

The Present Context in the Light of the New Testament and Its Background: The Case of Homosexuality

Reidar Hvalvik

SUMMARY

Few questions are more heatedly discussed in modern Western society than the issue of homosexual practice and same-sex marriage. Traditional positions have been challenged not only in the secular society but also in the churches. In this article it is suggested that the rapid change of views within most churches is partly due to the allegedly ‘new exegetical insight’ going back to influential books by John Boswell and Robin Scroggs in the

1980s. Attention is given to their exegesis of Romans 1:26–27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9; their interpretations are discussed and contested. Particular emphasis is given to the widespread suggestion that Paul did not know about stable homosexual relations among equal, adult partners – as we do today. The article presents several ancient texts which demonstrate that this assertion is most questionable. Finally, the article has some reflections on the biblical prohibition against same-sex marriage within the broader context of Christian ethics.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Es gibt wenige Fragen, die in der modernen westlichen Gesellschaft heißer diskutiert werden als die Frage nach praktizierter Homosexualität und gleichgeschlechtlicher Ehebeziehung. Traditionelle Positionen wurden auf den Prüfstand gestellt, und dies nicht nur in der säkularen Gesellschaft, sondern auch in den Kirchen. Dieser Aufsatz vertritt die Anschauung, dass der rasche Wechsel der Meinungen innerhalb der meisten Kirchen teilweise auf die sogenannten „neuen exegetischen Einsichten“ zurückzuführen ist, die auf einflussreiche Bücher von John Boswell und Robin Scroggs aus den 1980er Jahren

zurückgehen. Entsprechende Aufmerksamkeit ist ihrer Exegese von Rö. 1,26-27 und 1.Kor. 6,9 gewidmet; ihre Auslegungen werden erörtert und in Frage gestellt. Ein besonderer Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf der weitverbreiteten Ansicht, dass Paulus nichts von stabilen, homosexuellen Beziehungen zwischen gleichgestellten, erwachsenen Partnern gewusst habe im Gegensatz zu uns heute. Die Studie legt verschiedene antike Texte vor, die aufzeigen, dass diese Annahme höchst fragwürdig ist. Abschließend stellt sie einige Überlegungen über das biblische Verbot gleichgeschlechtlicher Ehebeziehungen in den weiteren Rahmen christlicher Ethik.

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RÉSUMÉ

Il n’y a pas de question plus chaudement débattue dans notre société occidentale moderne que celles de la pratique homosexuelle et du mariage entre personnes de même sexe. Les positions traditionnelles sont remises en question, non seulement dans le monde séculier, mais aussi dans les Églises. L’auteur suggère que le changement rapide de point de vue dans de nombreuses Églises est en partie dû au soi-disant « nouvel éclairage exégétique » qui remonte à la publication d’ouvrages influents de John Boswell et Robin Scroggs dans les années 80.

L’auteur considère leur interprétation de Romains 1.26-27 et de 1 Corinthiens 6.9 et en conteste la validité. Il réfute en particulier l’idée répandue selon laquelle l’apôtre Paul n’aurait pas connu de relation homosexuelle stable entre partenaires adultes et égaux, telles qu’on les rencontre de nos jours : il présente plusieurs textes anciens qui montrent que ce point de vue ne correspond pas aux faits. Enfin, l’auteur apporte quelques réflexions à propos de l’interdiction biblique du mariage entre personnes de même sexe dans le contexte plus large de l’éthique chrétienne.

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1. Introduction

There can be no doubt that the question of homosexual practice and same-sex marriage is one of the most debated moral questions in Western society today. Certainly there are other topics that seem to be more urgent, for example poverty, inequality and oppression of women, which affect many more people around the world. These questions do not, however, create similar theological discussions as the question of same-sex marriages. The latter issue has in fact created huge problems in several Western churches and is more or less splitting them. Besides, this issue is special due to the rapid change in opinions – both inside and outside the churches.

This article deals with a chapter of the history of the exegetical discussion about homosexuality.¹ The reason for doing so is that so-called new exegetical insights have been crucial for the reorientation in this question. Let me start with a few comments about the present context. I will take the situation in Norway as my starting point because this is the society I know best. Besides, Norway has often been on the front line in questions of liberalisation and secularisation, and may thus give an indication of what is going on in present day Western Europe. Here are some facts: In Norway male homosexual practice was forbidden and punishable until 1972 and until the middle of the last century homosexuality was in fact not a prominent issue in public debate. Homosexuality was a totally marginal phenomenon. Today the situation is quite different. Homosexual relations are celebrated and given much positive attention in the mass media, in film and literature. This change has taken place in a very short period of time. In 1993 the Norwegian parliament approved a partnership law for gay and lesbian couples, and in 2008 the parliament adopted a common marriage law that gives them the opportunity to marry – like heterosexual couples. In other words, from a legal point of view heterosexuality and homosexuality are now treated in the same way by the authorities, with a few exceptions.

Besides, during the last decades the attitude among the Norwegian population towards homosexuality has changed dramatically. What earlier was a marginal phenomenon is today seen as something within the range of the normal. We can say that in Norway (and probably in the rest of the Western world) there is an ever-increasing majority which seems to regard homosexual relations

as normal and acceptable – as expressions of love which always must have right of way.

As far as I can see this is one of the most noticeable cultural changes in Western society due to the very short time in which it took place. The same change is visible within the Western churches. Until rather recently the Church of Norway (with approximately 75% of the population as members) had a traditional standpoint on the question of homosexuality. In 1995, 8 out of 11 bishops argued that sexual relations only belonged within the marriage between a man and a woman. In 2014, by contrast, only 3 of 11 bishops argued for the traditional view. The majority seems to be ready to accept same-sex marriages. The question has been discussed in the General Synod of the church several times, but no clear decision for the new view has so far been taken. This is in fact somewhat surprising, and liberals are upset and disappointed. They are campaigning for a change the next time the General Synod will be assembled.

This change in the church is undoubtedly a result of the massive pressure from the secular society. In Norway, as in many other Western countries, the gay and lesbian lobby has been extremely efficient. I do think, however, that the change in the church of Norway was only possible because biblical scholars and other theologians provided arguments for a new view on same-sex unions. In the following I will therefore focus on scholars who, in my opinion, provided the main arguments and set the agenda for the debate, and now I am thinking internationally. This brings us back to around 1980.

2. The most important purveyors of premises for the debate

The first book to question the traditional Christian view on homosexuality, however, was published already in 1955: *Homosexuality and the Western Christian tradition* by the Anglican priest Derrick Sherwin Bailey.² Bailey argues that the Bible had been wrongly interpreted to condemn modern homosexuality. This point of view was taken up by John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, published in 1980.³ It seems that Bailey's ideas provided Boswell with a springboard for his own arguments, which may be summarised in four points:

First, that Christianity had come into existence in an atmosphere of Greek and Roman tolerance for same-sex eroticism. Second, that nothing in the Christian scriptures or early tradition required a hostile assessment of homosexuality; rather that such assessments represented a misreading of scripture. Third, that early medieval Christians showed no real animosity toward same-sex eroticism. Fourth, that it was only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that Christian writers formulated a significant hostility toward homosexuality, and then read that hostility back into their scriptures and early tradition.⁴

This particular book has had an enormous impact. It won a US National Book Award in the category of history, and was celebrated among liberals, especially in the popular press. It is interesting, however, that it was met with scepticism within the gay community. Only a few months after its publication the book was heavily criticised by a forum organised by the New York Chapter of the Gay Academic Union, who decried what they saw as a whitewash of Christian persecution of homosexuals and rejected Boswell's notion that it might be possible to square Christianity with homosexuality.⁵

Among scholars, Boswell's book was praised by some and criticised by many, both historians and theologians. J. Robert Wright, a professor of Christian history in Oxford, entitled his review article of the book: 'Boswell on Homosexuality: A Case Undemonstrated'.⁶ Later research has, among other things, qualified Boswell's presupposition that the Greek and Roman society in general accepted same-sex eroticism: 'There was, in fact, no more consensus about homosexuality in ancient Greece and Rome than there is today.'⁷

In the following overview of the biblical texts on homosexuality, I will take Boswell's arguments as my starting point. It may seem strange to use such an old book, but the fact is that much subsequent writing on this subject – from a liberal point of view – depends on Boswell, at least to a certain extent.

Another, likewise influential book should also be mentioned, namely Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate*, published in 1983.⁸ One of Scroggs' main theses is that the only form of homosexuality known to and banned by Paul was pederasty, the love for young boys.

Until quite recently this position was repeated by Christian pastors and scholars – making it easy to propagate liberalisation of the churches' standpoint to homosexuality. Let us now move on to the most relevant New Testament texts, starting with Romans chapter 1.

3. Romans 1:26–27

In Romans 1 Paul writes about how God has revealed himself through his creation. 'For what can be known about God is plain to them', i.e., all humanity, 'because God has shown it to them.' Then he continues from verse 21:

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged [ēllaxan] the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up [paredōken] in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged [metēllaxan] the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up [paredōken] to dishonourable passions. For their women [thēleiai] exchanged [metēllaxan] natural relations [tēn fysikēn chrēsīn] for those that are contrary to nature [para fysīn]; ²⁷ and the men [hoi arsenes] likewise gave up natural relations [tēn fysikēn chrēsīn] with women [tēs thēleias] and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men [arsenes en arsesīn] and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (ESV⁹)

In this text Paul speaks about unnatural sexual relations; but what does he refer to? John Boswell has an answer: 'What is even more important, the persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual: what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons.'¹⁰

In passing Boswell admits that the idea that some people were born as homosexual was known in antiquity, but he is pretty sure that Paul did not know the idea. In other words, Paul does not speak about homosexual persons but about homosexual acts – committed by heterosexual persons.

With regard to the term ‘natural’ (*fysikos*), Boswell claims that this has nothing to do with morality. In his opinion, nature in this text refers to the Gentiles’ personal nature, i.e. what is characteristic for an individual or a group. The phrase *para fysin* does not mean ‘against nature’ but rather something like ‘unexpected’, ‘unusual’.¹¹ The sexual acts described in the text are thus something that was unusual according to people’s own nature as heterosexual persons.¹²

Robin Scroggs has a very different approach. He is clear about what *para fysin* means: ‘The use of the “argument from the nature” is a commonplace of Greco-Roman attack on pederasty and has nothing to do with any theories of natural law or with interpretation of the Genesis stories of creation.’¹³ A little bit later in his book he elaborates his argument:

The verses attacking homosexuality seem dependent on Hellenistic Jewish propaganda against Gentiles. While the phrase ‘male with males’ relates to the law of Leviticus, the likelihood is that Paul is thinking only about pederasty, just as Philo. There was no other form of male homosexuality in Greco-Roman world which could come to mind. ... Since that is so, then it is not too hard to see how he might have considered it unnatural. Perhaps he was impressed by the lack of mutuality, the physical and emotional humiliation suffered by youths who were forced into slavery or who accepted the degradation of the prostitute. Perhaps it was those particular conditions he had heard of that made him consider homosexuality unnatural, rather than some overarching abstract theological conviction, or even some fiat in the Bible.¹⁴

In these quotations from Boswell and Scroggs, we can see some important arguments which are repeatedly used in the debate:

- 1) In Romans 1 Paul speaks about heterosexual people involved in homosexual acts;
- 2) Paul did not know about homosexuals as we do;
- 3) What Paul condemns is pederasty, and his reason for doing so is the fact that it is linked to exploitation of young boys;
- 4) Whatever the meaning of *para fysin* – here Boswell and Scroggs disagree – the phrase has nothing to do with the biblical view on creation and the story in the first chapters of Genesis.

3.1 The meaning of *para fysin* and *fysikos*

With regard to the meaning of *para fysin* and

fysikos, I do not think it is necessary to go into a detailed discussion. It is clear that these words were used in many and various contexts. What is interesting in our connection is the fact that they were also used about sexual relations, and not only about pederasty. This can be illustrated with a few quotations.

The stoic Dio Chrysostom (c. AD 40–120) writes that by keeping human beings in brothels, one dishonoured the goddess Aphrodite ‘whose name stands for the normal [*tēs kata fysin*] intercourse and union of the male and female’ (*Disc.* 7.135). The words he uses for the ‘normal’ are *tēs kata fysin*, ‘that which is according to nature’.

Plutarch (c. AD 46–120) makes a contrast between the natural [*tē fysēi*] love between man and woman and the unnatural [*para fysin*] between men:

But I count this as a great argument in favour of women: if union contrary to nature [*para fysin*] with males does not destroy or curtail a lover’s tenderness, it stands to reason that the love between men and women, being normal and natural [*ton gynaikōn kai andrōn erōta tē fysēi chrōmenon*], will be conducive to friendship developing in due course from favor. (Plutarch, *Erotikos* 751c–d)¹⁵

When we move to Jewish authors, we find an interesting passage in Josephus, *Against Apion*:

What are our marriage laws? The Law recognizes only sexual intercourse that is according to nature [*kata fysin*], that which is with a woman, and that only for the procreation of children. But it abhors the intercourse of males with males. (Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.199)¹⁶

Even more relevant for the study of Romans 1 is the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, probably written in the second century before Christ. The author speaks about God’s creation, saying that ‘God made all things good in their order [*panta gar en tachei epoiēsen ho theos kala*]’ (2.8). I quote from the continuation:

The gentiles, because they wandered astray and forsook the Lord, have changed the order, and have devoted themselves to stones and sticks, patterning themselves after wandering spirits. But you, my children, shall not be like that: In the firmament, in the earth, and in the sea, in all the products of his workmanship discern the Lord who made all things, so that you do not become like Sodom, which departed from

(or: changed [*enēllaxe*]) the order of nature [*tachin fyseōs*]. Likewise the Watchers departed from (or: changed [*enēllaxan*]) nature’s order [*tachin fyseōs*]; the Lord pronounced a curse on them at the Flood. On their account he ordered that the earth be without dweller or produce. (*Testament of Naphtali* 3:3–5).¹⁷

What is important in this text, is that *fysis* is directly connected with God’s creation of the world. The

‘order of nature’ is the order given by the Creator – who can be seen in all he has done. The way of thinking is surprisingly close to what we read in Romans 1. Contrary to the views of Boswell and Scroggs, it is thus most likely that *fysis* in Romans 1 is directly linked to creation as it is told in the opening chapters of Genesis. This assumption can be supported by the obvious intertextuality between Romans 1 and Genesis 1 in the Septuagint version – as can be seen from this comparison:

Genesis 1 LXX (NETS) ¹⁸	Romans 1 (ESV)
<p>¹ In the beginning, God made the heaven and the earth ...</p> <p>²⁶ Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind according to our image [<i>eikona</i>], and according to likeness [<i>homoioōsin</i>], and let them rule the fish of the sea and the birds [<i>peteinōn</i>] of the sky and the cattle and all the earth and all the creeping things [<i>herpetōn</i>] that creep on the earth.’</p> <p>²⁷ And God made humankind; according to divine image he made it; male and female [<i>arsen kai thēly</i>] he made them.</p> <p>²⁸ And God blessed them, saying, ‘Increase, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule the fish of the sea and the birds [<i>peteinōn</i>] of the sky and all the cattle and all the earth and alle creeping things [<i>herpetōn</i>] that creep upon the earth.’</p>	<p>²⁰ ever since <i>the creation of the world</i>...</p> <p>²³ ...and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images [<i>eikonos</i>] resembling [<i>en homoiōmati</i>] mortal man and birds [<i>peteinōn</i>] and animals and creeping things [<i>herpetōn</i>] ...</p> <p>(²⁵ ... because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than <i>the Creator</i> ...)</p> <p>Cf. the use of <i>arsēn</i> and <i>thēlys</i> (male and female): <i>hai thēleiai</i> (v. 26) and <i>hoi arsenes</i> (v. 27)</p>

In the first text God gives humankind dominion over the creation, exemplified by, among other things, birds and reptiles. In the second text Paul speaks about how fallen humanity changed the order created by God, and started to worship creatures, exemplified by birds and reptiles, instead of the Creator.

3.2 Fallen humanity

What Paul is describing is the fall of humanity. It is far more than a polemical denunciation of some selected gentile vices. In fact the text is much more theological than ethical. According to Paul, the whole history of humankind is governed by the primal sin of rebellion against the Creator, a sin that finds repeated and universal expression in every new generation.¹⁹ When Paul brings same-sex relations into his exposition, it is as an illustration of the fact that humans have rejected the

Creator’s design. It is worth noticing that when Paul speaks about men and women in this text, he does not use the most common Greek words, *anēr* and *gynē*, but *arsēn* and *thēlys*, exactly the same words that we find in Genesis 1:27: ‘So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’ There is thus an allusion not only to God’s order of creation in general, but also to the complementarity between man and woman.

The basic issue in Romans 1 is humanity’s rejection of the Creator – a fact that leads to Paul’s conclusion in 3:9 ‘that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin’. The fundamental rejection of God comes to expression in idolatry: humans worship the creature instead of the Creator. The key word here is ‘exchange’. It is used of idolatry in verses 23 and 25, and then taken up again in verse 26 in connection with

unnatural sexual relations. This means that the change about which Paul speaks has nothing to do with heterosexuals starting to have same-sex relations. Paul is not referring to an individual change, but to a universal change in the history of humankind. Boswells' exegesis is clearly at variance with the plain sense of the text. It is wishful exegesis or rather eisegesis, reading a meaning into the text.

The same holds true with regard to Robin Scroggs' claim that Paul is referring to pederasty, with a special focus on the exploitation and humiliation of young boys. Two factors show that this is not the case. First, when Paul speaks about homosexual practice, he says in verse 27: 'they were consumed with passion for one another'. The word used here (*orexis*) is not compatible with the idea of coercion; it means desire, passion or longing,²⁰ and it is stressed that it is reciprocal. These words can hardly be used about pederasty, for example in master-slave relationships.

Besides, and that is the second argument against Scroggs: In this text Paul also speaks about lesbian sex. Even if this is mentioned only here, it was a well-known phenomenon in antiquity, not in the form of adult exploitation of young girls, but as mutual relations between adult women.²¹ To say that Paul only knew about pederasty is thus in direct contradiction to what this text actually says.

This leads me to the last objection against Boswell and Scroggs, about what Paul actually knew of homosexuality. I will comment on that question in connection with the second most important New Testament text related to our topic, namely I Corinthians 6:9–10.

4. First Corinthians 6:9–10

In these two verses Paul gives a list of people who will not inherit the kingdom of God. The New International Version (NIV) translates as follows:

⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor *men who have sex with men*¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

The NET (New English Translation) gives another translation:

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral [*pornoï*],

idolaters [*eidōlōlatrai*], adulterers [*moichoï*], passive homosexual partners [*malakoi*], practicing homosexuals [*arsenokoitai*],¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The phrase 'men who have sex with men' (NIV) is in fact a translation of two different Greek words, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. What is the meaning of these words? Traditionally, as in these translations, they have been understood as referring to homosexual actions, but this has been disputed.

4.1 Malakos

Let us start with the word *malakos*. This is a rather common word, meaning soft or weak. Boswells claims:

The word is never used in Greek to designate gay people as a group or even in reference to homosexual acts generically, and it often occurs in writings contemporary with the Pauline epistles in reference to heterosexual persons or activity.²²

So many people are denigrated as '*malakos*' in ancient literature, for so many reasons, that the burden of proof in this case must be on those who wish to *create* a link with gay people. In the absence of such proof, the soundest inference is that '*malakos*' refers to general moral weakness, with no specific connection to homosexuality.²³

Boswell is right when he says that *malakos* is used in a great variety of contexts, but not when he excludes references to homosexuality. In texts about homoeroticism we certainly find authors speaking about males who behave like women and thus are characterized as soft – using the adjective *malakos* or the equivalent noun (*malakia*) or verb (*malakizesthai*). This can be illustrated with a quotation from Philo of Alexandria, in a text where he writes about pederasty. He writes about men who behave like women. They have their hair curled and adorned, their faces painted, and their skins anointed with fragrant perfumes:

Moreover, another evil, much greater than that which we have already mentioned, has made its way among and been let loose upon cities, namely, the love of boys [*to paiderastein*], which formerly was accounted a great infamy even to be spoken of, but which sin is a subject of boasting not only to those who practise it, but even to those who suffer it, and who, being accustomed to bearing the affliction of being

treated like women. ... And let the man who is devoted to the love of boys [*paiderastēs*] submit to the same punishment, since he pursues that pleasure which is contrary to nature [*para fysin*], and since, as far as depends upon him, he would make the cities desolate, and void, and empty of all inhabitants, wasting his power of propagating his species, and moreover, being a guide and teacher of those greatest of all evils, unmanliness and effeminate [*malakias*] lust ... (Philo, *Spec. leg.* 3.37–39)²⁴

Let me add another quote, this time from Lucian of Samosata who lived in the second century AD. In his *Amores*, which is a comparison between the love of women and the love of boys, he speaks about the goddess of love, Aphrodite, referring to men and women:

she linked them to each other, ordaining as a sacred law of necessity that each should retain its own nature and that neither should the female grow unnaturally masculine nor the male be unbecomingly soft [*malakizesthai*]. (Lucian, *Amores* 19)²⁵

These two texts should be sufficient to show that *malakos* (or derivate words) may refer to a person in a homosexual relationship. As is always the case, the context is essential for the translation of this word. In 1 Corinthians 6 two of the three preceding words refer to sexual sins, namely *pornoi* (people who practise sexual immorality) and *moichoi* (people who commit adultery). But even more important is the subsequent word *arsenokoitai*. What does it mean? Admittedly this is not quite obvious due to the fact that we lack parallels in writings that are older or concurrent with 1 Corinthians. Boswell comments:

Perhaps the most extensive evidence that ‘*arsenokoitai*’ did not connote ‘homosexual’ or even ‘sodomite’ in the time of Paul is offered by the vast amount of writing extant on the subject of homoerotic sexuality in Greek in which this term does not occur. It is extremely difficult to believe that if the word actually meant ‘homosexual’ or ‘sodomite’, no previous or contemporary author would have used it in a way which clearly indicated this connection.²⁶

This argumentation may sound convincing, but it is not. Boswell’s horizon seems to be limited to the Greco-Roman world, not taking into account that Paul was a Jew, with knowledge of Hebrew and capable to draw on a Jewish tradition.

4.2 *Arsenokoitēs*²⁷

The second word, *arsenokoitēs*, is obviously a compound word: *arsēn* (male, man) is linked with *koitē* (bed; euphemism for *sexual intercourse*); the suffix *-ēs* indicates masculine. It is, however, not clear how the two parts are related. Boswell mentions another but similar composite word *paidofileō* where it is obvious that *paido* is the object of *fileō*, but this is not always the case. To illustrate the problem Boswell mentions the English expression ‘lady killer’. Does this mean a lady who kills or a person who kills ladies? Consequently *arsenokoitēs* is ambiguous, according to Boswell, though he leans towards seeing *arsēn* as subject and claims that it means a male prostitute, or more precisely: an ‘active male prostitute ... capable of the active role with either men or women’.²⁸ This means, according to Boswell (and some other scholars), that the word does not necessarily refer to homosexual intercourse.

This conclusion is questionable – to say it gently. First, it is more likely that *arsēn* is the object than the subject. This can be claimed on the basis of other Greek words where *koitēs* is the second part. The most interesting examples are *doulokoitēs* (*doulos* + *koitēs*) and *mētrokoitēs* (*mētēr* + *koitēs*), both found in Liddel and Scott’s Greek-English lexicon. The first refers to a man who has intercourse with a slave, the second to a man who has intercourse with his mother. Consequently it is most likely that *arsenokoitēs* refers to a man who has intercourse with another man, *arsēn* stressing that the person is male.

Secondly, this interpretation is strongly supported by the fact that the word seems to be coined on the basis of the Septuagint (LXX). In Leviticus, in the so-called Holiness Code (Lev 17–26), we find two laws that forbid sexual intercourse between men:

Leviticus 18:22: ‘And you shall not sleep with a male as in a bed with a woman (*meta arsenos ou koimēthēsē koitēn gynaikos*); for it is an abomination.’ (LXX/NETS)

Leviticus 20:13: ‘And he who lies with a male in a bed for a woman (*hos an koimēthē meta arsenos koitēn gynaikos*), both have committed an abomination.’ (LXX/NETS)

Here we have a phrase where both the word *male* (*arsenos*, genitive of *arsēn*) and the word *bed* = *intercourse* (*koitēn*) occur; in the second case next to each other. It is thus most likely that the word has been coined in a Jewish setting with these texts

in mind, possibly by Paul himself. This is, however, of less importance. The important point is that Leviticus 18 and 20 offer a most plausible background for the word *arsenokoitēs*, which clearly refers to a man having sexual intercourse with another male person.

Can we be more precise? According to Scroggs, the combination of *malakos* and *arsenokoitēs* makes it likely that the first word refers to a feminine ‘call boy’ and the second to the active person in the relationship who has a young boy as his mistress. The text thus refers to pederasty, but without further argumentation Scroggs claims that ‘a very specific dimension of pederasty is being denounced with these two terms’.²⁹

Let us disregard the last comment for a moment, and simply ask: What can be said about this interpretation? Does 1 Corinthians 6:9 refer to the form of homosexuality known as pederasty, love for young boys? It is interesting to see that this interpretation is presupposed in several European Bible translations, especially German versions, as can be seen from this list:

Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift: ‘noch Lustknaben, noch Knabenschänder’

Lutherbibel (1912): ‘noch die Weichlinge noch die Knabenschänder’

Neue LutherBibel (2009): ‘Lüstlinge oder Knabenschänder’

Elberfelder Bibel (revidierte Fassung 1993): ‘noch Lustknaben, noch Knabenschänder’

Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible (1988): ‘ni les efféminés, ni les pédérastes’

There is no doubt that pederasty was a well-known practice in antiquity, especially in Greece,³⁰ but it is hardly what Paul refers to here. If he did, he could have chosen another term, for example the unambiguous *paiderastēs* or *paidofilēs*. Instead he uses a new and unknown word, which seems to cover all forms of homosexual relations toward another male. There is no basis for limiting this word to pederasty or to limit it to relations to a male prostitute, as several English Bible translations in fact do:

New International Bible (1984): ‘nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders’

New Living Translation: ‘or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality’

New Revised Standard Version (1989): ‘male prostitutes, sodomites’

New American Bible: ‘nor boy prostitutes nor sodomites’

Both these solutions, limiting what Paul speaks about to pederasty or to homosexual intercourse with male prostitutes, are based on an important assumption, i.e. that these were the only forms of homosexual practice that Paul knew of and consequently the only forms of homosexuality that he condemned.

4.4 What did Paul know?

This is in fact the trump card of homo-liberal scholars and activists: Paul did not know of stable homosexual relations among equal, adult partners. Therefore his texts about homosexuality are not relevant for modern times. In the words of Martti Nissinen, author of *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*:

The modern concept of ‘homosexuality’ should by no means be read into Paul’s text, nor can we assume that Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 6:9 ‘condemn all homosexual relations’ in all times and places and ways. The meanings of the words are too vague to justify this claim, and Paul’s words should not be used for generalizations that go beyond his experience and world.³¹

Here Paul’s experience (a word I take in a broad sense) and his world set the limits for what the words in 1 Corinthians 6:9 can refer to. Without accepting this premise, let us test the assumption of Paul’s limited knowledge. What could a well-educated person, who had travelled extensively in the Roman Empire, living for long periods in great cities like Antioch, Corinth and Ephesus, know about homosexuality?

To be provocative, I could claim that he did not know pederasty – simply because he did not use the common technical term for such relationships. Someone could then protest and say: Of course he knew it; it was very common. Yes, but it was not the only form of homoerotic relationship known in antiquity, not even in the classical Greek period. This can be seen in Plato’s well-known text *Symposium*. The setting is, as the title indicates, a symposium, i.e. an aristocratic drinking party at which men met to discuss philosophical and political issues and recite poetry. In Plato’s famous *Symposium*, an imaginary dialogue takes place between representatives of the intellectual elite of the day, including Socrates, Aristophanes and Pausanias. Each guest delivers a speech in praise of Eros, the god of love.

When Pausanias starts his speech, he comments that there are two different kinds of Eros or Love. The Greeks had two different stories about the birth of Aphrodite, the goddess who always accompanies Eros. Thus Pausanias claims that there are two different goddesses named Aphrodite. One is the heavenly Aphrodite and the other is the common or ordinary Aphrodite. The love which is connected with the Common Aphrodite is the love that inferior people experience, i.e. men who love women quite as much as boys, and their bodies more than their souls. Pausanias continues:

However, the Love who accompanies the heavenly goddess (and who does not descend from the female but only from the male) is the love of boys, and that goddess is older and entirely free from wantonness. Hence those who are inspired by this love incline to the male, preferring what has by nature more vigour and intelligence. Moreover, even among men who love younger members of their own sex it is possible to recognise those who are motivated purely by this heavenly love, in that they do not love boys before the stage when their intelligence begins to develop, which is near the time when they begin to grow a beard. I believe that those who wait until then to embark on a love affair are prepared to spend their whole life with this individual and to live in partnership with him. They will not take him at a time when he is young and inexperienced, and then deceive him, contemptuously leaving him and running off to someone else. (Plato, *Symposium*, 181a–181d)³²

It is clear that Pausanias' ideal form of love is the lifelong partnership between men. And this is not the kind of love where an adult man looks for the feminine and soft in a young boy. On the contrary, it is a love that is attracted to the strength and intelligence of a grown-up male. Consequently he says:

There ought really to be a law against starting a love affair with mere boys, to prevent a great deal of effort being spent on something of uncertain outcome, because with young boys it is uncertain how well or badly in body or soul they will turn out. (181d)

With regard to common lovers, i.e. those who are influenced by the Common Aphrodite, he says:

It is men like these who have given rise to disapproval and caused some people to go so far

as to state that gratifying³³ lovers is wrong, but their disapproval is based on the ill-judged and improper behaviour of this latter kind of lovers, since certainly no activity that is carried on in a decent and lawful manner can justly be called blameworthy. (182a)

This sounds astonishingly modern, and one could guess that this is the background for Scroggs' thinking. It is the exploitation of young boys that Paul knew of and which he spoke against, not the mature love between men that Pausanias recommended. But one has to ask: If Paul knew the first-mentioned kind of homosexuality, could he not also have known the last-mentioned?

It is often claimed that Paul (and people in antiquity in general) knew nothing about what we would call homosexual orientation. Admittedly they did not know and use our terminology and categories, but this does not mean that they did not know that some people had an inclination or attraction towards persons of the same sex – and that they were born like that. In the words of Thomas K. Hubbard, editor of *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents*:

Close examination of a range of ancient texts suggests, however, that some forms of sexual preference were, in fact, considered a distinguishing characteristic of individuals. Many texts even see such preferences as inborn qualities and thus 'essential' aspects of human identity.³⁴

Let us return to Plato's *Symposium*. In his speech Aristophanes starts to talk about the nature or anatomy of human beings, and claims that far back in time there were not merely two sexes, male and female, but three, the third being a combination of the other two. He continues:

This sex itself has disappeared but its name, androgynous, survives. At that time the androgynous sex was distinct in form and name, having physical features from both the male and the female, but only the name now exists, and that as a term of insult. (189d–e)

Aristophanes then goes on describing what human beings looked like in ancient times; they had four arms and four legs, they had two faces and two set of genitals. They were all awesome in strength and might, and their ambition was great too. The gods, led by Zeus, were frightened by them and decided to split each man, woman and androgyne person in two. When the original nature of every

human being had been severed in this way, the two parts longed for each other and tried to come together again. They were not, however, able to have children. Therefore Zeus adjusted the human body, placing the genitals on the front of the body. Thus Zeus caused them to reproduce by intercourse with one another through these organs, the male penetrating the female. He continues:

He did this in order that when couples encountered one another and embraced, if a man encountered a woman, he might impregnate her and the race might continue, and if a man encountered another man, at any rate they might achieve satisfaction from the union and after this respite turn to their tasks and get on with the business of life. (191c-d)

Due to the split of human beings in ancient times, we are all continually searching for our other half, Aristophanes continues:

Those men who are sliced from originals which comprised both sexes (formerly called androgynous) are lovers of women, and most adulterers originate from this sex, as do adulteresses and all women who are lovers of men. Women who are sliced from the wholly female sex are not at all interested in men but are attracted towards other women, and female homosexuals come from this original sex. Men who are sliced from the wholly male original seek out males, and being slices of the male, while they are still boys they feel affection for men and take pleasure in lying beside or entwined with them. In youth and young manhood this sort of male is the best because he is by nature the most manly. Some people say such males are without shame, but that is not true. They do what they do not out of shamelessness but out of confidence, courage and manliness, and they embrace that which is like themselves. And there is good evidence for this in the fact that only males of this type, when they are grown up, prove to be the real men in politics. Once they reach manhood, they become lovers of boys and are not naturally inclined to marry or produce children, though they are compelled by convention. They are quite content to live out their lives with one another and not marry. In short, such a male is as a boy a lover of men, and as a man a lover of boys, always embracing his own kind. (191d–192b)

Despite the mythological ‘wrapping’, the text makes clear that people in antiquity were aware

of different sexual ‘orientation’ as something innate and even natural. According to this text, the youngsters involved with older men were not exploited or forced to do so. They did so because of an innate orientation to and longing for the same sex. Again, this sounds very modern, and shows that people in antiquity had knowledge of relationships between men of a kind not unlike what we see in modern Western society. Our terminology and explanations are different, but the phenomenon seems to be the same. And these texts make it perfectly clear that pederasty was far from the only form of homosexuality known to ancient people.

The salient question, however, is the following: Did Paul know about these things? There are good reasons to believe that he did. Firstly, Paul indicates that he knew people who were ‘passive homosexual partners’ (*malakoi*) and ‘practising homosexuals’ (*arsenokoitai*) – to use what I think is the most adequate English translation of the key terms.³⁵ After listing such people in 1 Corinthians 6:9, he says, ‘Some of you *once lived* this way’ (v. 11). In other words, there were former practising homosexuals in the Corinthian church, a church Paul knew better than any other. He had a close relation to them and visited them several times; according to Acts (18:11) he lived there for one and a half year when he first visited the town. There are thus very good reasons to think that he personally knew men who formerly had practised sex with other men.

Secondly, Paul’s Roman environment witnessed various homoerotic relations between adult men, some of them even formalized in marriage. I shall offer some examples, close to New Testament times.³⁶

The Roman historians Tacitus (c. 55–117), Suetonius (69–c. 122) and Dio Cassius (c. 150–235) all record that the emperor Nero publicly celebrated at least two wedding ceremonies with males, one in which he was the groom and one or perhaps two in which he was the bride. According to Tacitus, in AD 64 Nero was formally married to his slave Pythagoras:

A veil was placed over the emperor, the interpreters of the auspices were sent; a dowry, a wedding bed and marriage torches – in the end, everything that is concealed by night even in the case of a woman was on display. (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.37)³⁷

Suetonius mentions a wedding in which Nero was

the bride to his freedman Doryphoros, adding that a certain Sporos earlier ‘had been wedded to Nero himself’ (Suetonius, *Nero* 29). The same Suetonius also writes about the Roman general Galba, who was emperor for three months after Nero’s death:

As for his sexual desires, he was more inclined to males, and among males only to the very strong and experienced. They said that in Spain, when Icelus, one of his long-time kept men, announced Nero’s death to him, he not only received him publicly with intense kisses, but begged him to have himself depilated immediately and then took him aside. (Suetonius, *Galba* 22)³⁸

One may be tempted to think that what an emperor did was exceptional, but other sources confirm that marriages between men took place in Rome. This is witnessed by the first century Roman poets Martial (c. 40–103) and Juvenal (late first to early second century), who both used satire as a literary genre. As a rule Martial and Juvenal appropriate actual practices in their satirical commentary on Roman society, and it seems that weddings between males, though certainly not officially sanctioned, were a feature of the social landscape.³⁹ On this topic, Craig A. Williams, author of *Roman Homosexuality*, concludes as follows:

In sum, it seems clear that some Romans did participate in formal wedding ceremonies in which one male was married to another ... and that these men considered themselves joined as spouses.⁴⁰

Certainly this was an anomaly according to Roman standards; this is clear from the fact that if two males were joined together, one of them had to be ‘the woman’. This is ridiculed by the satirists, as in an epigram of Martial:

The bearded Callistratus became a bride to the rigid Afer on the same terms with which a maiden is wedded to her husband. Torches led the way and a veil concealed his face; nor did you, Talassus, miss out on being invoked.⁴¹ Even a dowry was established. O Rome! Don’t you think this is enough already? Or are you waiting for him to give birth too? (Martial 12.42)⁴²

Similarly Juvenal records:

Gracchus has given a dowry of four hundred [thousand] sesterces to a trumpeter – or maybe he blew on a straight horn. The documents

were signed and sealed; people shouted ‘Best wishes!’; they sat down to an enormous dinner; the newly wed bride lay in her husband’s lap. (Juv. 2.117–120)⁴³

Such relations would certainly have been the topic of conversation and gossip in a Roman colony like Corinth. Paul could also have got knowledge of such relations from persons within the Christian community in Corinth, as he got knowledge of a man who was cohabiting with his father’s wife (1 Cor 5:1). After leaving Corinth Paul wrote several letters to the church there, commenting on problems raised in letters from the community and in orally information (cf. 1 Cor 1:11). In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses different forms of sexual immorality, particularly the incest case and the practice of visiting a prostitute; both are strongly denounced. It is thus no surprise that he also mentions homosexual practice – since he knew that some men in the Corinthian church earlier had had sex with other men. Both the specific words Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and the homosexual practice he must have known, make it more than likely that he actually denounces all kinds of homosexual activity between males. And, as we saw from the letter to the Romans, he also knew about women having sex with other women, and condemned it as something at variance with God’s creational order.

Against this background we must conclude that the idea of so-called new knowledge that sets aside the New Testament texts is far from convincing. Paul’s letters show that he was acquainted with various forms of sexual practices but that he only blessed the monogamous marriage between a man and a woman – in line with the teaching of Jesus himself. The horizon of Jesus – like Paul in Romans 1 – is God’s creation of humans as male and female to lifelong union:

Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’ (Mt 19:4–5; NET).

In the words of the late Wolfgang Pannenberg:

According to Jesus’ teaching, human sexuality as male and as female is intended for the indissoluble fellowship of marriage. This standard informs Christian teaching about the entire domain of sexual behavior.⁴⁴

5. Ethical challenges in present day societies and churches

Early on in the modern debate about Christianity and homosexuality John Boswell argued that the Bible does not speak against homosexuality. According to him, the traditional view was based on misinterpretation of the texts. More than three decades later there has been a certain change. Among classical historians and biblical scholars, I think, a majority will say that texts from both the Old and the New Testament speak clearly against homosexual practice. This is made clear by several scholars, among whom Robert Gagnon⁴⁵ and Richard Hays⁴⁶ should be mentioned. And the interesting thing is that even those on the liberal wing agree that Paul condemns homosexual practice, both among men and women. As Bernadette Brooten writes, ‘I see Paul as condemning all forms of homoeroticism.’⁴⁷

If this really is the case, one could expect a change towards the ‘traditional’ position on homosexual practice. This is, however, most unlikely. For one thing, there are very few pastors and lay activists within the churches who read the most up-to-date books on the Bible and homosexuality. For that reason many will still refer to Boswell or Scroggs (or other scholars with similar positions) and believe that they know what ‘the scholars’ say on this subject. Thus there is a great need to educate churchgoers and active Christians about the results of modern exegetical scholarship – confronting the massive flow of direct and indirect propaganda for a more liberal attitude to homosexual practice. There is hardly any possibility to change the attitude in the broader society, but in many churches the debate continues – and sound, solid arguments are needed. If arguments for the ‘traditional’ view shall have a future, I think they have to be treated within a much broader context. I could have listed several issues; I will briefly mention only two areas which should not be forgotten – even if they are well-known:

a) *The prohibition against same-sex marriage within the broader context of Christian ethics.* As I have tried to demonstrate, the biblical prohibition against homosexual practice is part of the biblical view on sexuality and marriage, which means that sexual intercourse belongs to the monogamous marriage between a man and a woman. This view is, however, heavily challenged both in the broader society and in the churches. We all know that sex before marriage is common also in Christian

circles. Do preaching and teaching in evangelical churches mention that this too is violation of God’s commandment, and that this sin is also covered by what Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10? In other words, is evangelical teaching equally clear and consistent in other ethical questions as in the question of same-sex marriages?

If we once more take a look at 1 Corinthians 6, we could for example stop at the word ‘the greedy’. What is preached about greed in our churches and communities? If we look at the situation in Europe today, we see that the gap between rich and poor is increasing. And in a broader global context we are all rich. Is this a problem that is taken seriously? Clement of Alexandria once wrote a book on the question, *Can a rich man be saved?* Does anyone ask this question today? If we take a look at Jesus’ many words about the danger of being rich, we should be worried. This worry is strengthened by Paul’s words in Colossians 3:5, where he says that greed is idolatry. In my opinion this is the greatest challenge to Christians in the Western world today. What do evangelical Christians say and do with reference to this question? Is it possible that the traditional view on sexual ethics would gain greater credibility if the ethical teaching were more consistent and less one-eyed?

b) *What would Jesus do?* This is a popular slogan among young Christians. It is also popular among liberals. I have met pastors and bishops who changed their view on same-sex marriage based on the question ‘What would Jesus do?’ and I know of scholars who agree that Paul speaks against homosexual practice, but still argue strongly for a liberalisation based on the example of Jesus: Jesus had fellowship with tax collectors and sinners; he welcomed the outcasts in society and gave them dignity. In our days the homosexuals belong to this group. Thus Christians have to welcome them without conditions and show them love and care.

Surely something can be learnt from this attitude, and Jesus is certainly a model to be followed in Christian ethics. But liberals should not be alone in focusing on this aspect. On the other hand, the ethics of Jesus is not taken seriously if one only says, ‘Neither do I condemn you.’ The following words have to be added, as Jesus did: ‘Go, and from now on sin no more’ (John 8:11, ESV).

One of the most pressing challenges for the church today is to speak rightly and honestly of Jesus and of God. It is true that ‘God is love’, but his love included suffering and sacrifice – aspects that often are forgotten when we speak about love.

As Paul says about love, ‘It does not insist on its own way’ (1 Cor 13:5, ESV).

Focusing on love is important, but an unqualified reference to love is unbiblical and dangerous.⁴⁸ Today we often meet the ‘love justifies’ hermeneutic – which actually may be used to justify practice that, according to the New Testament, is sin, for example sex outside marriage or divorce. The church is called to teach and preach God’s unconditional forgiveness. And at the same time to talk about commitment to those who will be followers of Jesus.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus’ last words to his disciples were the following: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (28:19–20, ESV). This clearly shows that Jesus not only spoke about liberation; he also gave commandments. And notice that the disciples are not only asked to *teach* what Jesus had commanded. They should teach new disciples to *keep*, to *observe*, what he had commanded. All Christian ethical teaching should be seen in this broader context: between commandments and commitment on the one hand, and the gospel of forgiveness on the other.⁴⁹

Dr Reidar Hvalvik is professor of New Testament at the MF Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo

Endnotes

- 1 This article is based on a lecture held at the biennial conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET) in Orsay near Paris in 2014.
- 2 Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955).
- 3 John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- 4 Matthew Kuefler, ‘The Boswell Thesis’, in Kuefler (ed.), *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 1–31, 2.
- 5 Alastair J. L. Blanshard, review of *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* in *Journal of Sociology* 44 (2008) 209–211, 210.
- 6 J. Robert Wright, ‘Boswell on Homosexuality: A Case Undemonstrated’, *Anglican Theological Review* 66 (1984) 79–94; see also, e.g., Lynne C. Boughton, ‘Biblical Texts and Homosexuality: A Response to John Boswell’, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58 (1992) 141–153.
- 7 Thomas K. Hubbard, ‘Introduction’, in Hubbard (ed.), *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 1–20, 7–8.
- 8 Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).
- 9 ESV = English Standard Version (London: Collins, 2002).
- 10 Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 109.
- 11 Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 112.
- 12 For a refutation of this view and an evaluation of many other interpretations of Romans 1:26–27, see John Nolland, ‘Romans 1:26–27 and the Homosexuality Debate’, *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 22 (2000) 32–57; see also Richard B. Hays, ‘Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1’, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986) 184–215.
- 13 Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 114–115.
- 14 Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 116 and 117.
- 15 Quoted from Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 9 (trans. E. L. Minar, F. H. Sandbach and W. C. Helmbold; Loeb Classical Library 425, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).
- 16 Quotation from Robert A.J. Gagnon *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001) 326. The translation in Josephus, *The Life. Against Apion* (trans. H. St. J. Thackeray; Loeb Classical Library 186; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926) is unfortunate, rendering the last sentence with one single word (‘sodomy’).
- 17 Quotations from James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985).
- 18 NETS = *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title* (ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 19 See Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996) 385. The chapter on Homosexuality is on pages 379–406.
- 20 See F. Danker, W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*

- (3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v.
- 21 See, e.g. Bernadette Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 22 Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 107.
- 23 Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 340.
- 24 Quotation from *Philo*, vol. 7 (trans. F. H. Colson; Loeb Classical Library 320; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937).
- 25 Quotation from *Lucian*, vol. 8 (trans. M. D. Macleod; Loeb Classical Library 432; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).
- 26 Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 345.
- 27 For a detailed treatment of this word, see David F. Wright, 'Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10)', *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984) 125–153.
- 28 Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 344.
- 29 Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 108.
- 30 Note, however, Hubbard's reminder: 'Greek homosexual activity, despite popular misconceptions, was not restricted to man-boy pairs. Vase-painting shows numerous scenes where there is little or no apparent difference in age between the young wooer and his object of courtship...' ('Introduction', 5).
- 31 Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) 118.
- 32 This and the following translations are from Plato, *The Symposium* (ed. M. C. Howatson and F. C. C. Sheffield; trans. M. C. Howatson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- 33 In Plato's Greek a youth is euphemistically said to 'gratify' (*charizesthai*) his lover when he grants him sexual favours.
- 34 Hubbard, 'Introduction', 2.
- 35 On 1 Corinthians 6:9 see also the thorough study of Bruce W. Winter, 'Roman Homosexual Activity and the Elite (1 Corinthians 6:9)' in Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 110–120.
- 36 For these and other examples, see Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) appendix 2: 'Marriage between Males' (279–286).
- 37 Translation from Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 284.
- 38 Translation from Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, 422.
- 39 See Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 280.
- 40 Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 286.
- 41 *Talassio*: a congratulatory exclamation to a bride when she entered her new house. Its meaning was unknown to the ancient writers themselves, but it was probably the name of the god of marriage.
- 42 Translation from Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 281–282.
- 43 Translation from Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 282.
- 44 'Revelation and Homosexual Experience: What Wolfhart Pannenberg says about this debate in the church', in *Christianity Today* 40.13 (November 11, 1996), available at www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1996/november11/6td035.html.
- 45 See Robert A. J. Gagnon's thorough treatment of the subject in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001). Note also his extensive review articles which evaluate some recent books on homosexuality: 'A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*', in *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 22 (2000) 174–243 and 25 (2003) 179–275; 'Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts? A Critique of Walter Wink's Views on the Bible and Homosexuality', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24 (2002) 72–125.
- 46 See notes 12 and 19.
- 47 Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 244.
- 48 As Pannenberg (cf. note 44) reminds us, love can be sinful: 'The entire tradition of Christian doctrine teaches that there is such a thing as inverted, perverted love. Human beings are created for love, as creatures of the God who is Love. And yet that divine appointment is corrupted whenever people turn away from God or love other things more than God.' And he continues: 'The will of God – Jesus' proclamation of God's lordship over our lives – must be the guiding star of our identity and self-determination.'
- 49 A valuable, sensitive treatment of the use of the Bible in the homosexuality debate is found in Craig R. Koester, 'The Bible and Sexual Boundaries', *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993) 375–390.