations for *marriage* than they had of astrophysics or microbiology. Our responsibility to treat others, as we want to be treated, must take seriously what *we know now* that they *didn’t know then*. And we know now, as they knew then, that, for both Jesus and Paul, *love* is “the greatest” response to *anything* at all.

Peter Jones, a minister in the conservative Presbyterian Church in America, starts a recent blog posting with supposedly big news: “In our present world, decadence is replacing decency.” Isn’t he a bit late? Decadence replaced decency *ages* ago, in Eden.

To illustrate his alarm, Jones cites someone’s saying: “Even [ancient] Rome had not known orgies like the Berlin transvestite balls”. Apparently, Jones doesn’t know what Gordon-Conwell’s Catherine Kroeger knew and wrote about in 1987 in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. As she explained, Paul would have known of “the deliberate sex reversal practiced in some of the cults”. She said that, “sex reversal was a specific distinctive of the Dionysiac cult” in which “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 wrote: “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.”

Classicist Sarah Ruden, a contributor at *Christianity Today*, explains that, in Paul’s day, “There were no gay households; there were in fact no gay institutions or gay culture at all” – nothing of the sort about which Paul could write. Yet Jones confuses Paul’s reactions to *pagan rites* with his obsessive disgust over all things “gay” today. He’s said: “C. S. Lewis gets many things right”. He probably wouldn’t think Lewis got it right when the Oxford don attributed distaste for homosexuals to, “a certain nausea [that was, he averred,] of very little relevance to moral judgment”.

