

Appealing to Scripture, Moral Formation, and Re-imagining Homosexuality

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary Western church's vexed discussions about homosexuality, nearly everybody is appealing to Scripture. Some appeal to scripture and find clear reasons for resisting any legitimization of same-gender relationships. Others appeal to Scripture and find no directly relevant material and conclude that there is no reason not to legitimate such relationships. Others appeal to Scripture and find the relevant material so susceptible to an irreducible hermeneutical diversity that the church is invited correspondingly to embrace a diversity of positions on such relationships. Still others appeal to a 'canon within the canon' in order either to reinforce biblical prohibitions against homosexuality or to theologically relativise them. In each case there is an appeal to scripture. The dividing lines between the different positions are not lines between being more or less serious in the acknowledgement of scripture's authority. Nor are the dividing lines simply those which separate different exegetical or hermeneutical methods from each other. So why the diversity?

The different results of appealing to Scripture also reflect different modes of appealing to Scripture, different expectations of what it is that Scripture does in the life of the church and, in particular, different assumptions about how different elements of Scripture variously shape the moral imagination of the church. What, however, does it mean to 'appeal to Scripture'? There is no shortage of writing on how to interpret and exegete scripture, but reflection on what it means to appeal to scripture is more limited. I believe that by asking this prior question it is possible to re-frame the discussion about homosexuality.²

Whilst scholarly discussion about the 'appeal to Scripture' is limited, it is not non-existent. Entering those discussions will be the first substantive section of this essay. Having then outlined one recent proposal for a variety of 'modes of appeal' to scripture, I will turn more directly to the appeal made to the inclusion of the Gentiles in Acts 10-15 in the debates surrounding homosexuality, specifically the respective and divergent appeals made to this text by Richard Hays and Luke Timothy Johnson. Against that background, I will make my own appeal to Acts 10-15. It will not, however, be another instance of the appeal to that text as a paradigm

of including the previously excluded. Rather, I will appeal to the actual use of Scripture *within* Acts 10-15 as paradigmatic for the use of Scripture in the task of theologically re-imagining homosexuality.

But before moving to those tasks, I will briefly make a second set of introductory remarks about issues that require some comment before embarking on the substantial part of the essay.

2. ENTERING THE DEBATE: NO EASY OPTIONS

In my view there are strong and intellectually responsible arguments both for and against the normalisation of homosexuality within the Christian faith. Not all who resist that normalisation are homophobic biblical literalists. Intellectually serious arguments have been mounted for maintaining the traditional prohibition against same-sex sexual activity. On the other hand, not all who champion the acceptance of such normalisation are postmodern relativists who have sold out to the spirit of the age. There are serious theological arguments which warrant a revision of the traditional position. Accordingly, the church catholic's theological navigation through this issue requires an encounter between the strongest cases for the various positions. As in other theological debates, so in this one: easy options are no options. So before moving into the complexities of what it means to appeal to scripture, it is necessary to resist two quite specific 'easy options' which have been invoked to resolve this debate. One is an appeal to the idea of inclusion. The other is the appeal to the discourse of emancipation.

That the gospel announces the inclusion of those once deemed excluded is beyond dispute. Indeed, the sheer radicalness of the gospel's inclusiveness seen in the ministry of Jesus and the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in the early church has rightly been given greater prominence in recent theology and justly makes heavy demands on the self-understanding and practices of the church. But the inclusiveness of the gospel does not stand alone. It can never be an exhaustive description of the character or purpose of the church. Both Jesus and the New Testament writers announced *exclusions* from the kingdom of God and from the church even as they proclaimed the inclusive gospel. Inclusiveness

is indeed an important theme in the present debates about homosexuality, but on its own it is not, in my view, anywhere near a big enough theme (or even a sufficiently precise theme) around which to build a theological argument about the place of homosexual people in the Christian community.

Similar remarks might be made about the use in this debate of the modern liberal discourses of emancipation. These discourses have been pivotal in, for instance, the decriminalisation of homosexual acts and in the deconstruction of pervasive and entrenched cultural and social prejudices against homosexuals. Moreover, even those churches which have stridently resisted any theological normalisation of homosexuality whilst supporting its decriminalisation have often done so using the rights- and justice-based arguments of emancipatory discourses. Yet, important though they have been, those discourses cannot provide an adequate theological resting place for an account of the relationship between homosexuality and Christian discipleship. Notwithstanding their (nowadays hidden) theological roots, matters such as 'freedom' and 'rights' have become detached from those roots. Without integration into a wider framework of ideas about God, salvation and human existence, they remain fairly blunt and uninformative theological tools.³

3. APPEALING TO SCRIPTURE: BEYOND FLAPPING OUR EXEGETICAL ARMS

As indicated at the outset, shared assertions of Scripture's authority can obscure the vast range of ways in which that authority is appealed to and implemented. For instance, eco-theological, evangelical and post-colonial interpreters of scripture might share a belief in the Bible's authority but have quite different ways of, and reasons for, using it. In other words, to consider what it is we are doing when we 'appeal' to Scripture is essentially to ask about our use of Scripture. It is one thing to exegete a passage and to interpret it in ways intelligible to contemporary readers and listeners. Hermeneutics may well help us to identify where and how the Bible is relevant to contemporary concerns. But what then do we do with it?⁴ Identifying meaning and locating relevance do not by themselves determine the mode of use. An exercise in exegesis and interpretation might be ignored, disputed or appropriated; the exegesis of a given passage of Scripture might be used by a Christian to proclaim the gospel or it might reinforce an atheist in their unbelief. It might be used in ethical instruction, doctrinal formulation, fostering the discipline of prayer or in cultivating particular pastoral practices.

Additionally, exegesis and interpretation are not by themselves necessarily *theological* exercises. And if we are to construct an identifiably Christian theological argument about any issue, let alone homosexuality, the results of any exegetical exercise must be brought into wider Christian considerations about God, salvation, and human existence. In other words, an appeal to scripture which stops at, say, historical or literary or social-scientific exegesis does not yet constitute a Christian *theological* argument. Still less does dependence on exegesis constitute a Christian *ethical* argument. The contemporary moral theologian, Oliver O'Donovan, is

reported to have said: "Interpreters who think that they can determine the proper ethical application of the Bible solely through more sophisticated exegesis are like people who believe that they can fly if only they flap their arms hard enough."⁵ Perhaps this is borne out nowhere more clearly and conspicuously than in the debates about homosexuality. I do not repeat this remark by O'Donovan to trivialise or bypass exegesis. But it is an important reminder that exegesis is only one part of theological construction. When this is not acknowledged, opposing exegetical arguments can simply talk past each other in their shared but disputed confidence they have settled the issue theologically.⁶ My claim is not that by moving beyond exegesis any resolution of these and other theological debates will be necessarily or easily reached. Rather, it is to move in the direction of a different kind of conversation. The first step in that direction is to explore some recent proposals about what it means to 'appeal' to scripture.

4. APPEALING TO SCRIPTURE: SOME RECENT PROPOSALS

In a landmark study in 1975, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, David Kelsey drew attention to the diverse ways theologians use scripture. He demonstrated how, during the twentieth century, in the rejection of a direct equation of the Bible with the Word of God, there was a shift in theological discourse from appeals to 'What does the Bible say?' to 'What is God using the Bible to say?' Kelsey pointed out, however, that notwithstanding the significance of this shift, it left the Bible's function closely tied to the doctrine of revelation. Therefore, it left unaddressed the question, 'What is God using the Bible for?' Because the Bible was located wholly in the doctrine of revelation, the question was answered without needing to be asked: The Bible reveals God. Kelsey's own more nuanced answer to that question was that God uses the Bible to shape the church's identity: "Speaking *theologically*, God 'uses' the church's various uses of scripture in its common life to nurture and reform the self-identity both of the community and of the individual persons who comprise it."⁷

Echoing some of Kelsey's conclusions, Richard Hays, in his equally landmark study *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*,⁸ drew attention to the different ways the Bible is ethically instructive and how reading it is ethically formative. Hays argues that the framework is as ethically decisive as any particular ethical instruction. The New Testament texts are as morally directive and formative when they tell the story of Jesus' passion as they are when they impart specific ethical instruction. Accordingly, Christian readers of these texts need to be attentive to how they are using them: the ethical significance of the framework may be more determinative for Christian action than any specific ethical instruction. This leads Hays to propose a certain set of exegetical, hermeneutical and pragmatic tasks which, he claims, should guide the contemporary church in its use of the New Testament in its ethical considerations. Among these tasks, Hays reflects very briefly on the various 'modes of appeal' to Scripture that could be found in ethical arguments. Moreover, these various modes reflect the diverse ways that ethical discourse emerges in scripture itself. This

should, he says, control the way we use particular texts: "New Testament texts must be granted authority (or not) in the mode in which they speak".⁹ There is nothing exhaustive about the four modes identified by Hays. Nevertheless, whatever their limitations, their very existence is a twofold reminder: the New Testament itself is morally formative and directive in different modes; and the theological appeal to scripture is not 'one thing' and can be at least as complex as the exegetical task itself.

Hays identifies four modes of ethical discourse in the New Testament, and defines them as follows:

Rules: direct commandments or prohibitions of specific behaviours; for example, Jesus' prohibition on divorce.

Principles: general frameworks of moral consideration by which particular decisions about actions are to be governed; for instance, Jesus' twofold summary of the law.

Paradigms: stories or summary accounts of characters who model exemplary conduct; for example, Paul's presentation of his own cruciform pattern of ministry as a general pattern of Christian ministry.

Symbols: biblical narratives and the values embedded in them create the perceptual categories through which we interpret reality; for instance, the way God's character is depicted as, for instance, love and the depiction of the human condition as, for instance, creaturely but fallen.¹⁰

Whatever the limitations of these different modes, the very fact of the distinctions between them is an important tool in breaking the rule-book approach to Scripture.

Of course, Hays does not propose that ethical argument proceeds only on the basis of an appeal to scripture, regardless of the mode of that appeal. He takes note also of tradition, reason and experience, albeit with each of those being subordinate to scripture. In that sense, his theological method is quite conventional. What he also does, which is of interest to this essay, is sift through the different modes of ethical argument present in the New Testament's discussions of homosexuality and bring them into conversation with reason, experience and tradition. Hays thus explores the question of the normalisation of homosexual practice in the church, and, in doing so, he enters the debate about the relevance to that issue of the inclusion of the Gentiles. Along with others, Hays asks whether Acts 10-15 can be appealed to as 'paradigm' which justifies the full inclusion of homosexual people in the church. Hays's answer turns out to be 'no'. But how he gets to that answer warrants attention, and, as indicated earlier in this essay, this debate demands that the various positions encounter each other *at their strongest points*. Hays's argument is a strong one, not least because of the nuances he brings to it via his understanding of the different modes of appeal to the Bible. And the challenge he presents to those who hold different positions is a serious one and cannot be ignored. Later, I will outline such a position precisely by taking up Hays's challenge and will do so on his terms. Before that, however, it is necessary to engage his argument. To that task I now turn.

5. APPEALING TO ACTS 10-15: A PARADIGM OF INCLUSION?

a. Hays's Argument

Hays's engagement with Acts 10-15 is not the first move in his argument about the ethics of homosexuality. In fact, it is his last. The weight of his own judgement against the church's full acceptance of homosexuality lies in his reading of Romans 1:18-32. His privileging of this text over the other standard points of reference is a direct function of his application of the different modes of ethical discourse in the New Testament.¹¹ Indeed, even his conclusion that "the New Testament remains unambiguous and univocal in its condemnation of homosexual conduct"¹² does not by itself settle the issue. Perhaps surprisingly, Hays's final position for arguing against homosexual practices does not depend on any appeal to New Testament 'rules'. Indeed, he notes that a "striking feature of...the handful of relevant texts is that the New Testament contains no passages that clearly articulate a *rule* against homosexual practices."¹³ This is not because he believes that the various texts can be bypassed because what 'homosexuality' meant then is not continuous with what it means today. Indeed, he is clear that such a continuity does exist. He is also clear that *malakoi*, *arsenokoitai* and *porneia* in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:10 and Acts 15:28-29, are variously related to homosexual acts and are always the object of criticism. His point, however, is that none of these texts offer standalone Christian teaching, let alone a rule, on homosexuality. So, for Hays, the references to homosexual acts in these texts are made in passing in the course of larger arguments.¹⁴

If there are no rules, what about *principles*? Hays acknowledges that certain principles underlie the negative judgements on homosexual acts and that such principles could be argued to relativise the explicit judgements. For instance, underlying Romans 1 could be a general principle that "human actions ought to acknowledge and honour God as Creator"¹⁵ and underlying 1 Corinthians 6 might be a principle that our bodies should be used to glorify God. Yet Hays contends that any extension of these principles to soften the criticism of homosexual practices would illegitimately extract the principles from the "particular narrative framework"¹⁶ which authorises them in the first place. In fact, it is this narrative framework which comes to the textual surface in Romans 1, a text which Hays reads in the "mode of symbolic world construction". And it is this *symbolic* mode that is decisive in his appeal to scripture. This text is "read against the specific background of the Genesis creation story";¹⁷ it articulates foundational claims about God, creation and creatures, and the relationships between them. Homosexual practices are invoked in this argument because, says Hays, they "represent a tragic distortion of the created order".¹⁸ For Hays, this lays bare the fundamental background to the New Testament's consistently negative references to homosexual activity, even if they never amount to rules. It is the symbolic mode which carries authority for the contemporary church and, therefore, Hays insists that "[if we accept the authority of the New Testament on this subject, we will be taught to perceive homosexuality accordingly."¹⁹

Nevertheless, Hays leaves a door ajar. In his consideration of any relevant *paradigms*, he acknowledges one possible argument for the endorsement of homosexual practice. Although first noting that the only “paradigms offered by the New Testament for homosexual behaviour are the emphatically negative and stereotypic sketches in the three Pauline texts”,²⁰ he allows that a “more sophisticated type” of paradigmatic appeal to scripture in justification of homosexuality “is offered by those who propose that acceptance of gay Christians...is analogous to the acceptance of Gentile Christians in the first-century church”.²¹ In this proposal, the acceptance of the Gentiles serves as a “paradigm...for the church to expand the boundaries of Christian fellowship by recognizing that God’s Spirit has been poured out upon those previously considered unclean.”²² Hays acknowledges that the “analogy is richly suggestive and deserves careful consideration”.²³ This paradigmatic appeal to the significance of God’s Spirit doing something novel overlaps with the appeal to experience and brings the appeal to scripture into relationship with the appeal to experience. The issue is whether this paradigmatic appeal to scripture’s own witness to a particular novel experience of divine grace can counter and override the appeals to scripture in mode of symbol. Hays’s answer, albeit with little actual engagement with the text of Acts, is a clear no:

[I]t is crucial to remember that experience must be treated as a hermeneutical lens for reading the New Testament rather than as an independent, counterbalancing authority. This is the point at which the analogy to the early church’s acceptance of Gentiles fails decisively. The church did not simply observe the experience of Cornelius and his household and decide that Scripture must be wrong after all. On the contrary, the experience of the uncircumcised Gentiles responding in faith to the gospel message led the church back to a new reading of Scripture. This new reading discovered in the texts a clear message of God’s intent, from the covenant with Abraham forward, to bless all nations and to bring Gentiles (qua Gentiles) to worship Israel’s God. ...Only because the new experience of Gentile converts provided hermeneutically illuminating of Scripture was the church, over time, able to accept the decision to embrace Gentiles within the fellowship of God’s people.²⁴

Hays is very doubtful that the experience of homosexual Christians can be similarly ‘hermeneutically illuminating’:

This is precisely the step that has not – or at least not yet – been taken by the advocates of homosexuality in the church. Is it possible for them to reread the New Testament and show how this development can be understood as a fulfilment of God’s design for human sexuality as previously revealed in Scripture?²⁵

Herein lies the force of Hays’s position: there can be no paradigmatic appeal to the inclusion of Gentiles as an appeal to inclusion *per se*. Any such appeal must be able to be ‘hermeneutically illuminating’ of other strands of the biblical witness. This raises the stakes for any rejoinder to Hays, and, in my view, fairly so. To highlight

this, let me briefly detour to another oft-cited appeal to the inclusion of Gentiles which comes to a different conclusion. The example is that of Luke Timothy Johnson.

b. Detour: Luke Timothy Johnson’s Appeal to Acts 10-15

Johnson’s appeal to Acts 10-15 is set within a larger discussion about discernment in the decision-making processes of the church.²⁶ The argument is framed by his understanding of the theological task which at once distinguishes his approach from that of Hays. For Johnson, theology is “first of all...a reading of the texts of human lives in a continuing process of self-revelation by the Living God, rather than as first of all a reading of the *texts of Scripture* as a record of a past and finished revelation”.²⁷ It is the ‘rather than’ here which reflects how Johnson feels none of the pressure which Hays does to find new experiences ‘hermeneutically illuminating’ – or, if he does, only in the most truncated sense.²⁸ He turns to the narrative of Gentile inclusion in Acts 10-15, drawing attention to the fact that “it is unique in the New Testament for the fullness of the attention it gives to the decision-making process”.²⁹ He regards it as a “paradigmatic story”³⁰ of the early church “articulating its faith in response to new and threatening circumstances”.³¹ The ‘threat’, in this case, is the intrusion of Gentile impurity into the nascent Christian church.

As he traces Luke’s narrative, beginning with the story of Cornelius and Peter and culminating in the decision of the Jerusalem council, Johnson stresses the appeal to, and the authority of, the experiences of both the Gentiles receiving the Spirit (Acts 10:44) and Peter’s conversion to a different understanding of the foundation of faith (10:47; 11:16-17). The decisive moment in Peter’s address to the church in Jerusalem in Acts 11 is exactly its final sentence: ‘If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?’ (11:17). Then, as Acts tells the story of Barnabas and Paul relating to the Jerusalem Council ‘all the signs and wonders that God has done...among the Gentiles’ (15:12), Johnson notes: “The narrative is the only argument”.³² What follows next in the Acts narrative is the verdict announced by James who, first of all, *de facto* endorses the claims which Peter was making for the Gentile converts. James is then reported to quote Amos 9:11-12 referring to the inclusion of Gentiles in the restored people of God. Noting James’s declaration, ‘This agrees with the words of the prophets’ (15:15), Johnson proposes that “the text is confirmed by the narrative, not the narrative by Scripture”.³³ Neither the cultural nor exegetical radicalness of the move can be ignored. Says Johnson: Gentiles were “‘by nature’ unclean, and were ‘by practice’ polluted by idolatry”.³⁴ To accept the Gentiles “‘as is’ and to establish a more inclusive form of table-fellowship...came into direct conflict with the accepted interpretation of Torah and what God wanted of humans”.³⁵

It is the priority of the ‘narrative of faith’ which Johnson extends to the church’s discussions about homosexuality. With the Acts narrative functioning paradigmatically, Johnson presses the appeal to experience to its limits. For instance, he makes no attempt to soften the univocal biblical prohibitions against homosexuality. He writes, “I think it fair

to conclude that early Christianity knew about homosexuality as it was practiced in Greco-Roman culture, shared Judaism's association of it with idolatry, and regarded it as incompatible with the life of the kingdom of God".³⁶ Accordingly, he believes on the basis of emerging "narratives of homosexual holiness" the church must consider the compatibility of homosexuality and holiness.³⁷ With the paradigmatic authority of Acts 10-15 in place, he notes that the "burden of proof required to overturn scriptural precedents is heavy but it is a burden that has been borne before".³⁸ Johnson is alert to the potential for this approach to Scripture to appear cavalier.³⁹ To counter this, he points out, among other things, that the church has often found itself required to live by one rather than another voice of Scripture. In itself, this is quite unproblematic. But he appears to dislodge his arguments from any appeal to Scripture at all when he appeals instead to the "more fundamental principles of the 'mind of Christ' and 'freedom of the children of God'".⁴⁰ In doing so, he appears to suggest that there is nothing 'hermeneutically illuminating' about the experience of homosexual inclusion. Johnson is right to stress and appeal to the unusual role of experience in Acts 10-15 (something I take up below). But in his hands, the issue becomes a simple and un-nuanced trade-off between scripture and experience.⁴¹

We cannot, therefore, look to Johnson to meet Hays's forceful challenge of asking whether homosexual experience can be hermeneutically illuminating for the contemporary church in the way the inclusion of Gentiles was for the ancient church. But before taking up Hays's challenge, it will be necessary to explore in more detail just how the early inclusion of Gentiles did in fact illuminate Scripture.

c. Illuminating Scripture: The Inclusion of the Gentiles

Hays is right, I believe, to claim that the Gentile experience of faith did lead to a re-reading of Scripture. Recall his claim: "This new reading discovered in the texts a clear message of God's intent, from the covenant with Abraham forward, to bless all nations and to bring Gentiles (*qua* Gentiles) to worship Israel's God."⁴² But is this really what happened? Hays's language implies something far less complicated and more passive than what is recorded in the New Testament. It's as if a previously obscured or neglected aspect of the Jewish scriptures was unearthed in all its clarity and which now only had to be appropriated. In fact, the readings of the Old Testament which were used to justify the inclusion of Gentiles were not only novel, they were not only hermeneutically illuminating, they were hermeneutically inventive. The idea that Gentiles would be 'brought to worship Israel's God' was hardly an unknown aspect of Israel's hope. But there was nothing in these texts that anticipated a mixed Jewish-Gentile community worshipping a crucified Messiah as God. To justify this new experience required a degree of hermeneutical inventiveness which not only turns previous *readings* of the text on their head, but turns the *texts* themselves on their head.

Indeed, the one key appeal to Scripture in Acts 10-15 is a case in point. As noted above, after Paul and Barnabas had recounted to the Jerusalem Council the conversion of

the Gentiles, James addresses the council, quoting Amos 9:11-12. This text is quoted to endorse the acceptance of the Gentiles as Gentiles. God's work amongst the Gentiles, says James, "agrees with the words of the prophets" (Acts 15:15). At least as it is presented in the Acts narrative, James's appeal to Amos is both creative and complex. Note the following comparison of the actual text of Amos 9:11-12 with what Luke tells us James said.

Amos 9:11-12

On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the LORD who does this.

Amos 9:11-12 as quoted in Acts 15

After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago.

The differences between these two versions are significant. They are explained in part by James quoting from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew) text of Amos. In the Hebrew version, Amos 9:11-12 is actually a prediction of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty; its vision for Gentiles was for their inclusion among those conquered by the restored Davidic monarch. In Amos, the Gentiles ('the remnant of Edom') are possessed by Israel ('booth of David'). There is certainly nothing about their inclusion in a new mixed Gentile-Jewish people of God worshipping the God of Israel on equal footing, or of doing so as a new Israel. But in the Greek translation placed on James's lips, the text says something it doesn't say in the Amos source. Now the vision is of the inclusion of the Gentiles among the people actively 'seeking the Lord' and coming to worship the God of Israel. This shifts the meaning of the text quite considerably. But this is not all. There are also other innovations in this use of Amos. It is noteworthy that, as James introduces the text, reference is to the plural, 'prophets'. Indeed, it turns out that this is not a straightforward quotation from Amos alone after all. One phrase from Isaiah ("known from long ago" [Isa. 45:21]) has been inserted as has another from Zechariah ("all other peoples may seek the Lord" [Zech. 8:22]). And, the opening words of the passage are also changed: 'after this' replaces the original 'in these days', presumably to sharpen the Christian claim that the final days have already come.⁴³ In other words, James has not just appealed to Amos; he has produced what one commentator has described as "a pastiche of fragments".⁴⁴

Of course, this is just one example of the kind of creative engagement with the Old Testament scriptures on display throughout the New Testament. When the authors of the New Testament documents were appealing

to Scripture, they were not constrained by the exegetical rules of the modern academy. They continued creative patterns of engagement with the Old Testament which they had learnt from the established patterns of Jewish exegesis and interpretation. In fact, it is arguable that no issue elicited such creative interpretations of the Old Testament in the New Testament as did the inclusion of the Gentiles. Throughout his own extensive—even tortuous—scriptural arguments for the inclusion of Gentiles,⁴⁵ Paul exegetes Old Testament texts with significant freedom. Indeed, Richard Hays himself has done as much as any other contemporary scholar to expose the exegetical creativity of the New Testament writers. In an earlier book, Hays notes that “Paul’s readings of Scripture are not constrained by a historical scrupulousness about the original meaning of the text. Eschatological meaning subsumes original sense”.⁴⁶ Paul engages Scripture as “allusive rather than overt in its communication strategies”.⁴⁷ He produces meaning by “attentiveness to the promptings of the Spirit, who reveals the gospel through Scripture in surprising ways”.⁴⁸ As such, says Hays, it is “not so much like a relic excavated from an ancient text as it is like a spark struck by the shovel hitting rock”.⁴⁹ Yet it is not arbitrary: “Though the quotations appear selective and scattered, they usually must be understood as allusive recollections of the wider narrative setting from which they are taken.”⁵⁰

Here is an irony. It is Hays’s own insights into Paul’s hermeneutics which provide a framework which offers more leverage on what is happening in Acts 10-15 than his own remarks on that specific narrative.⁵¹ It is far more straightforward to explain what is going on in this narrative, and especially what is going on in the account of James’s speech, as an instance of a ‘spark struck by the shovel hitting rock’ than it is the ‘excavation’ of a textual ‘relic’ or the ‘discovery of a clear message of God’s intent’. It is more straightforward to see that even in this brief but complex and subtle single use of the Old Testament, Acts 10-15 demonstrates a use of scripture characterised by ‘allusive recollections of the wider narrative setting from which they are taken’. That wider narrative was the anticipation of the new age of God’s gracious universal renewal in which the Jewish-Gentile divide was broken down. Yet, this anticipation was never ‘clear’ and there was nothing in the texts to predict exactly how this new age would dawn. And this highlights that whilst Hays is right to stress that the experience of Gentile conversion was hermeneutically illuminating, he overstates the clarity of that illumination and understates the authority that the gift of the Spirit had in shaping the acceptance of the Gentiles.

Throughout the Acts 10-15 narrative, the power of the testimony borne by Peter, Paul and Barnabas to the work of the Spirit is stressed repeatedly. It is this testimony, and not Old Testament exegesis, which carries the narrative. And it is important to stress that it is a narrative of the Spirit’s work.⁵² Indeed, the authority of appeal to the Spirit’s work is reinforced by an even greater authority than Scripture. In Acts 11:16, as he recounts the events at Cornelius’ house, Peter appeals to the words of Jesus himself: “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.’” For

Peter, at least according to Acts, this recollection is the clincher. At once he declares: “If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” (11:17). What is carrying authority here is not simply the witness of the Spirit, it is the recollection of Jesus’ own promise with all its resonance of the dawning of the new age. Yet it is even more than simple recollection. It is also more than interpretation. It is a striking extrapolation of Jesus’ promise. At no stage in Luke’s narrative has Jesus promised the Spirit to the Gentiles; he promised it to his inner group of disciples.⁵³ Yet for Peter, the evidence of the Spirit in the Gentiles allows him to extend Jesus’ promise in a way that he is unlikely to have imagined when he first heard it.

The story of the outpouring of the Spirit told in Acts 10-15 is another chapter in the emergence of the community of God’s new age. The story of this new community was announced at the beginning of Acts when, in his Pentecost sermon, Peter invokes the prophet Joel: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (2:17, referring to Joel 2:28). With the events at Cornelius’s house in Caesarea, the new, unusual, unsettling, unexpected shape into which the Spirit was forming this community became itself a theological benchmark. Ultimately, as Paul’s writings bear monumental witness, the church did appeal to the Old Testament to sustain and reinforce this inclusion of the Gentiles, and not just by a one-off appeal to Amos 9. But the readings of scripture offered in that process were not abstract exegetical ‘discoveries’. Those readings would never have occurred but for God’s prior work of the Spirit bringing the Gentiles into the Church and pressing questions upon the Old Testament which no one had otherwise thought to ask or would have had reason to ask.⁵⁴

So, can it be said that ‘this new reading discovered in the texts a clear message of God’s intent...to bless all nations and to bring Gentiles (*qua* Gentiles) to worship Israel’s God’? The above analysis would suggest that the interplay between scripture and experience is not as straightforward or as uncomplicated as Hays suggests. He is right (contra Johnson) to stress the appeal to Scripture, but such an appeal was complex and the new reading was more than a discovery of something previously hidden: it was genuinely novel. The appeal to Scripture did not consist of asking, ‘What do the Scriptures say about Gentiles?’ If it was, the answer to it could never have produced the various Christian arguments which did emerge for Gentile inclusion. Rather, prompted by the Spirit, it consisted of asking ‘How is what *is* said to be interpreted in light of Scripture’s larger story?’ In that respect, the inclusion of the Gentiles is not simply a biblical paradigm of inclusion (although it is that). It is also the context of another paradigm: a paradigm of *appealing to* and *interpreting* one part of Scripture in the light of the larger whole.

What then does it mean to appeal to Scripture? If we are guided by the witness of Acts and the New Testament documents more generally in their use of the Old Testament, then the question is not easily answered. Appealing to Scripture involves creativity, spontaneity, the promptings and experience of the Spirit, and a sense of the larger framework to which the whole of Scripture

points. It is this larger framework, or grand narrative, which prompts us to read the Bible as a whole in the first place and which must always frame the diverse and creative readings of its individual parts.

Against this background, it is now time to take up Richard Hays's challenge. Does the experience of Christian homosexual people prove hermeneutically illuminating in the way the inclusion of Gentiles proved hermeneutically illuminating? Hays says that it doesn't. I will now argue that it does.

6. THE ILLUMINATION OF THE BIBLE BY HOMOSEXUAL EXPERIENCE

Firstly, what is the 'experience' being referred to here? The experience which presses itself upon the church is the experience of Christian men and women who, through mutual attraction, friendship and affection, have formed a relationship with a partner of the same gender, displaying and practicing fidelity and mutual nurture. Such relationships allow each partner to develop as disciples of Jesus Christ by loving God and neighbour, befriending strangers, praying for enemies, and otherwise contributing to the life and witness of the church. It is sometimes suggested that because such relationships are uncommon and that homosexual relationships are more typically short-lived (so the argument goes), they should be dismissed and should not be taken as part of the data for evaluating homosexuality. I would argue exactly the opposite. It is such relationships, precisely *because* they survive so much against the odds, which require honest and sustained theological engagement. The experience at hand is not, therefore, the experience of sexual identity *per se*; it is not the experience of an allegedly univocal 'gay lifestyle'; it is not contemporary culture's celebration of sexual fulfilment. None of those experiences are here making their claim upon the Christian moral imagination. Rather, the experience in question is the *church's* experience of being built up in its ministry by homosexual people whose discipleship is embedded in same-sex relationships which are, in turn, embedded in virtues which characterise life in the kingdom of God. It is the capacity of these relationships not to disrupt but to enhance life lived in the kingdom of God which makes their claim upon the church, and thereby invites the church to reflect more generally on the reality of homosexuality.

What does this experience illuminate? I suggest that there are three areas of the biblical witness which have new light thrown on them: the inscrutability of God's good creation; the psychosomatic nature of human existence; and the issue of desire. There is nothing definitive or exhaustive about these three. The selection is a function of the way my own engagement with the witness of homosexual people in the church has intersected with my own readings of the Bible and my ongoing theological development. My aim is to link these discussions to Richard Hays's specific challenge and, in turn, to the broader discussion of what it means to appeal to Scripture.

(a) Creation

The issue here is the way the homosexual experience (as defined above) invites us to re-imagine aspects of

the doctrine of creation. It does so by hermeneutically illuminating certain elements of biblical witness which point to the inscrutability of creation. Before explaining that, however, it is important to stress that what follows is not an instance of the otherwise common strategy of appealing to the eschatological relativising of creation by new creation. Such arguments point, for instance, to Jesus himself expecting the disappearance of marriage in the new age (Mark 12:25) and to Paul's christological relativising of the gender binary of male and female (Gal 3:28).⁵⁵ Sometimes this kind of argument is used to marginalise creation. Such a strategy is, in my view, vulnerable to the charge of a distinctly un-Christian indifference to God's good creation. Oliver O'Donovan's response to this strategy is legitimate: "New creation is creation renewed, a restoration and enhancement, not an abolition".⁵⁶ Indeed, at issue is the integrity of creation itself: "Once we separate God's purposes in creation from the inherent goods of creaturely existence, there is little reason to hold on to the view that God meant anything at all by making the world."⁵⁷ I agree that cavalier appeals to new creation over creation are simplistic. My suggestion for a hermeneutical illumination of creation upholds the integrity of creation precisely as God's good creation but draws attention to its inscrutability as something that belongs to its createdness. In short: by creation's inscrutability I mean that the knowledge of the goodness of creation and its very createdness is not exhausted by a knowledge of those of its features which are deemed obvious and/or ordered. Two voices in the biblical witness are alert to this dimension of creation: Job and Ecclesiastes.

In the case of the Book of Job, the presenting issue is that of the motivation for Job's piety: Does Job worship God for God's own sake or because God will reward him (1:9)? In response to the afflictions sent by God, Job holds to his faith, justly maintains his innocence before God (e.g., 6:24-30; 9:13-24), and demands that God explain himself. Job's friends, trapped in a theology of retributive justice, demand that Job own up to whatever sin it is which, from their perspective, alone can explain his afflictions (4:8; 11:4-6; 15:1-16). Job resists both their advice and theology (16:1-5); he continues to protest his innocence (16:6-22) and to cry out to God in faith (29:1-31:40). Finally, after endless words from his friends and mounting despair on his own part, Job receives an answer: God speaks from the whirlwind (38:1-40:2; 40:6-41:34). It is an answer which exposes the friends as pious moralists (42:7-9). Job is declared to have spoken rightly (42:7b). Job is revealed as one who, in never abandoning his faith, even if this faith took the form of protest, worshipped God for God's own sake. Yet God does not simply vindicate Job. Even in the answer which rushes from the whirlwind, God continues to unsettle Job and to destabilise his faith. God's answer consists of a sustained and majestic declaration that God is the Creator who is not bound by the moralism of Job's friends and who also, as Creator, owes Job, the creature, nothing. To the extent that God rebukes Job, he does so by reminding Job that that he is a creature and not the Creator. God sets his creative power before Job. Over and over, God asks Job whether he has any comprehension at all of the gulf between them. God declares his freedom from all creaturely expectations, even the expectations of

blameless and faultless creatures such as Job. God drives this home by displaying the Creator's freedom over any and every creature. This extends to those dimensions of the good creation which lie beyond human dominion and perception of order. Strikingly, this includes the flightless ostrich and preying vultures:

The ostrich's wings flap wildly, though its pinions lack plumage. For it leaves its eggs to earth, and lets them be warmed on the ground, forgetting that a foot may crush them, and that a wild animal may trample them. It deals cruelly with its young, as if they were not its own; though its labor should be in vain, yet it has no fear; because God made it forget wisdom, and has given it no share in understanding. ...Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and spreads its wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high? It lives on the rock and makes its home in the fastness of the rocky crag. From there it spies the prey; its eyes see it from far away. Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is. (39:13-18; 26-30)

These creatures possess features and live in ways which place them beyond normal conventions of order and goodness. The ostrich has wings but cannot fly; in careless abandonment it fails to protect its eggs; it treats its children with cruelty, as if they were not even its own. The eagles (or vultures) take their place in creation only by living off the death of others, including the rotting bodies of slain warriors,⁵⁸ thereby denying those bodies an orderly and dignified return to the earth. God declares these creatures with these features to be his work. Job is not invited to see some otherwise hidden order, nor to understand this apparent disordering as the result of a universal 'fall' (a concept alien to the book of Job). Rather, Job is summoned simply to acknowledge that these creatures with these features belong to God's wise creative work and thus play their role in the integrity of creation. Job is confronted with the fact that in "YHWH's ordered design, for apparently no reason that humans might understand, there is room for the wild and fearless as well as the absurd and incongruous".⁵⁹ Yet this is not simply an affirmation of or acceptance of the absurd or incongruous. It is an invitation to Job to reconsider the status of his perception of the world. What appears as disorder to the wisdom of conventional faith is order within the wisdom of God. The divine answer—the display of his creative power—points to the "ineradicable presence of the chaotic as part of the natural or the social world"⁶⁰ and thereby "God confronts Job with things that his...categories cannot possibly comprehend."⁶¹ What is revealed is not simply the diversity of creation. The divine ordering, or perhaps the integrity of God's wise creation, is something which transcends the human perception of order and chaos. As such, if creation is in any sense to give rise to a moral vision, it invites contemplation rather than a straightforward reading. In the words of one commentator: "[R]eaders may be impatient for explicit moral discourse, but the divine speeches require a prolonged and disciplined act of contemplation as the first task."⁶²

Similarly, although lacking the dramatic intensity of the dialogues of Job, Qoheleth (the author of Ecclesiastes) repeatedly queries whether there is any

justice or order in the world, and is unable to find it (e.g. Eccl. 1:16-17; 2:17; 8:14). But this outcome does not subvert his confidence in the Creator. God remains Creator even if creation's createdness is in some measure opaque to human assumptions (12:1-8). So, Qoheleth declares: "Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked" (7:13). The distinction between 'crooked' and 'straight' had already been introduced at 1:15.⁶³ But in Chapter 7, both poles of this distinction are explicitly affirmed as the creation of God. The "universe has wrinkles", some of which are simply part of the "act of creation itself".⁶⁴ As with the book of Job, the point at issue is the difference between the integrity of God's wise creation and the human perception of order.

[Qoheleth] applies the inscrutability of God's creative work against the human presumption to categorize and thereby control what goes on under the sun. Created by God, even what is 'crooked' is invested with a dignity that commands acceptance, if not respect, in place of contempt and correction.⁶⁵

Homosexual experience illuminates these two voices from scripture precisely because homosexual experience itself appears to common perceptions of creation as 'incongruous' or 'chaotic' or, indeed, 'crooked'. My point here is not to draw an analogy between homosexual experience and the 'incongruous' or 'chaotic' or 'crooked' *per se*. The witness of Job and Ecclesiastes asks whether we really know how to apply such categories. Reflection on the experience of homosexual disciples asks a similar question. Such reflections can even encourage us to abandon categories of 'order' and 'chaos' and to think instead of the differentiated integrity of God's wise creation for which human beings simply do not have appropriate categories of classification. To develop this argument nevertheless requires, inevitably and quite properly, confronting another voice within the Bible. It is the voice of Paul, and one that, as we have already seen in this essay, has a pivotal place in the debates about homosexuality. It is this voice of Paul that was decisive, for instance, in Richard Hays's rejection of any acceptance of homosexual experience.

Homosexuality heads the evidence cited by Paul that God has delivered human beings to the disorders of creation as a consequence of worshipping some particular creature instead of the Creator:

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural (para phusin) and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse (aphentēs tēn phusikēn) with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Rom 1:26f)

In Romans 1, 'nature' is invoked as something stable and the meaning of which is transparent. This is certainly how it has been read by many, including one of the most uncompromising scholarly contributors to the sexuality debates, Robert Gagnon. Gagnon argues that Paul is demonstrating that "same-sex intercourse represents one of the clearest instances of conscious suppression of revelation in nature by gentiles,

inasmuch as it involves denying clear anatomical gender differences and functions.⁶⁶ It represents “the obvious visible manifestation in creation of same-sex discomplementarity.”⁶⁷ It contravenes the “visible evidence in creation”⁶⁸ and denies the “visible grounding of the truth in human anatomy.”⁶⁹ Does this seemingly straightforward appeal to creation trump the witness of Job and Ecclesiastes? Or is it quite as straightforward as it seems?

As noted by many scholars, the text of Romans 1 is thick with apologetic and rhetorical overlay. Paul lures an unsuspecting Jewish opponent into a theological trap. In this letter, as elsewhere, Paul was arguing, against his fellow Jewish Christians, that Jews and Gentiles had equal access, by faith, to the promises of God realised in Jesus. The argument Paul uses in Romans 1:26-27 against disordered creaturely life is a line of anti-Gentile argument familiar to many Jews.⁷⁰ By citing it, Paul seems to have been trying to goad his intended audience into thinking that they were above this disordered Gentile fray. Yet it turns out that that within just a few verses Paul will apply the same argument to Israel (Rom 2:1-29). His argument has not been to condemn Gentiles, but to argue to Jews that they shared in the disordered creation. The principal target of condemnation is religious pride.

The very fact of this rhetorical edge to the argument must at least give pause to consider whether this is actually a standalone theological judgement on creation, or nature, and the transparency of its moral order. In fact, it is generally acknowledged that Paul is here drawing on a particular way of describing homosexuality as *para phusin* which he has borrowed from Stoic thought.⁷¹ By itself, this recognition does not mean that it can't be a theologically considered view or, even more specifically, that it doesn't reflect what Paul himself actually believed. Nevertheless, there are at least two other places where Paul refers to nature, *phusis*, in a way which suggests that it not such a self-evident or stable category for him after all. Firstly, in this same letter Paul will quite remarkably speak of God acting “contrary to nature” by including Gentiles within the messianic community.⁷² He develops the metaphor of the olive tree which has both its natural and unnatural branches:

For if you [Gentiles] have been cut from what is by nature (kata phusin) a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature (para phusin), into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree (11:24).

It is at least noteworthy that the same phrase, *para phusin*, is used in the one piece of correspondence to refer both to sinful human action and to God's redeeming work. It is also noteworthy that this use of *para phusin* has been used on both occasions to unsettle religious self-assurance. In Romans 1, Paul's target is Jewish self-confidence. In Romans 11, the target is the boasting of Gentiles about their inclusion in the people of God (11:18). Within the discussion of the one issue (the inclusion of Gentiles), referring to both humans and God acting 'contrary to nature' certainly unsettles and puts in question assumptions about nature's self-evident meaning. We have here another biblical reminder that 'nature' is not necessarily a straightforward teacher of the moral order intended by God.⁷³

A second example from Paul is his appeal to nature in his instructions on head coverings in worship. The relevant argument in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is notoriously complex. At one point, Paul appeals to tradition (v. 2) then alludes to Scripture, specifically Genesis 3 (in vv. 7-8), then to a christologically-based male-female reciprocity (vv. 11-12), followed by an appeal to 'nature' (v. 14) before a final appeal to custom (v.16). In this multi-pronged argument, essentially for a symbol of woman's submission, it is very difficult to know how to weight the appeal to 'nature': “Does not nature (*phusis*) itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?” (v. 14). It is hard to see how Paul's argument for women to have long hair and men short hair is not an argument fundamentally drawn from custom.⁷⁴ After all, there is nothing 'natural' which leads men to have short hair. If their hair is short, it is because it is cut. So, whatever Paul means by 'nature', it is not definitively grounded in biology. Within this argument, the appeal to nature is *ad hoc* and hardly warrants any serious theological weighting. But it also highlights that Paul can appeal to nature in a fairly arbitrary way which, just as in Romans, serves a rhetorical function without constituting a definitive teaching on the meaning of nature. Does Paul's appeal to nature, therefore, trump the appeal by Job and Qoheleth to creation's inscrutability? I would argue no. Indeed, Paul's willingness to speak of God acting 'contrary to nature' might be its own echo of a particular Jewish sensitivity to a certain tension between the ways of God and the ways of nature. But neither does an appeal to creation's inscrutability justify an indifference towards creation. I suggest that the fact that our categories cannot comprehend creation should neither licence any indifference towards creation nor prevent us from actively enquiring into it. The challenge is not to identify and define its ordering, but to observe and contemplate what I have described above as the differentiated integrity of God's wise creation. This leads to an engagement with the psychosomatic unity of the human creature.

(b) The psychosomatic nature of the human creature

I have suggested in the previous section that attention to Paul's appeal to nature in the matter of hair length, whatever it actually means, certainly loosens the nexus often assumed between nature and moral order. This, in turn, puts a question mark beside the confidence that many have placed in Romans 1:26f to draw that link, including Robert Gagnon whom I quoted above. It is noteworthy how much, on the basis of Romans 1, Gagnon stresses the 'visibility' and 'obviousness' of the 'grounding of truth in human anatomy'. Gagnon is untroubled by any hermeneutical complexity in the theological interpretation of anatomy and equally confident in the transparency of anatomy to moral order. Yet is human anatomy as 'obvious' as Gagnon suggests? If truth is 'grounded in human anatomy', then there must be an acknowledgement that human anatomy is more diverse than Gagnon allows. Inter-sex conditions alone unsettle this appeal to the moral transparency of human anatomy. Moreover, it is possible to 'read' human bodies at levels deeper than that of their external anatomy.

The psychosomatic reality of human existence is also accessible to observation, and, if an appeal to creation is theologically significant, it must take the results of that observation into account. There is no good theological reason for believing that nature is discernible as *creation* only in what is *immediately* visible or that the visible and external features of human being are determinative for other features of human being. Homosexual experience poses just such a question. The question is posed to the assumption that the physical complementarity assumed in anatomical difference is necessarily matched by a psychological difference; that genital complementarity (assuming that that itself is obvious) is matched by a complementarity of sexual desire for bodies with different genitals. In short, the assumption being questioned is that genitals are a reliable and necessary sign of the orientation of sexual desire.

The theological defence of this assumption has drawn heavily on the Genesis witness to the creation of male and female. First in the priestly narrative: "So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:24). Then in the second narrative: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24f). Do these texts, however, require the theological judgement that anatomy and desire are necessarily linked? Are they open to the possibility that the union spoken of here admits only one combination of anatomy and desire? Can homosexual experience illuminate possible other meanings of these texts?

It hardly seems that these texts can be bypassed given the significant place they have in the respective creation narratives. They might speak about the image of God being sexually differentiated and they may say something about marriage, but there is much about being male and female, and indeed about being human, on which these texts are simply silent.⁷⁵ For that reason they must be taken as in some sense paradigmatic rather than exhaustively explanatory or universally prescriptive. For instance, when Jesus is asked about divorce (Matt 19:3-12), he answers by first quoting Genesis 1:24 and then adding Genesis 2:24, precisely to make the point that marriage is a vocation. Moreover, in this same dialogue, Jesus' straightforward reference to the eunuchs "who have been so from birth" (Matt 19:12) further points to the fact that these creation narratives function more as paradigms than as prescriptions, let alone as exhaustive explanations. (This reference to the eunuch as a 'natural' condition in its own way points to the inscrutability of creation.)

It can be argued that precisely in their brevity and suggestiveness these Genesis texts speak into other dimensions about the social nature of human existence. Claus Westermann, for instance, has drawn attention to the way Genesis 1:24 points paradigmatically to the fact "that a human being must be seen as one whose destiny is to live in community; people have been created to live with each other. This is what human existence means and what human institutions and structures show."⁷⁶ Such an appropriation of the text can itself be further illuminated by the distinction drawn by Paul Lehmann between a 'limiting' and 'foundational' instance, precisely in relation to what he describes as the "divine ordination" of sexual

differentiation in Genesis 1 and 2:

As a limiting instance, the divine ordination to sexual otherness and reciprocity is put forward as the normative mode of sexuality, in relation to which variants are excluded as deviants from the heterosexual norm. As a foundational instance, the divine ordination to sexual otherness and reciprocity becomes the liberating instance in relation to which divergent possibilities may be pursued and assessed.⁷⁷

Perhaps the critical word here is 'assessed'. It reminds us of the invitation, based on Job's and Qoheleth's awareness of creation's inscrutability, to *contemplate* creation, but not through the inadequate categories of 'order' and 'disorder', but in a way that is alert to the differentiated integrity of God's wise creation. The homosexual experience, as defined at the outset of this section, is able to be assessed and contemplated. It has shown itself able to be integrated into, and to be a means of, enhancing the life of Christian discipleship, not because being in Christ redeems it, but because it too has a place in the differentiated integrity of God's wise creation. It has been possible, therefore, to observe how homosexual experience illuminates the wider meanings of these pivotal texts from Genesis.

There is also another text from Genesis 2 which is illuminated by this experience. In Genesis 2:7, it is stated that "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being". This claim distinguishes Hebrew and later Christian anthropology from all forms of dualism. As an integrated 'living being', human beings are not composed of parts, such as a body plus a soul. Westermann remarks on this text that to "exist as a human being then is to exist in undivided unity".⁷⁸

The person as a living being is to be understood as a whole and any idea that one is made up of body and soul is ruled out. A person created as a living being means that one is a person only in one's living state. A person cannot be made into an object of study apart from the living state in which that person exists. An 'image of humanity' or a doctrine about humanity cannot comprehend existence as it is.⁷⁹

We return here to the psychosomatic unity of the human person, an idea deeply embedded in the Hebrew and Christian traditions. It is a reminder that to privilege anatomy as an exhaustive sign of the body's identity risks disrupting this unity and to introduce a latent physical determinism in which physical anatomy controls other dimensions of human identity. There are good theological reasons to point instead to a unity of the whole person which can make anatomy and psychology together serve the integrated person that any individual is.⁸⁰ Therefore, the "morality of [genital acts] actually depends on the extent to which they communicate the identity and ontology of persons *in their entirety*, sexual orientation and all".⁸¹ Now, such a claim, taken on its own, is dangerously reductionist, but only if the reference to identity and ontology is ignored. These are defined by many other markers, not the least of which is that of being a creature summoned to sociality, responsibility and justice. It would also be unsatisfactory to leave the idea of morality reduced

to one of self-communication. Therefore the moral question that diverse sexualities presents is focused on the extent to which “we want our sexual activity to communicate, [and] to display a breadth of human possibility and a sense of the body’s capacity to heal and enlarge the life of others”.⁸²

Within that framework it is appropriate to ask about the morality of the body and its different elements. That, of course, is to ask an even broader question: What is the body for? With that question I turn to explore the issue of desire and its proper objects.

(c) Desire

In the previous two sections my argument has been about creation. My interest has been in demonstrating how the Bible’s witness to creation can be hermeneutically illuminated by homosexual experience. I have suggested that the Bible’s witness to both creation’s inscrutability and the psychosomatic unity of the human creature have new light cast on them. I have tried to avoid the view that it is possible to justify homosexuality theologically only by appealing to the eschatological relativising of creation by new creation. My argument has been that homosexuality can participate in the goods of creation, and I have hinted at the contours of such a possibility in the immediately preceding paragraph. Nevertheless, in coming to address the question of the body and desire, and the possibility that it might be hermeneutically illuminated by homosexual experience, it is impossible to ignore the domain of new creation. This is so for two reasons. Firstly, even though homosexuality can participate in the goods of creation, like all creation it also participates in creation’s tragic fallenness. As such, it shares in the need of all our desires to be redirected towards God. Secondly, it is arguable that few areas of human existence are so unsettled by the coming of Jesus Christ and the inauguration of the kingdom of God than those pertaining to the body, gender and desire. I will expand on this second point.

With a degree of scandal largely ignored by the theological tradition, Jesus prioritises the community of disciples over his family as his primary community of loyalty and identity (Mk 3:31-35). As already noted, he accepts eunuchs as part of creation, he licences celibacy, and in so doing establishes the Genesis witness to gender differentiation and marriage as in some sense paradigmatic rather than prescriptive (and reading these texts prescriptively is something Jesus, as an apparently single celibate man, could hardly do). Above all, Jesus relativises marriage by indicating that there will be no marriage in “the resurrection” (Matt 22:30).

A similar freedom with regard to the received normative pattern of marriage is evident in Paul’s teachings on marriage and sex. Paul also licences celibacy (1 Cor 7:13); he breaks the nexus between sexual intercourse and pro-creation (albeit with rather negative arguments (e.g., 1 Cor 7: 3f, 9), thereby legitimating sexual desire and its fulfilment as a good in itself. Moreover, it is Paul who is most responsible for theologically articulating the primacy of baptismal identity in Christ above the prevailing markers of human identity, including, as startling as any other, that of gender. In Christ “there is no longer male and female”

(Gal 3:28). This destabilisation is shown in the roles assumed by women in the early Christian communities (Rom 16:1-3, 7), notwithstanding evidence of counter-tendencies which (seemingly) endorse prevailing gender conventions.⁸³ The point to note is that the very existence of diverse voices around these issues within the canon is itself evidence of the destabilisation that comes with Christian identity. It has been said in relation to the third century martyrs, Perpetua and Felicitas, that they demonstrated “active, gender-transcending roles to which the Spirit might call a woman in the new faith”.⁸⁴ The foundations for such roles lie in the gospel and the identity that is given with baptism.

Another voice in the New Testament in which eschatology unsettles conventional assumptions about gender and its associations is the book of Revelation. It points to the new Jerusalem coming from heaven “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2). All humans who make up the new Jerusalem become brides. All such developments point to the fact, noted by David Jensen, that “Christian eschatology shakes up gender”.⁸⁵ Indeed, I would argue that this ‘shaking up’ of gender is theologically more important for contemporary discussions than are claims that early Christian sexual ethics emerged out of metaphysical and ontological assumptions about sex specific to the ancient world. With this claim in hand, it is sometimes argued that because those assumptions were themselves contingent, so too were the sexual ethics built upon them. Therefore, so the argument goes, early Christian ethics can be set aside. I would argue, instead, that what is of abiding theological significance is not whether early Christian ethics were reflections or not of other ancient – or contemporary – ethical frameworks, but that Christian eschatology provokes new ethical trajectories. It is to those trajectories that we are invited to be attentive.

This unsettling of the conventional structuring of society, gender and desire has been largely obscured to the later pieties of the Christian faith, especially when the church tied itself to patriarchal social structures. It has been reasonably suggested that the centrality often claimed by Christians for “gender, family and marriage... is rather foreign to the New Testament” and that “[d]espite the security and meaning that these realities give for earthly life, they tremble in the face of divine grace”.⁸ It is not that other markers of identity are meaningless, but that they are neither stable, definitive, nor even ultimate sources of hope. As noted by Elizabeth Stuart, “[t]here is only one identity stable enough to hope in”:⁸⁷ identity in Christ.

If our identity – our selfhood – is so radically constituted in Christ, then what is the body for and to what should its desires be directed? The eschatological relativising of gender and marriage points to the fact that our desires are to be oriented to the new creation which the risen, crucified Jesus Christ inaugurates. It is his image to which all (whatever their sexuality or gender) are called to conform (Rom 8:29). That it is not to say that God is the only object of desire. After all, desire for company, humour, food, and sex remain and are rightly filled within the broader horizon of desire for God. Rather, those other desires are reconfigured and invested with new meaning when subordinated to the desire for God. I propose that there is no sharper statement of this, and no clearer answer

to the question of what we use our bodies for, than Paul's comment in 2 Corinthians 4:10: "For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our bodies". Of course, this particular comment is part of Paul's justification to the Corinthians of his apostolic ministry. To that extent, it is a very particular claim about his relationship with the Corinthians. His point in this particular passage is that the sufferings he has experienced in his ministry do not invalidate his ministry. That his ministry has continued despite these sufferings speaks of the power of God. Yet it is not a vague, arbitrary power of God of which he speaks. It is the power which brought Jesus' body to life following his death. In other words, the same power at work in the raised body of Jesus is at work in Paul's body. In that sense, as one commentator has noted, "the reference to Jesus' life here is not to Jesus' earthly life and ministry, as though Paul's apostleship were devoted to presenting Jesus' exemplary character".⁸⁸

On the other hand, can we separate the power of Jesus' exemplary life from the power of the resurrection? Indeed, precisely this point is made by Jan Lambrecht who draws attention to the distinctive use of 'Jesus' rather than 'Christ' in this verse. It may well serve as a reminder, says Lambrecht, that "for Paul the earthly Jesus is not separated from the risen, glorified Christ".⁸⁹ Even where Paul elsewhere and frequently stresses the dynamic of Jesus' death and resurrection as the foundation and pattern of the Christian life (and not simply that of apostles; e.g., Rom 6:1-14), references to the form of the earthly life of Jesus are not absent. This is notably true of Philippians 2:1-10 where Jesus' earthly life is the mandate for the life of Christians: love, humility, and rejection of self-interest. Even if the details of Jesus' life are not salvifically significant for Paul, its form is. It is the form of Jesus' life which is the benchmark for the life of Christians. It is hard not to imagine that a similar appeal to the form of Jesus' life is also intended in his reminder to the Roman Christians that they have been called "to be conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Rom 8: 29).

The point which can be suggested by 2 Corinthians 4:10 is that the form of the Christian life is principally to be characterised by conformity to the general form of Jesus' life. In general terms, again to quote Lambrecht: "[t]he proclaimer must reflect the proclaimed".⁹⁰ More specifically, the purpose of our bodies is to make visible the 'life of Jesus'. This relativises all other purposes of the body and provides a benchmark for them and the orientation of the body's desires. This criterion must necessarily be understood in general terms since not all Jesus' followers could follow those aspects of his life which were specifically Jewish, nor those specific to the politics of first century Palestine, nor those which were correlated to his male gender or his celibacy. In other words, the 'life of Jesus' may be made visible in bodies which are very unlike the body of Jesus. By making the life of Jesus visible in their lives no less or more so than other disciples do, Christian homosexuals demonstrate that their bodies and their sexual desires can be oriented to the nurturing and fostering of a life of discipleship in ways neither less fragile nor more secure than their heterosexual or celibate brothers and sisters. In the new age, sexuality, gender, and marriage are relativised. They

are no longer the main markers of the right use of the body. Instead, those main markers are whether our bodies make visible the life of Jesus. Homosexual disciples, precisely because they challenge the conventions of gender and sexuality whilst being faithful disciples, can help the rest of the church to see this. They break the nexus between conventional sexuality and the signs of discipleship, just as Paul broke the nexus between conventional leadership and authentic apostleship by appealing to the visibility of Jesus' own life in his. Conventional assumptions about how the body is to be used are challenged. As such, homosexual disciples can hermeneutically illuminate 2 Corinthians 4:10.

7. CONCLUSION

This essay began with the notion of 'appealing to Scripture'. Contemporary discussions of various 'modes of appeal' to Scripture were explored. Out of that emerged the idea that the inclusion of Gentiles in the early decades of Christianity, and outlined in the narrative of Acts 10-15, could be appealed to as a paradigm of inclusion of homosexual people in the contemporary church. To use Richard Hays's terms, this would constitute an appeal to scripture in the mode of paradigm. Hays's own claim is that whereas the inclusion of Gentiles 'hermeneutically illuminated' Old Testament texts, the presence of homosexual people in the church is not able to illuminate the biblical witness to 'God's design for sexuality'. In challenging Hays's claim I have argued that it is not simply that Acts 10-15 was paradigmatic of inclusion, but, and more critically, it can be paradigmatic of a certain use of scripture. The reference to Amos in Acts 10-15 was highly imaginative and almost arbitrary, giving to Amos a meaning it would never have had in its immediate context.

I would argue, however, that in taking this particular instance of Old Testament interpretation as paradigmatic, I have been less arbitrary than James was presented as being when he quoted Amos to the Council at Jerusalem. I have allowed the church's experience of having homosexual couples as part of its life to illuminate certain aspects of a variety of texts. In doing so, I have sought to extend meanings already present in the texts. I've not sought to use that experience to illuminate 'God's design for sexuality' – a notion which no element of the biblical witness can be said to address exhaustively or explicitly. Instead, I have allowed homosexual experience to illuminate those aspects of Scripture which, when combined in particular ways, construct a vision of creation and human life which allows homosexuality to be considered a good of creation and to consist of desires, like other desires, which can be faithfully oriented towards God. These aspects of Scripture have been: the inscrutability of creation, the psychosomatic unity of human beings, and the issue of desire itself. In taking this approach I have pointed, albeit in outline only, to the kind of doctrinal issues which accompany this particular mode of appeal to Scripture. In doing so, I am further suggesting that our readings of particular passages of Scripture can be controlled by the larger narrative which holds the Bible together as a witness to Jesus Christ without being limited by received interpretations of the particular passages. I believe that

the witness of homosexual disciples helps the rest of the church to see that, and to prompt the whole church to engage freshly with aspects of creation, human nature, and desire which might otherwise remain hidden to it.⁹¹

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ENDNOTES

- 1 This is a slightly shorter version of a paper oriented explicitly to the Uniting Church in Australia and the reminder in its founding document, *The Basis of Union*, of the "need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture". The longer essay will be appearing in my *Disturbing Much, Disturbing Many: Theology Provoked by the Basis of Union* (forthcoming).
- 2 In engaging homosexuality as the presenting issue I acknowledge the fact that the issue extends to the diversity of sexualities frequently referred to in these discussions, often summarised as LGBTI. Nevertheless, I have retained homosexuality as the presenting issue partly to reflect the more common discourse, to engage more directly the discussions about the biblical witness, and to facilitate discussion with my chosen dialogue partners in Section 5 of this essay.
- 3 For one reading of the limitations of these discourses in this debate, specifically within the context of the Anglican Communion, see Oliver O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008), 1-17. (The UK edition is *A Conversation Waiting to Begin*, published by SCM Press.) My thanks to Ben Myers for first drawing my attention to this important book. Its influence on this essay, even if mostly implicit, extends well beyond this reference.
- 4 I acknowledge that the suggestion here of sequential activities is somewhat artificial. Typically, they interact with and mutually determine each other in a far more dynamic manner. Nevertheless, the suggestion of sequential ordering is helpful, at least heuristically, as a way of teasing open this interaction in order to uncover its logic.
- 5 Reported, but unsourced, in Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross and New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 3.
- 6 For one example where this phenomenon can be observed see the respective essays in (no designated editor) *Five Uneasy Pieces: Essays on Scripture and Sexuality* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2011) and Michael Bird and Gordon Preece, eds, *Sexegesis: An Evangelical Response to Five Uneasy Pieces on Homosexuality* (Sydney: Anglican Press Australia, 2012). Nevertheless, Gordon Preece's essay in the latter ("(Homo)sex and the City of God: Sexual Ecology Between Creation and New Creation", 25-47) is a very deliberate attempt to construct a much larger theological argument not confined to exegesis. For another example of the tendency to try to resolve the issue by trading exegetical blows is Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003).
- 7 David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM, 1975), 214. A more recent edition with a new preface was published under the title *Proving Doctrine*.
- 8 The book proposes what its title indicates: an account of the moral vision which Hays claims can be found across the different strata of the New Testament. He argues that this vision has three foci: community, cross and new creation. It is these foci which hold together the view of life which provides the general framework for the New Testament reflections on what is good and true action. For an appreciative, but not uncritical, appraisal of the book, see David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 35-40. For a particularly critical review see, Dale B. Martin, "Review of Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 358-360.
- 9 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 294.
- 10 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 208-9.
- 11 Hays does refer to the three Old Testament texts typically invoked, i.e., Gen. 19:1-29 and Lev. 18: 22; 20:13. He disregards the first on the grounds that (a) the sin of Sodom's men was gang rape, not homosexual intercourse per se and (b) that Sodom's more general infamy was linked to its gluttony, prosperity and its neglect of the poor and needy (for this point Hays draws attention to Ezek. 16:49). For the latter two, whilst clear that they forbid homosexual acts, Hays argues that as part of Israel's law they are not decisive for Christian ethics (See *The Moral Vision*, 381f).
- 12 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 394.
- 13 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 394.
- 14 Hays acknowledges that Acts 15:28-29 is the text which comes closest to a 'rule' but only if its use of *porneia* is a direct allusion to Leviticus code (*The Moral Vision*, 394). This is uncertain and, once again, the decisive issue is that even in this text "sexual morality is not the major point at issue" (383): the main issue is the matter of Gentile circumcision.
- 15 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 395.
- 16 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 395.
- 17 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 395.
- 18 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 396.
- 19 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 396.
- 20 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 395.
- 21 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 395. By the time Hays had developed this argument, the inclusion of the Gentiles had already entered the debate about the acceptance of homosexuality in the church. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 95-97 and Jeffrey S. Siker "Homosexual Christians, the Bible, and Gentile Inclusion," *Theology Today* 51:2 (1994): 219-234. Johnson's particular contribution will be discussed below in reference to a revised version of the above work. Siker draws attention to a brief but even earlier reference to Gentile inclusion in a 1978 report on the subject of homosexuality by a Task Group of the United Presbyterian Church of the USA (see Siker, "Homosexual Christians", 229). Other more recent works to have explored the relationship between Gentile inclusion and acceptance of homosexuals are Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 119-126, Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., "Sanctification, Homosexuality, and God's Triune Life" in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 225-230 Andrew Goddard, *God, Gentiles and Gay Christians: Acts 15 and Change in the Church* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2001), John Perry, "Gentiles and Homosexuals: A Brief History of an Analogy," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38 (2010): 157-74, Jon C. Olson, "The Jerusalem Decree, Paul, and the Gentile Analogy to Homosexual Persons," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40 (2012): 361-85 and John Perry, "Vocation and Creation: Beyond the Gentile-Homosexual Analogy," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40 (2012): 385-400.
- 22 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 396.
- 23 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 396.
- 24 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 399.
- 25 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 399.
- 26 Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).
- 27 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 52.
- 28 To be fair, Johnson does speak of homosexuality being a "hermeneutical challenge to contemporary Christians" (*Scripture and Discernment*, 144) but the hermeneutical impact seems to be exhausted by a greater historical and cultural relativising of the specific New Testament references. Once they are set aside on the grounds of their historical and cultural specificity any appeal to the Bible falls from view and the appeal to the experience of homosexual Christians is granted authority.
- 29 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 68f.
- 30 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 79.
- 31 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 78.
- 32 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 103.
- 33 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 105.
- 34 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 147.
- 35 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 147.
- 36 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 145.
- 37 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 148.
- 38 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 148.
- 39 Thus, the "call to discernment of human experience is a call not to carelessness, but to its opposite: it is a call to the rigorous asceticism of attentiveness. I repeat: An appeal to some populist claim such as 'everyone does it' or 'surveys indicate' is theologically meaningless. What counts is whether God is up to something in human lives" (*Scripture and Discernment*, 144). And so, in relation to the present issue: "Inclusivity must follow from evidence of holiness: are there narratives of homosexual holiness to which we must begin to listen?" (148).
- 40 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 145.
- 41 In a more recent work which despite, in some ways, being more nuanced about the appeal to experience, Johnson nevertheless insists: "I think it is important to state clearly that we do, in fact reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex union can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience of thousands of others have witness to which tells that to our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us" (Luke Timothy Johnson, "Scripture and Experience," *Commonweal*, June 15, 2007, 14).
- 42 Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 399.
- 43 On these and additional allusions to other prophets in this text see Richard Bauckham, "James and Gentiles: Acts 15:13-21" in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154-184.
- 44 Robert W. Wall, *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections in The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:218.
- 45 Above all in Romans 1-4 and Galatians 2-4.
- 46 Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 156.
- 47 Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 155.
- 48 Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 156.
- 49 Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 155.
- 50 Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 158.

- 51 Dale B. Martin has rightly drawn attention to the shift by Hays from his view in this earlier text to the much stronger view of textual agency developed in *The Moral Vision*. See Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Saviour: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: WJKP, 2006), 149-160, but especially 149-151. Although, see Hays's brief reflection on the relationship of textual agency to the interpreter's own imagination (albeit not in relation to homosexuality) in dialogue with Markus Bockmuehl in Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), x-xi.
- 52 As such it is more complex than a simple appeal to experience as a subjective category that can be traded off against scripture as Luke Timothy Johnson's rhetoric presents it.
- 53 That Jesus anticipated a Gentile inclusion could be drawn, perhaps quite explicitly, from his 'sermon' at the synagogue in Nazareth when he cites the blessings given to the widow at Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. Strikingly, this itself is an innovation in relation to the passage from Isaiah 61: 1-2 which Jesus had just read. Nevertheless, it remains that he did not promise the Spirit to Gentiles in the way he did to the disciples. Peter's extrapolation of the promise to interpret what he had observed at Cornelius' home is an innovation.
- 54 I acknowledge that claim here of a chronological priority of the work of the Spirit risks obscuring the complex interplay between historical circumstance, the reinterpretation of Scripture, and the particular witness of Acts 10-15. Any historical reconstruction of this interplay would be far more complex than outlined in Acts 10-15. Nevertheless, at least for present purposes, I remain happy to stress the paradigmatic and theological significance of the interplay between experience and scriptural interpretation as it is presented in Acts 10-15. Whatever the historical unfolding of this interplay during the early decades of the Christian movement, the witness of Acts to the promptings of the Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture is striking. Assuming Acts was written perhaps several decades after Gentile inclusion had become an established – if still contested – reality, and by which time exegetical arguments (such as those of Paul) may have assumed a greater profile in the Christian imagination, the strong witness to the hermeneutical significance of the Spirit is noteworthy. It might also be added that Paul's own exegetical labours on the question of Gentile inclusion did not arise spontaneously but as a response to his prior commissioning by the risen Christ to be an apostle to the Gentiles. It was his mission to the Gentiles which provoked the exegetical labours, not vice versa. I am grateful to David Horrell for pressing me on this issue. I trust I have rendered my position with more nuance as a result.
- 55 For a summary of such arguments see, David H. Jensen, *God, Desire, and a Theology of Human Sexuality* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2013), 55-72.
- 56 O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis*, 99.
- 57 O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis*, 98.
- 58 The word translated in the NRSV as simply 'slain' is *halal* and indicates that slain human warriors are intended.
- 59 Steven Chase, *Job* (Louisville: WJKP, 2013), 263.
- 60 Carol A. Newson, *Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections in The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 4:625.
- 61 Newson, *Job*, 4: 337. Similarly, Norman Whybray remarks as follows: "The inclusion of these unpleasant and even repulsive beasts side by side with the 'harmless' ones in the list of [YHWH's] creatures reflects a concept of the breadth of the 'wisdom' of the creator-god which leaves the reader in wonderment": see Norman Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 165.
- 62 Newson, *Job*, 4: 626.
- 63 "What is crooked cannot be made straight" (Job 1:15a).
- 64 James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1987), 139. A critical exegetical question is raised by Qoheleth's reference to God creating human beings 'straight' (*yasar*, as at 7:13) and human distortion of that straightness at 7:29. Notably, however, the contrast at 7:29 is not between 'straight and crooked' as it is in 7:13 (which, by attributing both to God, almost subverts these as categories of contrast). Rather it is a contrast between what God has created and the human manipulation (*hisbebonot*) of that creation. Even though the latter passage points to the capacity of human beings to distort what has been created, it does not negate or qualify the earlier affirmation of creation's inscrutability and its challenge to human perception. It is a logically distinct issue. Indeed, the imposition of an order which improperly obscures creation's inscrutability may itself be an example of the human propensity towards the manipulation of God's creation.
- 65 William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), 79.
- 66 Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 264.
- 67 Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 265f.
- 68 Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 266.
- 69 Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 266.
- 70 For some of the background to this Jewish attitude to Hellenistic culture in general and its sexual practices in particular see William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 105-140, especially 131-140.
- 71 On this see the various remarks in, for instance, C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed (London: A&C Black, 1991), 38f., Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 76f., and Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 172-177.
- 72 I am drawing here on a suggestion made by Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., "Sanctification, Homosexuality, and God's Triune Life" in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 225f.
- 73 It might be argued that the horticultural metaphor is simply that, a metaphor of the unexpected inclusion of the Gentiles, and not an allegory of the theological status or meaning of nature. C.K. Barrett cautions against the latter by indicating that "Paul at least is not deducing theology from natural processes" (Barrett, *Romans*, 201). Moreover, the correspondence in Jewish thought between the categories 'Jew and Gentile' and 'natural and unnatural' further suggests a sharp rhetorical edge to Paul's discourse and that the use of the terms natural and unnatural have more rhetorical than substantive weight.
- 74 Indeed, J. Paul Sampley cites evidence of a claim, contemporary with Paul's, which suggested that neither long nor short hair was more natural than the other. The point of this is that any appeal to the natural is always an appeal to a particular construal of the natural, a construal which is, in turn, inevitably embedded in a matrix of cultural and ideological assumptions and therefore the object of dispute and debate. See J. Paul Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections in The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander Keck et al., (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10: 929.
- 75 Including just what it is about human existence which constitutes the *imago Dei*.
- 76 Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1984), 160.
- 77 Paul Lehmann, *The Decalogue and a Human Future: The Meaning of the Commandments for Making and Keeping Human Life Human* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 174.
- 78 Westermann, *Genesis*, 206.
- 79 Westermann, *Genesis*, 207.
- 80 As well as a threat of dualism, the privileging of anatomy could licence a physicalist essentialism. My resistance to any such essentialism is not, however driven by an appeal to the ideologies of social constructivism, but, once again, to the differentiated unity of God's wise creation.
- 81 Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010), 81.
- 82 Rowan Williams, "The Body's' Grace" in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 313.
- 83 Such counter tendencies are crystallised in the 'household codes' of Colossians, Ephesians and 1 Peter. That these may only be 'seemingly' endorsing prevailing conventions is suggested by the fact that they are not direct mirrors of existing practices at all and that what "we are witnessing in these texts is the criticism and gradual transformation from within of Jewish and pagan household ties in the light of Christ." See Stephen C. Barton, "The Epistles and Christian Ethics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 71.
- 84 Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christianity Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 147.
- 85 Jensen, *God, Desire and a Theology of Human Sexuality*, 59.
- 86 Jensen, *God, Desire and a Theology of Human Sexuality*, 60.
- 87 Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetition with Critical Difference* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 2.
- 88 Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 283.
- 89 Jan Lambrecht, SJ, *Second Corinthians* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 73.
- 90 Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, 77.
- 91 A similar argument could be made about the witness of celibate Christians – gay or straight – and their capacity to illuminate aspects of creation, human nature and desire. I am grateful for conversations with Gordon Preece about this issue, and for him challenging me to extend the logic of this essay to the issue of celibacy. Time and space prevented me from doing so, but Gordon's challenge is legitimate and I hope I can take it up in a future work.