

Why I Could Not Recommend the Mennonite Book *Reasoning Together: A Conversation on Homosexuality* (Herald Press, 2008)

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Note: In May 2008 Levi Miller of Herald Press and Mark Theissen Nation (professor of theology at Eastern Mennonite Seminary) asked me if I could provide a blurb for the Mennonite book Reasoning Together: A Conversation on Homosexuality written by Mark (whom I respect and count as a friend) and by a homosexualist professor of “theology and peace studies” at Eastern Mennonite University, Ted Grimsrud. I agreed to look at the manuscript in order to see if it merited a positive endorsement. I finally got around to it in Sept.-Oct. 2008. I concluded that I could not provide a blurb for the book unless certain changes were made and gave my reasons in the letter that I sent to Levi Miller, copied below. Mr. Miller responded:

As I noted, we forwarded your comments to the authors, and they have made some changes on the manuscript. I doubt however that they will meet your expectations, and at this stage, we are not expecting an endorsement from you. I suppose we'll have to live with a degree of disagreement on this topic.

Accordingly, no blurb was provided. I had hoped to provide a fuller critique of the book but other more important commitments have consumed my time. After a year I have decided to make public my letter, prompted by an email from a Mennonite in California who tells me that the Mennonite church is currently having churchwide conversations on the issue. My response here will have to suffice, at least for the foreseeable future.

*Readers not particularly interested in this book or in a rebuttal of ad hominem attacks that Grimsrud makes about my character can still benefit from seeing my response to four claims made by Grimsrud with regard to my work: (1) that I am projecting my own feelings onto Paul when I claim that **Paul viewed same-sex intercourse per se as a disgusting practice**; (2) that I have allegedly ignored **the context for the reference to man-male intercourse in 1 Cor 6:9**, which (Grimsrud alleges) is not the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5 (my point) but the law court dispute and social justice in 1 Cor 6:1-8; (3) that I have allegedly erred in claiming that Paul regarded **homosexual practice as an instance of porneia** (sexual immorality); and (4) that I have allegedly distorted **the Sodom story** by not limiting its indictment to coercive forms of same-sex intercourse. Grimsrud attributes all four of these alleged failings on my part to my “antipathy” and “hostility” toward homosexual persons and claimed that I provide no scholarly evidence for my conclusions. Here I show that the evidence from historical and literary context for my claims is, in each instance, overwhelming. Grimsrud simply ignores all the evidence.*

Note that page references to the Grimsrud/Nation work are to the manuscript I received, not to the pagination of the published book.

Oct. 11, 2008

Levi Miller
Herald Press
Mennonite Publishing Network
Scottsdale, PA

Dear Levi,

I am sorry that it has taken me so long to respond.

I have read the whole manuscript. *In its present shape* I cannot recommend it.

- 1. The first reason is that the manuscript in its present shape contains remarks by Ted Grimsrud about me and my work that are slanderous. Rather than address my arguments fairly Grimsrud has chosen the strategy of character assassination coupled with misrepresentation and neglect of my arguments. This is something that you and Herald Press have a moral obligation to remove before it goes to press. Mark Theissen Nation does not really refute these remarks.**

In his annotated reading list Grimsrud claims that my first book—which, it is clear, he has barely looked at and certainly has not digested its arguments—is “marred by obvious hostility toward gay and lesbian Christians and their supporters. Displays an obsessive attention to detail combined with an unwillingness to take points of view he disagrees with seriously or present them fairly.”¹

a. Detail. The remark about “displays an obsessive attention to detail” is just plain silly. Grimsrud’s own work in this manuscript indicates that he would have done well to pay more attention to the “detail,” inasmuch as he makes numerous errors in argumentation, putting forward positions in apparent ignorance of the many counterarguments that I have already raised to these positions.

On the homosexualist side of things, Bernadette Brooten and Louis Crompton have also both written 500-page books on the subject that are very detailed (also John Boswell and David Greenberg; Brooten’s in particular is equally detailed to my own, indeed more so on the question of lesbianism in antiquity). Why wouldn’t Grimsrud characterize their work pejoratively as being equally marked by “an obsessive attention to detail”? I will

¹ Only after the book came out did I see that Grimsrud had adjusted these comments to: “*Could be read as lacking objectivity and focusing more on details than broad themes. Grants no validity to opposing views.*” Clearly, Grimsrud continued to read my work in this way; or, I should say, continued to characterize what little that he did read of my work in this way. My work certainly does attend to *both* broad themes *and* detail. Since I do far more with “broad themes” than does Grimsrud, it is a little absurd for him to complain that I don’t do enough with broad themes.

come back to Brooten's and Crompton's works when I comment on Grimsrud's disuse and misuse of them, below.

b. *Alleged hostility toward homosexual persons and their supporters.* The other two remarks made by Grimsrud about me and my work are more slanderous. Grimsrud claims that my first book is "marred by obvious hostility toward gay and lesbian Christians and their supporters." The latter part "and their supporters" is ironic in view of Grimsrud obviously hostile remarks toward me. This is a slanderous remark that Grimsrud does not substantiate. In his section on "Is Gagnon a Reliable Guide?" Grimsrud states:

Gagnon's hostility toward gay Christians and their supporters emerges often throughout the book. He makes some likely unintentionally self-revealing comments when he reads into Paul's cryptic statements said to be speaking to "same-sex intercourse" in Romans 1 "deep visceral feelings...of disgust toward same-sex intercourse" as "the zenith of detestable behavior" (page 269).

Are these feelings of "disgust toward same-sex intercourse" Paul's or Gagnon's? We do not have much evidence of Paul's "deep visceral feelings of disgust" here, especially since it seems clear from the passage Romans 1-3 as a whole that Paul's concern is not nearly so much the behavior to which he refers in Romans 1 as it is the self-righteous attitudes of the religious people he challenges in Romans 2.

Grimsrud states that my "hostility toward gay Christians and their supporters emerges often throughout [my first] book." Yet the one comment that he cites is a statement about Paul's view of homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27, as also that of other Jewish writers of the period and the narrators of the stories about Ham, Sodom, and the Levite at Gibeah. The full-quote, which Grimsrud garbles, is as follows:

It has become commonplace among interpreters of Rom 1:26-27 to state that Paul did not regard same-sex intercourse as more egregious than any other immoral act. The treatment in 1:24-27 suggests otherwise, as is apparent from the compounding of such expressions as "the uncleanness of their bodies being dishonored" (1:24), "dishonorable passions" (1:26), and "indecency" or "obscene behavior" (1:27). In addition, the emphasis on the transparent self-degradation of the act ("in themselves") and the singling out of same-sex intercourse as a prime example before developing the extended vice list in 1:29-31 point in this direction. The depth of Paul's visceral feelings toward same-sex intercourse finds parallels not only in the level of disgust toward same-sex intercourse exhibited by other Jewish writers of the period but also in the responses to homosexual behavior in Paul's scripture: the narratives of homosexual rape (Ham, the men of Sodom, and the Benjamites at Gibeah) as examples of the zenith of detestable behavior; the intense revulsion against homosexual cult prostitutes manifested in Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic texts; the attachment of the label "abomination" to all male homosexual intercourse in the Levitical prohibitions; and possibly the unmentionable character of same-sex intercourse in Ezekiel, who refers to such behavior only by the metonym "abomination." (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 268-69)

In citing this as an example of my alleged "hostility toward gay Christians and their supporters" Grimsrud fails to deal adequately with the arguments that I put forward to substantiate the conclusion that Paul finds homosexual practice to be a particularly egregious instance, alongside idolatry, of suppressing the truth about God and the way that God made us, accessible to us through the material structures of creation. To claim, as Grimsrud does in alleging that I have wrongly imputed my own "hostility" onto Paul, that "we do not have much evidence of Paul's 'deep visceral feelings of disgust'" (note

the pastiche of several different quotations by Grimsrud as though this were a single phrase in my work) is to ignore the rest of the paragraph and, indeed, the whole of my book.

Grimsrud claims that “it seems clear from the passage Romans 1–3 as a whole that Paul’s concern is not nearly so much the behavior to which he refers in Romans 1 as it is the self-righteous attitudes of the religious people he challenges in Romans 2.” But this is a false reading, as I show on pp. 277-84 of my first book, which Grimsrud conveniently ignores. Grimsrud’s argument is the equivalent of saying that Paul was more concerned with self-righteous attitudes than he was with Christians persisting in the kind of idolatry that he cites in 1:19-23 just before mentioning homosexual practice. The subsequent argument in Romans 2:1-3:20 doesn’t chastise the Jewish interlocutor for judging the Gentile practices in 1:18-32 as deserving of God’s judgment (Paul confirms that such judgment is indeed “in conformity with the truth” in 2:2); it rather chastises him for thinking that he can get away with doing similar things and still escape God’s judgment. When Paul goes on to deal with the question of whether believers should continue in sin, in 6:1-8:17, he emphasizes that if Christians persist in such “uncleanness” or “impurity” (cf. 6:19 with the reference in 1:24 to same-sex intercourse as “uncleanness”) they will likewise experience the same fate of cataclysmic judgment, for it is only those who are “led by the Spirit” that can call themselves “God’s children” and escape from the judgment that will befall those who conform to the flesh (6:19-23; 8:12-14).

Grimsrud naturally does not want to tell readers about the numerous remarks that I make in my work to treat lovingly persons who experience same-sex attractions. For example:

I deplore attempts to demean the humanity of homosexuals. . . . The person beset with homosexual temptation should evoke our concern, sympathy, help, and understanding, not our scorn or enmity. Even more, such a person should kindle a feeling of solidarity in the hearts of all Christians, since we all struggle to properly manage our erotic passions. . . . Thus a reasoned denunciation of homosexual behavior . . . is *not*, and should not be construed as, a denunciation of those victimized by homosexual urges, since the aim is to rescue the true self created in God’s image for a full life.²

[In the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:28-35] Jesus was not telling the lawyer to affirm the Samaritan’s belief system. . . . Nor was Jesus stating that whatever lifestyle the Samaritan adopted was to be treated as acceptable. He was asserting that the lawyer should respond to the Samaritan in love, not hate, acting with as much vigor in the Samaritan’s best interest as he would be inclined to act in his own self-interest. In the contemporary case of the homosexual that means doing what is best for the homosexual, not necessarily what the homosexual lobby thinks is best. In other words, Christians should treat the homosexual as a friend to be converted over to the path of life, not as an enemy to be consigned to the path of death. . . . The church can and should recapture Jesus’ zeal for all the “lost” and “sick” of society, including those engaged in homosexual practice. Concretely, this means visiting their homes, eating with them, speaking and acting out of love rather than hate, communicating the good news about God’s rule, throwing a party when they repent and return home, and then reintegrating them fully into communities of faith.³

²Ibid., 31-32.

³Ibid., 227-228.

Far from being an unloving act, a sensitive refusal to condone homosexual conduct is the responsible and loving thing to do. . . . To simply assert that God loves us and forgives us as we are, without holding out the necessity and hope of a life conformed to the will of God, is to deny “God’s power to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. . . .”

The church must not shirk its duty to effect the costly work of reconciliation that liberates persons from bondage to a sinful self. . . . The church should reject the notion that the only alternatives are to affirm homosexual behavior or to hate and harass homosexuals. Rather, the church must affirm a third option: to love the homosexual by humbly providing the needed support, comfort, and guidance to encourage the homosexual not to surrender to homosexual passions.⁴

With regard to church, practicing, self-affirming homosexuals should be treated as any other persons engaged in persistent, unrepentant acts of immoral sexual behavior. They should be loved and ministered to; the church of God must struggle along with them and share in the groanings of the Spirit. They should also be called to a higher standard of behavior. . . . The final word on the subject of homosexuality is and should always be: love God and love the homosexual “neighbor.” The homosexual and lesbian are not the church’s enemy but people in need of the church’s support for restoring to wholeness their broken sexuality through compassion, prayer, humility, and groaning together for the redemption of our bodies. . . . To denounce same-sex intercourse and then stop short of actively and sacrificially reaching out in love and concern to homosexuals is to have as truncated a gospel as those who mistake God’s love for “accepting people as they are” and who avoid talk of the gospel’s transformative power. It is to forget the costly and self-sacrifician work of God in our own lives, past and ongoing.

The policy stances that the church must take toward same-sex intercourse do not diminish the believer’s call to love the individual homosexual. Indeed, a keener understanding of the theological, social, and physical consequences of same-sex intercourse can *potentially* perform the salutary task of helping our “love abound still more and more in knowledge. . . (Phil 1:9-11). An ill-informed love can be just as destructive as hatred. It is not enough to want to love. . . . At the same time, it is not enough to know what is right. Knowledge can “puff up” or “inflate” the ego. It can become a weapon for exalting oneself over others in a smug attitude of moral superiority. It can turn into a tool for “depersonalizing” others. Love must be wedded with knowledge, faith must express itself in love. . . .

This book has been aimed at showing that affirming same-sex intercourse is not an act of love, however well meaning the intent. That road leads to death: physically, morally, and spiritually. Promoting the homosexual “rights” agenda is an awful and harmful waste of the church’s energies and resources. What does constitute an act of love is befriending the homosexual while withholding approval of homosexual behavior, working in the true interests of the homosexual despite one’s personal repugnance for same-sex intercourse, pursuing in love the homosexual while bearing the abuse that will inevitably come with opposing homosexual practice. It is the harder road to travel. It is too hard for many people to live within that holy tension. Yet it is the road that leads to life and true reconciliation; it is the calling of the church in the world.⁵

It should be clear here, at least to you and Herald Press, that Grimsrud has created an unfair caricature of me and unfairly slandered me. I expect this to be rectified before the book goes to print.

c. Alleged that I presented opposing views unfairly. Grimsrud’s other slander is his allegation that “[Gagnon displays] an unwillingness to take points of view he disagrees

⁴Ibid., 484-85. The quote about “God’s power” is from an unpublished text of Marion Soards.

⁵Ibid., 489-93.

with seriously or present them fairly.” He adds to this in his section “Is Gagnon a Reliable Guide” the following:

Not once, in the entire book, does he grant any validity to any pro-gay arguments....
There is no sense of what problems there might be with restrictive assumptions and methods—nor of what validity might be found in inclusive assumptions and methods.
Thus Gagnon “proves too much.” The lack of even-handedness undermines the reader’s trust in Gagnon’s objectivity.

Let Grimsrud cite examples where I do not “present fairly” homosexualist arguments. I present them in greater detail than anyone does, including Grimsrud. What Grimsrud doesn’t like, apparently, is that I offer too many arguments as to why I don’t find any of the arguments used to discount the biblical witness on homosexual practice convincing. Ironically, unlike the way Grimsrud and other homosexualist advocates treat my work—by the way, Grimsrud’s characterization of me and others who share a similar view as “restrictive writers” is pejorative—I give the fullest possible representation of views and arguments from those with whom I disagree. To give such a full presentation of opposing views, to hide nothing from the best of their arguments, is to take them seriously.

Rather than hiding any of the arguments on the other side, I state them all *in detail* and then *in detail* (which Grimsrud ironically castigates as “obsessive”) show why I think that these arguments don’t work. Grimsrud’s slander of me is a clear case of projection, for I will give other examples (in addition to the ones cited above) where Grimsrud misrepresents my work and treats it unfairly.

Let Grimsrud make his case about which homosexualist arguments I should hail as valid. Taking opposing arguments seriously does not require that one find any of them as convincing, strong arguments because the attempts to make Scripture, understood in its historical contexts, palatable to contemporary committed homosexual unions may in fact be completely unconvincing. Certainly none of the arguments that Grimsrud uses regarding Scripture’s alleged non-opposition to committed homosexual unions are convincing (nor his use of alleged analogies); for this see below. The fault may not be mine for failing to recognize one or more of these arguments as convincing. The fault may lie with those making these arguments for they can simply be arguments not properly substantiated by the historical and literary evidence.

Even the most important homosexualist scholars acknowledge that the exploitation and orientation arguments that Grimsrud and others use to suggest that Paul would not have opposed committed unions by homosexually oriented persons are not “valid.” Earlier I referred to the detailed works by Bernadette Brooten and Louis Crompton. These are two of the four most important books on the subject and Grimsrud makes absolutely no use of their *content* (not even in his chapter 1 on the homosexuality debate). Perhaps this is not surprising since they both reject the kind of exploitation argument used by Grimsrud (the Bible is only opposed to exploitative forms of homosexual practice) on the grounds that the ancient evidence (which Grimsrud appears to have little or no knowledge of) does not substantiate it.

Grimsrud says of Crompton’s book in his annotated bibliography at the end of the manuscript: “A helpful thorough historical survey of the treatment of gay people in Western culture. The writer is himself a gay man.” What Grimsrud deceptively neglects to mention is that Crompton believes the following about the exploitation and orientation arguments used by Grimsrud:

According to [one] interpretation, Paul's words were not directed at "bona fide" homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well-intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian. (*Homosexuality and Civilization*, 114)

Grimsrud does not even include Brooten (a NT scholar who identifies as a lesbian) in his annotated bibliography. He cites her only in passing in a footnote as among those who "come to conclusions that would make those who affirm the Church's traditional stance uncomfortable." I would think that the following remarks by Brooten would make *Grimsrud* uncomfortable, though he is careful not to let readers know about them:

Boswell . . . argued that . . . "The early Christian church does not appear to have opposed homosexual behavior per se." The sources on female homoeroticism that I present in this book run absolutely counter to [this conclusion]. . . .

Paul could have believed that *tribades* [the active female partners in a female homosexual bond], the ancient *kinaidoi* [the passive male partners in a male homosexual bond], and other sexually unorthodox persons were born that way and yet still condemn them as unnatural and shameful. . . . I see Paul as condemning all forms of homoeroticism as the unnatural acts of people who had turned away from God. (*Love Between Women*, 11, 244; see also: 253 n. 106, 257, 361)

Grimsrud does include *one* major homosexualist work in his first chapter—all the rest of his "inclusive" works are by people who are not biblical scholars and who badly handle the treatment of biblical texts and the ancient contextual evidence (Scanzoni/Mollenkott, Helminiak, Myers/Scanzoni, Rogers)—the important book by Martti Nissinen (an OT Finnish scholar). However, in his summary Grimsrud conveniently doesn't mention to readers the following candid admission by Nissinen:

Paul does not mention *tribades* or *kinaidoi*, that is, female and male persons who were habitually involved in homoerotic relationships, but if he knew about them (and there is every reason to believe that he did), it is difficult to think that, because of their apparent 'orientation,' he would *not* have included them in Romans 1:24-27. . . . For him, there is no individual inversion or inclination that would make this conduct less culpable. . . . Presumably nothing would have made Paul approve homoerotic behavior. (*Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 109-12, emphasis added; for a critique of Nissinen's inconsistency here see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 381-82 n. 47)

Grimsrud's failure to notify readers of such positions by Brooten, Crompton, and Nissinen—collectively the three most important writers on the subject from an "inclusive" or homosexualist perspective—amounts to either scholarly incompetence or duplicity. Unfortunately, Mark does not point out these glaring problems in Grimsrud's use, non-use, and misuse of Brooten, Crompton, and (to a lesser extent) Nissinen.

Grimsrud cites the works of (1) Myers/Scanzoni, (2) Jack Rogers, and (3) David Fredrickson as powerful works defending the homosexualist "inclusive" interpretation of Scripture. Yet I have given lengthy critiques and rebuttals of each of these works, all of them also available online, which arguments Grimsrud has completely ignored:

- “Why the Disagreement over the Biblical Witness on Homosexual Practice? A Response to Myers and Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together?*” *Reformed Review* 59 (2005): 19-130 (online: http://www.westernsem.edu/files/westernsem/gagnon_autm05_0.pdf).
- “Does Jack Rogers’s New Book ‘Explode the Myths’ about the Bible and Homosexuality and ‘Heal the Church?’” (June 2006). Installment 1, 5 pgs.; online: <http://robagnon.net/articles/RogersBookReviewed.pdf>. Installment 2, 8 pgs.; online: <http://robagnon.net/articles/RogersBookReviewed2.pdf>. Installment 3, 15 pgs.; online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/RogersBookReviewed3.pdf>. Installment 4, 16 pgs.; online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/RogersBookReviewed4.pdf>. “How Jack Rogers Continues to Distort Scripture and My Work: A Response to Jack Rogers’s ’11 Talking Points” (June 2006; 5 pgs.; online: <http://robagnon.net/articles/RogersBookRespToRogersReply1.pdf>). “Jack Rogers’s Flawed Use of Analogical Reasoning in *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*” (Nov. 2006; 12 pgs.; online: <http://robagnon.net/articles/RogersUseAnalogies.pdf>).
- “A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture*, Part 2.” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25 (2003): 179-275. Also available online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoBalchHBTRReview2.pdf>. The critique of Fredrickson appears on pp. 206-39.

Mark even mentioned my critique of Fredrickson in the main body of the manuscript and my critiques of Myers/Scanzoni and Rogers in his annotated bibliography. Did these notations result in Grimsrud doing the responsible scholarly job of reading my critiques before uncritically rehashing the same arguments that I have already rebutted? No, it did not. Grimsrud even chastises Mark for dismissing Myers/Scanzoni while not engaging “their argument in favor of monogamous, covenanted same-sex partnerships.” I do engage it, for 110 pages, and Grimsrud ignores all of it. How can he criticize Mark for not addressing the arguments in Myers/Scanzoni while he himself fails to answer a single one of my extensive criticisms of the work? If Grimsrud is not going to do his homework on the subject adequately he shouldn’t be given a forum to publish his ill-informed views.

Grimsrud also completely ignores conclusions drawn by classicist Thomas K. Hubbard in his definitive sourcebook of Greek and Roman texts treating homosexual practice: *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). For example:

It is often assumed that same-gender relationships followed a stereotypical pattern . . . : in classical Greece this would take the form of pedagogical pederasty . . . , while in Rome, a merely physical relationship between an adult citizen and a young slave. The texts, however, reveal a much wider diversity of relationships in terms of both age and status. (pp. 5, 7-8)

Literature of the first century C.E. bears witness to an increasing polarization of attitudes toward homosexual activity, ranging from frank acknowledgment and public display of sexual indulgence on the part of leading Roman citizens to severe moral condemnation of *all* homosexual acts. (383, emphasis added)

Homosexuality in this era [viz., of the early imperial age of Rome] may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category of personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation. (386)

Basic to the heterosexual position [against homosexual practice in the Greco-Roman world of the first few centuries C.E.] is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other. (444)

Perhaps, however, my referencing a classicist who has produced the definitive sourcebook for homosexuality in Greece and Rome is another instance of my “obsessive attention to detail”?

- 2. The second reason why I cannot at present give a blurb for the book is that in the present form of the manuscript Grimsrud misrepresents consistently what I allegedly say or don't say about biblical texts. This at the same time amounts to a grossly ill-informed presentation of the biblical witness. Unfortunately, Mark in most cases does not adequately address this problem.**

I will address Grimsrud's misrepresentation of me and my work in his “Is Gagnon a Reliable Guide?” by taking his points in reverse sequence.

- a. 1 Cor 6:9.** Grimsrud alleges the following about my handling of 1 Cor 6:9:

Gagnon... does not consider, crucially, the broader *paragraph* in which this verse is found. By *starting* with 6:9, Gagnon gives the impression that Paul's point is about people not “inheriting God's kingdom” with the implication that he is warning Christians that they will not find salvation if they engage in same-sex intimacy. However, this focus ignores the actual context of 6:9 that is found in the eight previous verses. Paul's concern here is with Christians taking other Christians to secular courts as a means of settling their differences, not with “homosexual practice.”

Gagnon focuses on the individual words *arsenokoitai* and *malakos* (page 306). He does not address the immediate reason why Paul would give his list in 6:9–11, giving us the idea that Paul provides this list to answer the question of what happens to any possible same-sexer rather than answering the question of why those exercising authority in the secular courts are not suited to judge between Christians in conflict.

Although I do not deal extensively in my first book with the relationship of 6:1-8 to the vice list in 6:9-10, I do make clear enough that I regard 6:1-8 as an excursus within Paul's larger discussion of sexual immorality in ch. 5 and 6:9-20, arising from the fact that “the theme of judging those inside the community in 5:9-13 brought up in Paul's mind an occasion where not only did the Corinthians not judge those inside their community but, worse, they brought their dirty laundry before pagan courts of justice” (pp. 292-93). More importantly, I do deal at greater length in two other places; first in an online note (n. 105) to my essay in *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (<http://robgagnon.net/2Views/HomoViaRespNotesRev.pdf>); then, in a slightly more expanded form, in my critique of David Fredrickson's work (“A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the 'Plain Sense' of Scripture, Part 2,*” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25 [2003]: 227-28; also online: <http://www.robgagnon.net/articles/homoBalchHBTRReview2.pdf>). In the latter I state:

The first context problem is that Fredrickson treats 1 Cor 6:1-8, lawsuits before pagan authorities, as the main concern of the vice list in 6:9-11. It is far more likely that 6:9-11 links up with the case of the incestuous man in ch. 5, for three reasons (Mark notes only in the first point).

- The vice list in 6:9-10 repeats the same list of offenders mentioned in 5:10 and 5:11 and merely adds four more offenders, three of which have to do with sex (*moichoī* [adulterers], *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*).
- In 6:9-10 offenders known as *pornoi* head up the vice list, just as in 5:10 and 5:11. In 6:9 the word appears before “idolaters, adulterers, *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*.” Why isn’t the word grouped with the three other types of sexually immoral persons? The answer has to do with the fact that the incestuous man is called a *pornos* in 5:8 and his actions *porneia* in 5:1. Paul places *pornoi* at the head of the list, before idolaters and other sex offenders, because it is still the main subject of the discussion.⁶
- The material immediately following the vice list, namely 6:12-20, introduces a hypothetical example of *porneia* (sex with a prostitute) that illustrates Paul’s point that sex is not like food. This confirms that the case of *porneia* or sexual immorality dealt with in ch. 5 is still the issue at hand, not the matter of believer hauling believer before pagan law courts. Paul’s exasperated question in 5:12 (“Is it not those inside the church that you are to judge?”) diverts him momentarily to an instance where not only did the Corinthians shirk their responsibility to be arbiters of internal affairs but they also handed over such authority to the very pagans over whom they would one day stand in judgment.

Simply put, Grimsrud has missed the point that 1 Cor 6:9-10 is much more closely tied to the issue of adult-consensual sexual immorality, where Paul still has in view the issue of the incestuous man, than it is to the excursus on lawsuits in 6:1-8 (and sexual immorality and purity continues to be the primary issue in ch. 7). The link to 6:1-8 with the term *adikoi* (and the verb *adikeo*) is there simply to warn the Corinthians that they not become, through sexual immorality or any other behavior (idolatry, stealing, drunkenness, or abusiveness) one of the “unrighteous” of the world, the “unbelievers” who will be judged and condemned (6:1-2; cf. 11:32: disciplined by the Lord “in order that you might not be condemned with the world”). Paul is not telling the Corinthian believers not to judge cases of severe sexual immorality like adult-consensual incest (ch. 5), adultery (6:9), same-sex intercourse (6:9), sex with a prostitute (6:15-17), or premarital sex (ch. 7). On the contrary he *insists* on the church making such judgments of offending believers (5:9-13; 6:12-20). First Corinthians 6:1-8 treats going to pagan court over matters of relative indifference. 6:9-10 is dealing with matters of significance, such as the case of sexual immorality in ch. 5 (incest), which can lead to the offending believer’s exclusion from the kingdom of God if repentance is not forthcoming and thus requires the Christian community to take the last-ditch measure of temporary exclusion from the community’s gatherings to prompt such repentance.

Nor is the indictment of homosexual practice in 1 Cor 6:9 any more limited to pederasty, sex with slaves, or sex with prostitutes—i.e., only particularly exploitative

⁶ [This footnote is contained in critique of Fredrickson at this point:]

In following *pornoi* with adulterers, *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*, Paul does not mean to distinguish the latter three from the rubric *pornoi* but rather to further specify who would be included under that rubric. The immediate context in ch. 5 (incest, called *porneia* in 5:1; cf. *pornos* in 5:8) and 6:12-20 (sex with prostitutes, called *porneia* in 6:13, 18; cf. *porneuō* in 6:18 and *pornē* in 6:15-16) makes clear that *pornoi* would include at least participants in incest and men who have sex with prostitutes. The following three categories of sexual offenders simply fill out explicitly who else would be a *pornos*. This also explains why the vice lists in 5:10-11 employ *pornoi* as the sole term denoting sexual offenders; it is a general term that normally covers the sweep of sexual offenses. Similar to 1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10 singles out immediately after *pornoi* “men who lie with males” (*arsenokoitai*)—not because *arsenokoitai* are distinct from *pornoi* but because *arsenokoitai* are a particularly egregious instance of *pornoi*.

forms of homosexual practice—than is the similar indictment of adult-consensual incest in ch. 5 (included also in the *pornoi* of 6:9). It is an absolute indictment of all homosexual practice. The nearly identical vice lists in 1 Cor 5:10-11 and 1 Cor 6:9-10 demonstrate that the reason why the church should refuse to associate with the incestuous man until he repents (1 Cor 5:4-13; cf. 2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:8-12) is precisely because such a one is at high risk of not inheriting God’s kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-10).

So not only is it false for Grimsrud to claim that I don’t address the relationship of 6:9 to the context but it is also the case that Grimsrud has no substantive defense against my arguments. This problem with Grimsrud’s reading of 1 Cor 6:9 is devastating for his position since he rests his Scripture argument more on his peculiar reading of 1 Cor 6:9 than on any other text.

Grimsrud also fails to adequately address the whole range of other arguments that I put forward for the inclusive sense of the combined usage of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, including:

- Philo’s use of the abstract noun *malakia* (“softness”) for men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners, as well as the use of the parallel Latin word *molles* by some Greco-Roman moralists in some contexts to designate the same kinds of persons; Grimsrud attempts to argue that the reference to *malakoi* need not be sexual but, in so doing, ignores the immediate context in 1 Cor 6:9, which clearly indicates that sexual immorality is at issue (specifically its position in the midst of other terms that refer to participants in illicit sexual intercourse and immediately before the complementary term *arsenokoitai*, which clearly refers to the active partner in man-male intercourse)
- The extant usage of *arsenokoitēs* and related words subsequent to Paul (Grimsrud’s claim that there is no evidence that it refers solely to homosexual sex ignores the review of subsequent usage in my first book, pp. 315-23), including the comparable Hebrew term *mishkav zakur* (“lying with a male”) used by the rabbis, which does not support a limitation to homosexual practices that involve exploitation of a child or slave (note too that this is a distinctive Jewish and Christian term; it does not appear until very late in pagan literature and was clearly formulated off of the absolute prohibition of man-male intercourse in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 LXX: “a man shall not lie with an *arsen* [male] the *koiten* [lying] of a woman”)
- Absolute Jewish opposition to homosexual practice in the first century and in the centuries preceding and following (e.g., Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.199: “the law [of Moses] recognizes only sexual intercourse that is according to nature, that which is with a woman.... But it abhors the intercourse of males with males”)
- The link to Gen 2:24 in 1 Cor 6:16 (cf. 11:8-12), as well as to Gen 1:26-27 in Rom 1:23-27, which shows that Paul has at least partly in view the Genesis male-female paradigm when he critiques homosexual practice
- The fact that the reference to *arsenokoitai* in 1 Tim 1:10, as also the other vices in the list, are said to be derived from the law of Moses, thus alluding in the case of *arsenokoitai* to the Levitical prohibitions of man-male intercourse, which prohibitions are framed absolutely

- The fact that Paul in Rom 1:26-27 clearly indicts all homosexual practice, indicated not only by the clear intertextual echo to Gen 1:26-27 but also by the wording of “males having left behind the natural use of the female, ... males with males” and the indictment of lesbianism in Rom 1:26 (a point accepted, incidentally, by the lesbian NT scholar, Bernadette Brooten; see my arguments in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 297-99), a behavior not specially noted for its exploitative dimensions, and the use of a nature argument (cf. the quote from Hubbard cited above: “Basic to the heterosexual position [against homosexual practice in the Greco-Roman world] is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other”)
- The fact that even in the Greco-Roman world there existed some moralists who, though acknowledging the presence of love in homosexual relationships, still indicted homosexual practice absolutely (e.g., Plutarch’s *Dialogue on Love*); what then is the likelihood that Paul, a Jew coming from a religious and cultural environment more pervasively and strongly opposed to homosexual practice than any other culture of the ANE or Greco-Roman Mediterranean basis of which we are aware, would have made exceptions for committed homosexual relationships? (answer: nil)

More could be said but this is more than enough to show that Grimsrud’s argument about limiting the references in 1 Cor 6:9 to (at most) exploitative forms of homosexual practice is completely unconvincing. He simply hasn’t done his homework. And in the process he has the gall to state that this is true of my work, that I haven’t taken into consideration the contextual evidence because my mind has been “clouded” by my “hostility toward gays and lesbians and their supporters.” He hasn’t even read the bulk of my work and yet he makes such false claims.

b. *Porneia*. According to Grimsrud,

Gagnon begins his discussion of the New Testament with the assertion that “no first century Jew could have spoken of *porneiai* [sexual immorality, plural] without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20 (incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, bestiality)” (page 191). One missing piece of evidence supports the likelihood that Gagnon’s hostility toward gay and lesbian Christians clouds his scholarship here—the complete lack of the use of the term *porneiai* in the New Testament in relation to “homosexuality.” That is, Gagnon’s assumption is only an assumption, founded more on his own antipathy and condemnatory attitude toward same-sexers than on direct evidence of first-century Christians making the link.

This kind of fallacious charge by Grimsrud just underscores that he doesn’t understand the evidence.

When the apostolic decree in Acts 15:20, 29 (also 21:25) requires that Gentiles abstain from *porneia* it does so in a context that clearly has the laws forbidden to resident aliens (not just Jews) in Lev 17-18 (see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 435-36). Leviticus 18 contains the sex prohibitions that include prohibitions of incest, adultery, homosexual practice, and bestiality (compare also inclusion of the same in developing “Noahide laws” in early Judaism, along with sex with prostitutes). Hence Paul can apply the terms *porneia* and *pornos* (sexually immoral person) explicitly to cases of adultery (1

Thess 4:3-4; 1 Cor 7:2; cf. Matt 5:32; 19:9), incest (1 Cor 5:1-2, 9-11), sex with prostitutes (1 Cor 6:18), and premarital sex (1 Cor 7:2). BDAG (Bauer/Danker's *Lexicon*) correctly states that the word refers to "various kinds of 'unsanctioned sexual intercourse.'"

When Paul refers to *pornoi* (sexually immoral persons) in 1 Cor 5:9-11 he certainly has in view the incestuous man (the *pornos* of ch. 5) but he is not excluding other forms of sexual immorality. In 1 Cor 6:9-10 Paul expands the one mention of sexual offenders in the repeated vice lists in 1 Cor 5:10-11 to include other sexual offenders so as to make more specific what he means by sexual immorality: adulterers, the *malakoi* (soft men, i.e., men who effeminate themselves to attract male sex partners), and the *arsenokoitai* (men who lie with a male). In writing that "neither *pornoi*, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor *malakoi*, nor *arsenokoitai* ... shall inherit the kingdom of God" Paul was *not* suggesting that the "adulterers" mentioned subsequent to the *pornoi* in the vice list, for example, were not also *pornoi*. Clearly he elsewhere places their behavior under the rubric of *porneia*. At the start of the vice list in 1 Cor 6:9 Paul used the one term available to him to describe the incestuous man, *pornos*, a term that was broader than incest-offenders but would at least include that offense, and then cited three other sexual offender groups that would come under the same rubric (adulterers, *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*); he would add a fourth in 6:12-20 (those who have sex with prostitutes) and a fifth in 1 Cor 7:2 (fornicators, i.e., those having premarital sexual intercourse).

None of these other sexual offender groups in this context were excluded from the rubric *pornoi*—those who engage in incest (even of an adult-consensual sort), adulterers, those who have sex with prostitutes, those who engage in premarital sex (even of a committed sort)—so it makes no sense to single out *malakoi/arsenokoitai* as offender groups that would not come under the same heading. (A similar point can be made for 1 Tim 1:10, which specifies *arsenokoitai* as a specific sexual-offender group immediately after the general term *pornoi*.)

Moreover, in Rom 1:24 Paul designates same-sex intercourse as a prime example of *akatharsia*, "uncleanness" or "impurity." This is a term that Paul elsewhere correlates with *porneia* as a synonym (sometimes along with *aselgeia*, referring to sexual "licentiousness," lack of sexual self-restraint with respect to God's sexual prohibitions). So in 1 Thess 4:7 Paul uses *akatharsia* in connection with his discussion of *porneia*, specifically here adultery. In vice lists he correlates the terms: in Gal 5:19 he starts off with *porneia*, *akatharsia*, *aselgeia*; in 2 Cor 12:21 he cites only three vices, *akatharsia*, *porneia*, *aselgeia*; Eph 5:3 makes reference to *porneia kai akatharsia* (cf. Eph 5:5: *pornos ē akathartos*); in Col 3:5 *porneia*, *akatharsia*, *pathos* (passion), *epithumia kakē* (evil desire; the last two vices typically focus on sexual offenses). There is no doubt that for Paul "uncleanness" or "impurity" usually refers to sexual behavior and, in such contexts, is an alternate way of speaking of *porneia* by emphasizing its "dirty," i.e. impure, quality.

In addition, when Philo of Alexandria (a first-century Jew) discusses the OT sex laws under the heading of the seventh commandment against adultery, he includes not only a discussion of adultery but also a discussion of incest, man-male intercourse, and bestiality. Similarly when Josephus begins to address the subject about "laws about marriage" he immediately begins with a prohibition of male-male intercourse and then follows soon thereafter with a prohibition of adultery (*Against Apion* 2.199ff.). Since

both male-male intercourse and adultery are being treated as sexual offenses against marriage, it is clear that not only adultery but also same-sex intercourse would come under the heading of *porneia*.

So when I say in my first book that “no first century Jew could have spoken of *porneiai* [sexual immorality, plural] without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20 (incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, bestiality),” is my scholarship “clouded” by my alleged “hostility toward gay and lesbian Christians,” such that my “assumption” is “founded more on [my] antipathy and condemnatory attitude toward same-sexers than on direct evidence of first-century Christians”? Or is it rather the case that Grimsrud’s own homosexualist agenda has caused him to misrepresent both my views and the historical evidence? Since Grimsrud can have no valid counterargument to what I have put forward above—the evidence is clear enough—the latter alternative would appear more likely.

c. Sodom and Gomorrah. Grimsrud charges me as follows:

When Gagnon turns to the Sodom and Gomorrah story, we see his methodology illustrated. Rather than considering the evidence for why Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, thereby acknowledging that this is an issue over which people disagree, Gagnon *starts* with the assertion that only something as heinous as attempted “homosexual” rape could explain why God would wipe the cities out. His logic seems to run, we all know that “homosexual practice” is extraordinarily evil and thus when these cities are punished it must be because of their homosexuality.

From the start, Gagnon seems to assume the worst about same-sex intimate relationships, taking it for granted that “homosexuality” must have been terrible and extraordinarily repulsive to the biblical characters. Yet, we have next to no clear evidence of this repulsion in the texts themselves (beyond the cryptic commands in Leviticus). We have no stories comparable to David’s adultery with Bathsheba or Amnon’s rape of Tamar to illustrate what is so problematic about such behavior. On the other hand, the Old Testament is quite clear about the problematic nature of mistreatment of vulnerable people.

The stories of Ham (page 69), who had *descendants*, and of Sodom (page 75), where “all the men” were involved in the threatened gang rape, are about presumably heterosexual men doing sexual violence, not about anything remotely akin to present-day same-sex covenanted partnerships. Gagnon seems committed to denying that there is a meaningful moral difference between these two types of phenomena—though he does not justify this denial.

The fact that Grimsrud claims that I “start” with the notion that the text *must* include an indictment of homosexual practice *per se*, allegedly making the evidence fit the assumption and ignoring other interpretations, is a blatant distortion. I suggest that Grimsrud open up to my first book and read pp. 71-78 where I *argue* for the view that an indictment of homosexual practice *per se* is an integral element in the narrative’s view of Sodom. He can then read *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, 56-62, where I lay out the evidence from a series of concentric circles of historical and literary context. Or he can go to my extensive critique of Myers/Scanzoni, who use the same argument about Sodom that Grimsrud uses (http://www.westernsem.edu/files/westernsem/gagnon_autm05_0.pdf, pp. 46-50).

Grimsrud claims that the Sodom narrative, the Ham story, and the Levite-at-Gibeah story indict only coercive acts of male-male intercourse. These stories allegedly have no negative implications for loving homosexual bonds entered into by those who are homosexually oriented. Grimsrud criticizes me for denying that there is a meaningful

moral difference without “justifying the denial.” Grimsrud appears to be unable to hear arguments that he doesn’t want to hear. The problem with his claim is that it is tantamount to alleging that *a story about a man having coercive intercourse with his mother or father, such as the Ham story, has no negative implications for a mutually loving sexual relationship between an adult and parent.*

Whether the male-on-male act of intercourse constitutes a *compounding offense* or a *coincidental act* that is merely incidental to the evil of rape can only be settled by an examination of the historical and literary context. Here context is decisive that the narrators (i.e., the Yahwist and the Deuteronomistic Historian) regarded the attempt at treating a man sexually as though he were the sexual counterpart to men, i.e. a woman, as inherently dishonoring. Note:

- 1) The ancient Near East generally regarded with great scorn a man who *willingly* offered himself as the passive receptive partner in male-male intercourse (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 44-56).
- 2) Most scholars agree that the narrator of the Sodom story also narrated the description of the creation of man and woman in Gen 2 (i.e. the Yahwist), a text that has proscriptive implications for same-sex intercourse (woman emerges from a generic human, ‘*adam*, i.e. from one flesh; she is man’s sexual “counterpart” or “complement”; marriage is defined as the *reunion* into “one flesh” of the constituent parts, male and female, that came from one flesh; a same-sex sexual union would, by definition, not supply the missing element in one’s sexuality).
- 3) The story of Ham has close ideological links with Lev 18 since both texts explain that the Canaanites were expelled from the land or subjugated for heinous sexual offenses. Clearly the editors of Lev 18 have not limited their critique of incest *or of man-male intercourse* to coercive forms (18:6-18, 22).

The arguments for reading the Ham episode as a sexual act rather than as merely voyeurism include the following: (a) the expression “see the nakedness of” (Gen 9:22) appears elsewhere as a metaphor for sexual intercourse (Lev 20:17); (b) Noah “came to know what his youngest son had *done* to him” (Gen 9:24; the Babylonian Talmud records a debate about the meaning of this phrase in which one rabbi suggests homosexual relations, the other castration; *Sanhedrin* 70a); (c) the severity of the curse and its placement on Ham’s son rather than Ham himself better suits an act of sexual assault on Ham’s part (note the subtext: the curse falls on Ham’s ‘seed’/son because Ham offends with his ‘seed’/sperm); (d) the same narrator subsequently tells a similar story of Lot’s daughters having sex with their drunken father (Gen 19:30-38); (e) a similar story of incestuous same-sex rape as a means to establishing familial dominance exists in the Egyptian tale of Horus and Seth; and (f) the narrator shortly after links the Canaanites, i.e. Ham’s descendants, to the Sodom story (Gen 10:19), suggesting that the narrator understands both stories in a similar light. Both Hermann Gunkel and Gerhard von Rad, the greatest OT scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries respectively, understood Ham’s offense as sexual assault of his father, as has recently Martti Nissinen, a Finnish OT scholar who has written the most significant book by a biblical scholar defending homosexual relations (1998).

The discussion below will introduce additional layers of context, including:

- 4) The history of the interpretation of the Sodom story;
- 5) The Deuteronomistic parallel of the Levite at Gibeah and the relevance of the *qedeshim* texts;

- 6) The Levitical prohibitions in their historical context alongside the universal presumption in ancient Israel of a male-female prerequisite.

Here's some more of the mountain of evidence that Grimsrud simply ignores:

History of the interpretation of Sodom. Subsequent history of interpretation of the Sodom episode also indicts man-male intercourse per se, not just man-male intercourse conducted as rape, as a major factor in God's judgment. This is clear enough in two first-century Jewish authors: Philo of Alexandria (*Abraham* 135-37 and *Questions on Genesis* 4.37) and Josephus (*Antiquities* 1.200-201), among other early Jewish texts (e.g., the *Testament of Naphtali* 3:4; *Jubilee* 16:5-6; 20:5-6; 2 *Enoch* 10:4; 34:1-2). It is sometimes argued by supporters of homosexual unions that most, if not all, biblical texts that refer directly to Sodom say nothing about homosexual practice but rather comment on inhospitable treatment of the vulnerable in their midst: the poor, resident aliens, and visitors. The truth is that most texts in the canon of Scripture that refer to Sodom simply mention it and Gomorrah as places of great evil that God utterly destroyed. Isaiah 1:7-17 alludes to Sodom and Gomorrah in the context of discussing social injustice but this merely picks up one theme of the Sodom cycle without excluding other themes. There are a number of biblical texts that allude to the immorality of homosexual practice at Sodom.

(a) **Ezekiel 16:49-50.** According to Ezek 16:49-50, Sodom "did not take hold of the hand of the poor and needy. And they grew haughty and committed an abomination (*to'evah*) before me and I removed them when I saw it." Is the reference to "committing an abomination" to be identified with "not taking the hand of the poor and needy"? The evidence indicates that it is to be identified rather with man-male intercourse.

- 1) The vice list in Ezekiel 18:10-13, consisting of ten vices, indicates otherwise since it clearly distinguishes between the offense "oppresses the poor and needy" (fifth vice) from the offense "commits an abomination" (ninth vice).
- 2) The two other singular uses of *to'evah* in Ezekiel refer to sexual sin (22:11; 33:26).
- 3) All scholars of Ezekiel agree that Ezekiel knew, and shared extraordinary affinity with, either the Holiness Code (Lev 17-24) or a precursor document. Certainly the Levitical prohibitions of man-male intercourse are absolute (see below).
- 4) The phrase "committed an abomination" in Ezek 16:50 is identical to the phrase in Lev 20:13 that refers to man-male intercourse.
- 5) The conjunction in Ezek 18:12-13 of a singular use of *to'evah*, as a reference to a single specific offense, with a plural use of *to'evoth*, as a summary description of all preceding offenses, is exactly what we find in Lev 18:22 (man-male intercourse) and 18:26-30.

The medieval Jewish commentator Rashi also understood the text as a reference to homosexual practice, as have some modern commentators (e.g., Greenberg, Loader). It is apparent, then, that Ezekiel in 16:50 was interpreting the Sodom episode partly through the lens of the absolute prohibition of man-male intercourse in Lev 18:22 and 20:13, indicating that he understood the same-sex dimension of the rape to be a *compounding* offense. This strengthens the ideological nexus between the Yahwist's interpretation of the Sodom episode and the absolute sex prohibitions in Lev 18 and 20.

(b) **Jude 7 and 2 Pet 2:6-7, 10.** According to Jude 7 the men of Sodom “committed sexual immorality (*ekporneusasai*) and went after other flesh.” Some have argued that “committed sexual immorality” in Jude 7 refers to sex with angels, not sex between men, because that is what the next phrase, “went after other flesh,” clearly refers to. In effect, such an interpretation understands the two verbs here (Greek participles, to be precise) as an instance of ‘parataxis.’ In parataxis one of two clauses conjoined by ‘and’ is conceptually subordinated to the other; thus, “they committed sexual immorality *by going after other flesh.*” But a paratactic construction in Greek can just as easily make the first clause subordinate; in this case, “*by (or: in the course of) committing sexual immorality they went after other flesh.*” In other words, in the process of attempting the sexually immoral act of having intercourse with other men, the men of Sodom got more than they bargained for: committing an offense unknowingly against angels (note the echo in Heb 13:2: “do not neglect hospitality to strangers for, because of this, some have entertained angels *without knowing it*”). This is apparently how the earliest ‘commentator’ of Jude 7 read it. For 2 Peter 2:6-7, 10 refers to the “defiling desire/lust” of the men of Sodom. Since the men of Sodom did not know that the male visitors were angels—so not only Gen 19:4-11 but also all subsequent ancient interpreters—the reference cannot be to a lust for angels but rather must be to a lust for men. So both Jude 7 and 2 Pet 2:6-7 provide further confirmation in the history of interpretation that the Sodom narrative is correctly interpreted when one does not limit the indictment of male homosexual relations to coercive forms.

(c) **Romans 1:24-27.** Romans 1:24-27 echoes (in addition to the creation texts and the Levitical prohibitions) the Sodom story. This has been convincingly shown by Philip Esler (“The Sodom Tradition in Romans 1:18-32,” *BTB* [2004] 34:4-16; in an article in 2003 I had already alluded to this connection with the Sodom story in Romans 1). I’m not going to present the case here, except to say that there are numerous verbal links between Rom 1:24-27 and early Jewish interpretations of the Sodom story subsequent to Gen 19, too many to discount as coincidental. Given the fact that Sodom was widely regarded in ancient Israel and early Judaism as a byword for God’s terrifying wrath against human iniquity, it is not at all surprising that Paul alludes to it in his description of divine wrath against human unrighteousness in Rom 1:18-32. Indeed, Paul refers to Sodom as just such a byword in his citation of Isa 1:9 in Rom 9:29. Paul in Rom 1:24-27 does not limit his indictment of same-sex intercourse to rape, as shown by his references to lesbianism in 1:26 and men being “inflamed with their yearning for one another” in 1:27. Consequently, his series of intertextual echoes to the Sodom tradition in 1:18-32 indicate that he understood the Sodom story as an indictment of homosexual practice per se.

What of **Jesus on Sodom?** If historical context means anything, Jesus’ remarks about Sodom must be read in light of the texts cited above. When he declared that it would be “more tolerable on the Day (of Judgment) for Sodom” than for the towns that did not welcome his messengers (Luke 10:10-12 par. Matt 10:14-15), he was acknowledging Sodom’s role in Scripture and tradition as the prime example of abuse of visitors. This abuse included the ghastly attempt at treating males as though they were not males but sexual counterparts to males (i.e. females). Jesus merely added a novel twist: As bad as the actions of the men of Sodom were, failure to welcome him and his emissaries was worse still because “something more than” angelic visitation was here (Luke 11:29-32 par. Matt 12:39-41).

(d) *The Deuteronomistic references to the qedeshim and the Levite at Gibeah.* Legal material from Deuteronomy and narrative material from Deuteronomistic History (Joshua through 2 Kings) disparage the homoerotic associations of the *qedeshim*. The word literally means “consecrated men” but refers in context to male cultic figures who sometimes served as the passive receptive sexual partners for other men (i.e. homosexual cult prostitutes: Deut 23:17-18; 1 Kgs 14:21-24; 15:12-14; 22:46; 2 Kgs 23:7; cf. Job 36:14). Even Phyllis Bird, an OT scholar who writes on behalf of homosexual unions and has done extensive work on the *qedeshim*, concedes that the Deuteronomistic Historian was especially repulsed by the consensual, receptive intercourse that these figures had with other men. The reference to such figures as “dogs” (Deut 23:18) matches the slur made against parallel figures in Mesopotamia (the *assinnu*, *kurgarrû*, and *kulu’u*), called both “dog-woman” and “man-woman” because of their *consensual* attempts at erasing masculinity and being penetrated by other men (compare Rev 22:15, “dogs,” to Rev 21:8, “the abominable”).

It will not do to dismiss the references to the *qedeshim* as irrelevant because of the cultic associations, the exchange of money, or the absence of orientation, for several reasons. (1) The Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic description of their behavior as an “abomination” (*to’evah*, an abhorrent or detestable act) links these texts ideologically to Lev 18:22, where the same tag is applied absolutely to all man-male intercourse and not limited to intercourse in a cultic context for pay. (2) The disgust registered by these narrators for the *qedeshim* parallels the disgust registered in Mesopotamia for similar figures precisely on the grounds of their attempt to define themselves sexually as women in relation to men rather than as the men that they are. (3) Despite the revulsion with which such figures were held in the ancient Near East, this was still one of the most accepted forms of homosexual practice (not the least), because it was believed that their androgynous demeanor was beyond their control (i.e. due to a goddess figure with androgynous traits). This has links to today’s claim that homosexual attraction is beyond a person’s control.

So although there is no exact one-to-one correspondence between the *qedeshim* and homosexual persons today, Deuteronomistic abhorrence of the *qedeshim* was not confined to men who experienced no same-sex attraction or who were affiliated with a foreign cult and received compensation. It was primarily focused on men who feminized themselves to attract male sex partners—which, incidentally, is also the focus of Paul’s term *malakoi* (“soft men”) in 1 Cor 6:9. All of this is relevant to a proper interpretation of the Sodom narrative.

Since the Deuteronomistic Historian’s attitude toward the *qedeshim* makes it clear that he would have been repulsed by a *consensual* act of man-male intercourse, it is evident that in telling the story of the Levite at Gibeah the Deuteronomistic Historian was indicting man-male intercourse per se and not only coercive forms of man-male intercourse. Since too the story of a Levite at Gibeah in Judg 19:22-25 is in many respects a carbon copy of the Sodom narrative in Gen 19:4-11 (there are even some verbatim agreements in the Hebrew), how the narrator of Judg 19:22-25 interpreted the attempt of the men of the city to have intercourse with a male visitor provides our earliest commentary of how the Yahwist would have interpreted the similar event at Sodom. In other words, the Yahwist is likely to have viewed the man-male dimension of the attempted act as a *compounding* factor in underscoring the depravity of the inhabitants.

We now see an interconnected ideological nexus in the OT as regards the issue of man-male intercourse, linking Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, the Yahwistic material in the Pentateuch, the Levitical sex laws, and Ezekiel. These links are picked up also by Jesus, Paul, and the authors of Jude and 2 Peter.

I could go on to talk about the Levitical prohibitions: how they are part of a broader OT witness, where every text in Scripture treating sexual matters, whether narrative, law, proverb, poetry, moral exhortation, or metaphor always presupposes a male-female prerequisite for sexual activity; how they prohibit man-male intercourse (and implicitly female-female intercourse) absolutely and treat such intercourse as a first-tier sexual offense and a “detestable act”; how they bear the marks of moral, rather than merely ritual, purity; how they contain as an implicit motive for the proscription sexual discomplementarity; how they are consciously appropriated in the New Testament; and why cloth mixtures and menstrual law are second-rate analogies to the analogy from incest law. I could recount all the evidence here but, frankly, I think that I have already made the case for the OT witness. It’s time now for Grimsrud to act like a responsible scholar by reading my work carefully on the subject. I suggest that he start with my Myers/Scanzoni critique in the online *Reformed Review*, pp. 50-53 (online: http://www.westernsem.edu/files/westernsem/gagnon_autm05_0.pdf); then move on to: my article “Old Testament and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of the Case Made by Phyllis Bird.” *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (2005) 117: 367-94; *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 111-46; and *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 62-68 (with online notes). In view of the above evidence, Grimsrud’s claim that my arguments about Sodom in its OT and ANE context are nothing more than the projection of my own alleged antipathy to homosexual persons is clearly preposterous and slanderous.

So when in his section, “Is Gagnon a Reliable Guide?,” Grimsrud summarily dismisses my work as so skewed by my alleged hatred of homosexual persons as to make me a completely unreliable guide for addressing the issue of Scripture and homosexual practice, it is clear that he has borne false witness. Unfortunately, Mark, rather than show from my work that Grimsrud’s claims about me and about what Scripture says are misplaced, tends from that point on to shy away from giving too much emphasis to my work.

Conclusion

In sum, I expect such misrepresentations of my work to be corrected before the book goes to print. It doesn’t matter how far along the process is. Herald Press as a Christian press has a moral responsibility to see that such changes are made. I have no problem with Grimsrud trying to mount an effective case against my arguments. But that is not what has happened here. Instead, Grimsrud has adopted an *ad hominem* attack of me as a person and, in the process, has grossly misrepresented my work.

If such corrections are made, I would consider a blurb (I would need only a day or two after receiving evidence of corrections). At least Mark does some good work, although he unfortunately does his own overall argument a considerable disservice, in three ways: (1) by giving insufficient and often reluctant attention to the numerous strong scriptural

arguments (thereby making it possible for Grimsrud to make the absurd claim that he, in distinction to Mark, has a good case from Scripture); (2) by failing to enunciate a clear, logical reason why homosexual practice is wrong (part of the problem here is his capitulation on the incest analogy after a very weak counter by Grimsrud); and (3) by being overly apologetic (in a bad sense) about the position he holds, to a point where one almost wonders why he continues to retain the position of opposition (I see nothing apologetic about Grimsrud's posture; love entails sympathy for those who struggle with same-sex passions but Mark at times appears to regret that he has to be in agreement with Scripture, as if there were not greater benefits to obedience to God).

Sincerely,

Rob

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For readers wishing to read short general treatments of the subject of the Bible and homosexual practice, see my online articles:

“More than ‘Mutual Joy’: Lisa Miller of *Newsweek* against Scripture and Jesus” (Dec. 2008; 26 pgs.; online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homosexNewsweekMillerResp.pdf>).

“What the Evidence *Really* Says about Scripture and Homosexual Practice: Five Issues” (Mar. 14, 2009; 7 pgs.; online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homosexScripReallySays.doc.pdf>).

“Why Homosexual Behavior Is More like Consensual Incest and Polyamory than Race or Gender: A Reasoned and Reasonable Case for Secular Society” (May 22, 2009; 7 pgs.; online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homosexIncestPolyAnalogy.pdf>).

“What Should Faithful Lutherans in the ELCA Do?” (Sept. 30, 2009; 7 pgs.; online: <http://robagnon.net/articles/homosexELCAonWhatToDo.pdf>).