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HOMOSEXUALITY AS "AGAINST NATURE": AN INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 1:26-27

Peet H Botha & Fika J van Rensburg
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Abstract
The exegesis of Romans 1:18-32 confirms that the Bible portions referring to homosexuality are part of a much larger Biblical philosophy of life that consistently portrays only one model for sexual relations, that between a man and a woman in lifelong monogamous partnership. Paul’s own views did not depend on any one theory or model of causation but rather on the male-female complementarity embedded in creation. The phrase παρὰ φύσιν (against nature) is crucial, because it reveals the basis of Paul’s condemnation of same-sex relations. In Romans 1:26-27 it is doubtful that Paul is speaking of nature in the sense of custom. Φύσικός and φύσις (nature) refer to one’s constitution as given by God the Creator. In Romans 1:26 φύσικός means in accordance with the intention of the Creator and παρὰ φύσιν as Paul uses it, means contrary to the intention of the Creator. In Romans 1:26-27 there is an unambiguous indictment of homosexual behaviour as a violation of God’s intention for humanity.

1. Introduction
With good reason, Romans 1:26-27 is commonly viewed as the key Bible portion on the issue of homosexual conduct. Next to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 this Bible portion is the most substantial and explicit on homosexuality in the Bible and it is furthermore located in the New Testament. It is, however, a question whether the Bible portion in Romans is concerned only with same-sex intercourse among men, or with same-sex intercourse among women as well, as Gagnon (2001:229) postulates. This article seeks to alleviate the confusion around the meaning of the Greek words and phrases in Romans 1:26-27 and to make a contribution to the current debate in churches, especially the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.

2. Interpretation of the relevant Greek phrases
This interpretation is done according to the grammatico-historical method of exegesis, as applied by De Klerk and Van Rensburg (2004). First an interlinear translation of the Greek text is given, and then each of the relevant phrases are interpreted.

2.1 An interlinear translation of Romans 1:26-27
An interlinear translation of the Greek text (UBS 1983,531) of Romans 1:26-27 is as follows:

(26) διὰ τούτο παρέδωκεν αὐτούς ὁ θεὸς εἰς πάθη
Therefore he gave them - God To passions

αἷμας, αἱ τε γὰρ θηλεῖς αὐτῶν μετῆλλαξαν
of the even for females of changed

τὴν φύσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν
The natural use To the against Nature

(27) ὁμοίως τε καὶ οἱ ἀρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν
likewise and also the males leaving the

φύσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας ἔξεκακωθῆσαν ἐν
Natural use of Female Burned in the

ἡδεῖς ἀτῶν εἰς ἄλληλους, ἀρσενες.....
the desire of toward One Males them another

2.2 Interpretation: μετῆλλαξαν τὴν φύσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ
φύσιν (they exchanged natural use for what is against nature)

The key terms for the understanding of Romans 1:26-27 are χρῆσις (use) and φύσις (nature) which occurs in both verses 26 and 27, and ὁμοίως (likewise), which introduces verse 27. χρῆσις in verses 26 and 27 is connected by the term ὁμοίως. In verse 26 the natural χρῆσις is exchanged for the unnatural. In verse 27 the natural χρῆσις with women is abandoned because men burned with ἄφεσις (desire) which resulted in unnatural practices. Μετῆλλαξαν (exchanged) is a rare term and in extant Greek literature is used for sexual perversion only in Romans 1 (Miller
2.2.1 Interpretation of χρήσης (use)

The noun χρήσης can be translated as use, usage or usefulness and sometimes sexual intercourse. We can’t understand χρήσης to mean similar sexual activities engaged in by women in verse 26 and men in verse 27 (e.g., non-coital penetration). This would give a too simple reading of these verses. It will presuppose a single common category for homosexuality in the mind of Paul and his readers, which transgresses any differences in practice. Some exegesis understands Paul’s denunciation to refer only to pederasty (Rogers 1983:101), which in the non-coital sense will only have reference to intercurial (interfemoral) connection. χρήσης is perhaps best read as a reference to the sexual activities themselves rather than an abstract category presupposed by commentators (Miller 1995:3). The phrase the natural use of the male in Romans 1:27 implies that the elision in 1:26 is to be completed to read the natural χρήσης (of the female). Therefore, in both cases χρήσης is to be understood as regards sexual intercourse. Paul’s argument here assumes a mutuality in the male-female sexual relationship instead of much χρήσης as sexual use is concerned. There is a natural use of the female by the male (Rom 1:27), but also a reciprocal natural use of the male by the female (Rom 1:26). Sexuality in Paul’s understanding has its function or use in the complementary sexual other.

2.2.2 Interpretation of μετήλλαξαν (exchange)

Μετήλλαξαν (Rom 1:26) describes the result of the exchange of worship mentioned in 1:25, by itself an intensification of ἀλλάζειν in Romans 1:23. As the non-Christians perverted their worship with idolatry/the lie (Rom 1:25), so was also their sexual practice perverted. Τὴν φυσικὴν χρήσήν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν (exchange natural use for what is against nature) lies at the core of the argument in Romans 1:26-27. Sexual union is justified by sexual differentiation. This truth is defined in Paul’s usage of χρήσης. In creation man and woman fulfill a function of creative complementariness. Without her, the man is incomplete and without him, the woman is incomplete. It is the woman who brings man to completion and the man who brings the woman to completion. The purpose of sex is not just satisfaction of fulfillment but completion. Paradoxically, sex also serves an opposite purpose. When it becomes an end in itself, it enhances a completely separated and isolated individuality, a separateness

where an exchange takes place and the male-female separates into male-male and female-female (Rom 1:26-27) relationships contra naturam. Same-sex relations are not a valid mode of sexuality but a tragic maiming of the creation intention of male-female χρήσης.

That is why same-sex is not an intended mode of sexuality for it affirms incompleteness. Completeness can only be affirmed in the other who is truly other and this fact is vividly noticeable in the created physique of man and woman.

2.2.3 Interpretation of παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός (God gave them over)

The words παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός (God gave them over) in Romans 1:24-26,28 can be understood in three ways (Malick 1993:335). Firstly, in the permissive sense, which means God passively permitted men to fall into retributive consequences. Secondly, it can be understood in the privative sense, which means God withdrew his restraining hand from evil and lastly, in the active judicial sense, meaning that God actively gave men over to retributive vengeance. The refusal to acknowledge God ends in blind distortion of the created reality. The exclusion of the created order in worshipping the lie rather than God is reflected in a reversal of the created order in sexuality. Both constitute instances of overturning God’s design. This is emphasized by the term exchanged which parallels rebellion against God with the outcomes of that rebellion. There is a positive correlation between the sin and the retributive consequence, which by its very nature is also sin.

2.2.4 Interpretation of φύσις and φύσις (natural and/or nature)

The words natural and unnatural can be used in different senses, the biological, the moral and the religious sense. Biologically one can argue that natural means the complementarity of male and female, a congenital predisposition and conclude that homosexuality in the biological sense is not unnatural, especially measured against the norm of heterosexuality and procreation, the traditional grounds for the condemnation of homosexuality (Prock 1993:215). The παρὰ φύσιν (contrary to nature) argument, however, is a theological argument and not a scientific biological argument. Thus, the argument for congenital predisposition and procreation are in the first place a theologically based argument with secondary support from the other sciences. Hence φύσις (nature) is to be
interpreted not as the result of empirical investigation, or speculative determination, but as a theological norm determined by God. Therefore, φύσις and φύσις refers to one’s constitution as given by God the Creator. Φύσις may have the figurative sense of a natural endowment or condition inherited from one’s ancestors, when used as in Romans 2:27 (Malick 1993:331).

However, there is the literal sense of physical nature that is beyond heritage and is based on creational intent by the Creator. The male possesses, because of creational intent the complementary opening for insertion by the male member, a point confirmed by the procreative capacity of male seed when it enters via the vagina into the female womb (Gagnon 2001:391). The point of contention is that same-sex intercourse is a transgression of natural boundaries, distinguishable in the way males and females are made and not excess passion (Fredrickson 2000:199); this meaning is innate in Paul’s notion of sexual activity as χρήσις (use). That is why idolatry is implicitly παρὰ φύσιν (contrary to nature), not because people are constitutional monotheists, but because observation of the created cosmos presumes a Creator, far greater than a god carved out of wood or stone in the image of one of God’s creations (Rom 1:19-23). Not the innateness of one’s passions, but rather the bodily design of humans themselves should guide the Christian into the truth about the nature of God and the nature of human sexuality.

Nature in this passage is used purposefully and in a moral sense; actions could, therefore, be taken that contradict nature. To live παρὰ φύσιν or κατὰ φύσιν (contrary to nature or in accordance to nature) implies moral categories; it denotes how man (and woman) ought, or ought not to live. Evil practices in Romans 1:26-27 are, therefore, described as παρὰ φύσιν and Paul condemns the non-Christians on the basis of φύσις (Martens 1994:55). Such actions ignore the realities of gender and reproductive capacity, reducing sex to mere pleasure. Graeco-Roman and Jewish Hellenistic literature commonly employ παρὰ φύσιν to contrast same-sex practice with that which is κατὰ φύσιν. This phrase is crucial because it reveals the basis of Paul’s condemnation of same-sex relations (Schmidt 1996:297; De Kruijf 1986:45). Thus, the context requires us to understand natural sex as sex according to God’s creational intent. When man relinquishes the Creator (Rom 1:25), he likewise relinquishes the creation ordinances, which include the male-female relationship as the intended context for sex (Cottrell 2000:157). The rationale of Paul to argue that homosexual acts are against nature can be summarised in his creationist orientation; the Biblical creation narratives serve as a backdrop to the narrative in Romans 1:18-32. Paul’s references to the sexes in Romans 1:26-27 as females and males rather than women and men follow the style of Genesis 1:27 (LXX). The inter-textual connection between Romans 1:23 and Genesis 1:26 (LXX) is unmistakable (Gagnon 2001:290). For Paul both adultery and same-sex intercourse reject God’s verdict that what was made and arranged was very good (Rom 1:31). It is probable that Paul is arguing in terms of sexual pairing of male and females in Genesis 1:26-31.

The arguments of the anatomical and procreative complementarity of male and female are of importance in assessing what Paul means when he contends that same-sex intercourse is παρὰ φύσιν (contrary to nature). Given the meaning of παρὰ φύσιν and comparable expressions used by Jewish writers to describe same-sex intercourse, the meaning of the concept in Romans is clear. It seems from Paul’s argument in Romans 1:26-27 that he is referring to the anatomical and procreative complementarity of male and female. That Paul thought of φύσις (nature) not as the way things are usually done (cultural convention) but rather as the material shape of the created order can also be deduced from his illustration that idolatry entails the suppression of the knowable truth.

What type of homosexuality is meant in Romans 1:26-27? Scroggs (1983, 121) concludes that only in Romans 1 is there a negative judgement made on both female as well as male homosexuality, which could be considered a general indictment. He continues: this general indictment about male homosexuality must have had, could only have had, pederasty in mind. Scroggs’s primary argument is that Paul condemns only pederasty in Romans 1 in its more dehumanising characteristics (1983:127-128). The descriptions, however, of homoeroticism in Romans 1:24, 26-27 as the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, dishonourable passions, contrary to nature, burned in their lust for one another, committing shameful acts, argues strongly to understand a context of consenting males rather than male and child. Scroggs’s pederasty model, as the sole focus, is to our mind excluded by the very wording of Paul’s argument in Romans 1:26-27.

A major flaw in the assumption for pederasty as the only focus of Romans 1:26-27 is Paul’s inclusion of female-female homoerotic relations in his argument. It would indeed be strange for Paul to begin with a reference to women when pederasty, as the only focus, is by definition a male vice. Paul is comprehensive in his theological statement, and that is why women are
not included in a figurative way of speaking. As we have seen above Paul is very concrete in his theology. The view that Paul is discussing pederasty in Romans 1 can not logically and exegetically be determined to be the case. Male and female are necessary counterparts. Humanity is created male and female and the one is not above the other to be excluded from the effect of homoeroticism. For Paul to give a general indictment against homosexual acts he has to include both male and female. Given his Jewish background it is nothing but natural to include both. The language of natural use and the link likewise between Romans 1:26 and Romans 1:27 clarifies that both male and female homoeroticism are seen as evidence of the same dishonourable passions. It implies a departure from a divinely intended, deliberately created, originally heterosexual relationship between males and females.

2.2.5 Conclusion on μετίλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρήσην εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν (they exchanged natural use for what is against nature)

From the context of Romans 1:26-27 it is clear that Paul intended his denunciation to apply in a general way to all homosexual practices among both men and women. He censures homosexual activity in general terms, reaffirming the Levitical prohibitions in 18:22 and 20:13.

2.3 Interpretation of ἀρσενεῖν ἐν ἀρσενῷ τὴν ἀσχημόσυνην κατέργασόμενοι (men committed shameful acts with men)

The recalling to memory of you shall not lie with a male as with a woman in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 summarises perhaps the point of contention, namely behaving toward another man as if he was a woman by making him the object of male sexual desire. The Greek word ἀσχημόσυνη (shameful) used here (Rom 1:27), is also used in Revelation 16:15, with cognates in 1 Corinthians 7:36; 12:23 and 13:5.

2.3.1 Interpretation of ἀσχημόσυνην

Louw & Nida (1989a:759) classifies ἀσχημόνεω under domain, Moral and ethical qualities and related behaviour and under sub-domain T, Act shamefully. The meaning of ἀσχημόνεω is defined as: to act in defiance of social and moral standards, with resulting disgrace, embarrassment and shame. Louw & Nida gives the following English translational equivalents: to act shamefully, indecent behaviour, shameful deed. 1 Corinthians 13:4-5,
Romans 1:27 and Ephesians 5:4 are quoted as illustrations of such usage.

Paul uses three terms to describe unacceptable sexual acts: παρά φύσιν (against nature), ἄτιμα (dishonour) and ἀσχημοσύνη (shameful act). This has been discussed in some detail in a previous section (2.2.4 above). In his consideration of ἄτιμα Helminstian (1997:87) concludes that the term means without honour, hence the possible translation degrading. or Helminstian ἄτιμα clearly refers to a negative judgement in the arena of public opinion, a person's standing or valuation in the eyes of others. The adjective ἀσχημοσύνη translates as shameless or shameful. He suggests that ἄτιμα is a parallel to ἀσχημοσύνη because both indicate negative public opinion. In every usage in the New Testament it signifies something sexual. The crux of Paul's argument for Helminstian is that Paul did not mean to say those acts are wrong; he is saying that they are unnatural and do not enjoy social approval.

Countryman's (1989:109-117) analysis that Paul evaluated same-sex intercourse as dirty but not sinful, insists that the descriptions of same-sex behaviour in Romans 1:24, 26-27 as uncleanness, the dishonouring of their odious among themselves, dishonourable passions, contrary to nature, turned in their desire for one another and committing indecency does not connote sin for Paul. But it is obvious that the stance of Countryman and Helminstian is not accepted within the academic fraternity but meets with serious criticism (Schmidt 1997; Smith 1996; Hays 1988). Males committing shameful acts with males is derogatory in its relationship to the previous phrase of being inflamed in their desire for one another. The first plucks to the language in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that prohibits same-sex relations between males of all ages, not only pederasty. The term hama in addition to shameful act also used for sexual organs, its privacy being accentuated in Exodus 20:26 and Leviticus 18:6-18. The term ἀσχημοσύνη is clearly in context a euphemism for sexual intercourse of a shameful type. Paul's language and obvious intent has as its aim to move any vestige of decency, honour, and positive attitude from same-sex relations. In this Paul seems to act in consistence with his Jewish cultural tradition.

3.2 Interpretation of the phrases ἄρσεν ἐν ἄρσεν, εἰς ἄλλους, and τὸς πλάνης αὐτῶν (men with men, toward one another, their error)

The phrase ἄρσεν ἐν ἄρσεν (men with men) defines the sexual act by

reference to a woman (Lev 18:22); this formulation emphasizes the inappropriateness of the sexual act between males (Bird 2000:151). Seeing that the prohibition in Leviticus 18:22 does not appear to echo the creation account or emphasize the procreative function, it simply describes the normative pattern of sexual relations.

Paul wrote males with males and did not use a similar phrase to that of Plato (Laws, 3.836C): ἄρσεν ἐν ἄρσεν (men with boys). The words being used in Romans 1:26 designate adult males. Lesbianism was usually understood to be between adults (Karlen 1971:21), thus arguing for adult-adult actions, not adult-child actions (Malick 1993:338). The activity of adults rather than adult-child behaviour seems to be the intention of natural use of the woman τὴν φυσικὴν χρήσιν τῆς θηλείας in Romans 1:27. The phrases toward one another (eis ἄλλους) men with men (ἄρσεν ἐν ἄρσεν) and their error (τὴν πλάνης αὐτῶν) describe reciprocal activity with adults, by choice. Paul's words males with males (ἄρσεν ἐν ἄρσεν 1:27) do, therefore, not refer to men and boys. If this was Paul's intent, he could have done it explicitly as did Plato. Paul compares male homosexuality to female homosexuality (φοινίκιοι--likewise). Female homosexuality was simply understood in mutual adult terms. Woman-girl relationships are not attested at all. The phrase natural use [function] of the woman (τὴν φυσικὴν χρήσιν τῆς θηλείας 1:27) describes the activity of adults.

The phrases toward one another (eis ἄλλους) men with men (ἄρσεν ἐν ἄρσεν) and their error (τὴν πλάνης αὐτῶν) describe reciprocal activity with adults, contra the pederasty model described by Scroggs (1983:32-33).

3. Conclusion: Romans 1:26-27 and Biblical sexuality

The key words for understanding Romans 1:26-27 are χρήσις and φύσις. The natural χρήσις (use) implies male-female sexual relationships, which is inter alia also the nature which is at stake. This must also be read and interpreted against the larger section of Paul's exhortation concerning God's wrath toward the non-believers who had rejected God (Rom 1:18-32). Thus, homoerotic terminology used, for both males and females, is based on an allusion to the prohibitions against homosexual acts in the Hebrew Torah. The statement that such acts are παρά φύσιν (against/contrary nature) refers to the created order as reported in Genesis. These acts show a disruption or confusion of God's sexual intention for males and
females, as was ordained in creation.

Paul condemns homosexual acts per se, whether performed by heterosexuals, bisexuals or innately homosexuals. The homosexual act is indicative of ὀμονόμων (lust/desire) and represents homosexuality as a sin in God's eyes. It is further an indication of rampant unrighteousness, which includes not only homosexuality but also πορνεία (sexual immorality) in general, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, murder, strife, deceit, etc. Those who practice such things, says Paul, are deserving of death (Rom 1:29-32). The modern notion of orientation does not find any ground in the letters of Paul. For Paul it is clear: the practitioners of such acts are excluded from the kingdom of God. The act defines the outcome. This is true of both female and male homoeroticism.

The vocabulary used by Paul does not favour a particular homosexual style, pederasty or heterosexuals practicing homosexuality: it is stated in such a way as to condemn homosexuality in general, making no allowance for exclusions based on age difference or other criteria.

Paul targets homosexuality in general as a move away from God's intention for and design for humanity, and thus a move away from godliness. That is why πορνοκολικόν (He gave them over, Rom 1:24,26,28) is not simply permissive or privative but descriptive of a judicial act of God giving humanity over to judgement for turning away from their Creator. Homosexuality is, therefore, not a proper expression of sexual relationships but a perversion of the created φύσις.

The textual context of Romans 1:26-27 as well as the content of Romans 1:26-27 by itself makes it clear that Paul regards same-sex intercourse, be it female or male homosexuality, as sin.

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Homosexuals or prostitutes?: The meaning of ἀφρενοκοίται (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10). *Vigiliae Christianae* 38: 124-153.

NOTES

1. Χρῆσθαι - to use, make use of; desire, yearn after, enjoy. Louw & Nida (1989a:258) defines the meaning as: the sexual function or use of the same or opposite sex, and suggests the following as a viable translation into English: sexual use, sexual function. With reference to Romans 1:26-27, Louw & Nida translates: for the women pervert the natural sexual function for that which is contrary to nature, and likewise men give up the natural sexual function of a woman. Gagnon (2001:236) quotes Pseudo-Lucian (Affairs, 25) where he uses the word: I will show that the womanly "use" is better by far than the "use" of a darling boy.

2. Outside Romans the related term ἐναλλάσσει is more common for sexual perversions (Miller 1995:3). See, for example the parallels in Wisdom 14:26 and Testament of Naphtali 3:4-5. Miller argues that ἐναλλάσσει is non-specific to the type of sexual perversions and may be used for any activity, which the author considers a perversion and concludes that μεταλάθησαι is probably also non-specific. If, however, μεταλάθησαι is intended to be specific, the context must provide the information of what specific perversion is intended by Paul’s use of μεταλάθησαι.
The active sense of παρέδωκεν does not allow an interpretation for either the permissive or privative sense. The active judicial sense correlates with Paul’s instruction in other parts of Scripture (Rom 4:25; 6:17; 8:32; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20). Thus, the best reading is to understand the phrase in the active judicial sense where the act of God is to be seen as a penal infliction of retribution. This action is consistent with God’s holiness (Malick 1994:337; Huizinga 1994:318; Sanders & Headlam 1962:45).

The term exchanged which parallels rebellion against God with the outcomes of that rebellion is confirmed in verses 23 (ἡλλασάν), 25 (μετηλλασαν) and 26 (μετηλλασαν).

Homosexuals cannot lay claim to and own nature with its particular predisposition. The appeal to a God ordained special homosexual nature allows claims for other natures, for example a bi-sexual nature, a pedophilic nature or Bestiality nature. This is, however, not the case. The term παρὰ φύσιν is at the same time inclusive and exclusive: it includes a specific nature and excludes all others as deviations of that nature. It would exclude homosexuality as contra naturam if homosexuality is proved not to be natural, that is, aligned with what is Biblically regarded to be natural.

This is how Paul uses the term 1 Corinthians 11:14 when he refers to nature as an argument for head coverings. Paul argues that the branches of the olive tree are natural (κατὰ φύσιν) and of the tree which by nature is a wild olive tree (κατὰ φύσιν). Branches are grafted into it contra naturam (παρὰ φύσιν). To our mind Cranfield (1985:835) correctly observes that in Romans 1:26 φυσικός means in accordance with the intention of the Creator and παρὰ φύσιν means contrary to the intention of the Creator.

Paul argues that he views sexual sin, specified in Romans 1:26-27, as a result of rebellion against the Creator. There is no direct quote of Genesis in Romans 1:18-32, but the passage is filled with allusions to and/or echoes of the creation of humanity. The following phrases evidence this phenomenon: ever since creation (1:20); the things He has made (1:20); Creator (1:20); females and males (1:26-27). It echoes Genesis 1:27 where it reads: male and female He created them. For Paul, the creation account of sexual differentiation is the only true φύσις. The word for creation (κτίσισ) in 1:20 refers to the act or process of creation (Barrett 1991:39). Same-sex relationships constitute obscene/shameful pleasures, which is interpreted as a perversion of the created order.

Gagnon (2001:254) is quite vivid in his discussion on Paul’s argumentation in condemning same-sex intercourse. Paul argues that even pagans who have no access to the book of Leviticus should know that same-sex eroticism is παρὰ φύσιν because the primary sex organs fit male to female, not female to female or male to male. Fittedness also clues to complementarity provided by procreative capacity and the capacity for mutual and pleasurable stimulation. These clues make clear that neither the anus, the orifice for excreting waste products, nor the mouth, the orifice for taking in food, are complementary orifices for the male member (Gagnon 2001:254-255). The reciprocal point of view is well-illustrated by Barnard (2000:45): the point of departure is that the whole body is holy – the so-called orifices for excretion of waste products as well. Barnard queries the judgment that the anus is solely regarded as an excretory organ seeing that the penis is also an excretory organ and at the same time a sexual organ. He calls upon research results by sexologists to support his claim that anal sex is natural because it is sexually stimulating and if it was not natural then surely sexual stimulation would have been absent (2000:44). He concludes that the Bible is not prescriptive in the ways of sexual intercourse, but definitely prescriptive in the attitude accompanying sexual intercourse. Countryman’s (1989:243) conclusion that (1) the Gospel allows no rule against, in and of themselves: masturbation, non-vaginal heterosexual intercourse, bestiality, polygamy, homosexual acts, or erotic art and literature and (2) bestiality, where it is the casual recourse of the young or of people isolated over long periods of time from other humans, should occasion little concern.

Scholars who point to the male-female complementarity as the key to understanding Paul’s use of παρὰ φύσιν include: Hays (1985); Schmidt (1995); Wright (1984). Other commentators are not clear on the issue and allude to same-sex intercourse as a violation of the natural order or order of nature created and intended by God. Fitzmyer (1993:286) explicitly mentions the order seen in the function of the sexual organs themselves, which were ordained for an expression of love between man and woman and for the procreation of children. Cranfield (1986:125-126) takes nature as a metonymy for the way God made us. Hoheisel (1994:294) admits that Paul viewed same-sex intercourse as being outside the order of God or of creation while Balz (1987:66) says that it is a matter of an offense against the human body given with creation, false use of one’s sexual potency, a renunciation of offspring, an offense against the creation – appropriate combination of man and woman and finally probably the disturbance of the bodily relationships of life willed by God... Paul appeals, when he speaks of φύσιν, to an insight accessible to everyone in the reality of creation given in all that is. Gagnon (2001:255) is justified in his observation that for Paul it was a matter of commonsense observation of the human anatomy and procreative function that even non-Christians otherwise oblivious to God’s direct revelation in the Bible, had no excuse for not knowing.

This, to our mind, is a contradiction in terms. Scroggs is arguing for a qualitative fact that his argument cannot have. Jewett (2000:235) rightly argues against Scroggs’ view when he says that the evidence in this verse
(Rom 1:26) is particularly damaging to the hypothesis by Scroggs that the critique of homosexuality in this pericope aims solely to attack pederasty and thus has no bearing on homoerotic relationships between consenting adults.

The following gives an overview of the state of the art on the occurrence of female homosexuality in the literature of antiquity: Scroggs (1983:140-144) lists some instances of female homoeroticism in literature from antiquity. His conclusion is that there is virtually nothing in the texts about female homosexuality. He might, however, be underscoring the truth in support of his view on pederasty as the only homosexual model in the Graeco-Roman world. He mentions Sappho of Lesbos and a single reference in the speech of Aristophanes in Plato's Symposium. Another is Plutarch's life of Lycurgus and the statement that παρθένοι (young girls) found female lovers. Other instances include Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Lucian's Erōtēs and a final portion in Lucian's Dialogues of the Courtesans. Smith (1996:223-251) is justified to take Scroggs to task for his limited references concerning female homosexuality in ancient literature and art. Over and against the ten references listed by Scroggs, Smith (1996:223-252) states on the contrary several certain statements can be made about female homosexual practices. Considerably more is known about female homosexuality. He then lists an additional seven instances not mentioned by Scroggs from Graeco-Roman literature and instances from rabbinic literature. Dover (1978:184) refers to numerous references and quotations and concludes: if lesbian woman had a reputation for shameless and uninhibited sexuality, they are likely to have been credited with all such genital acts as the inventive pursuit of a piquant variety of pleasure can devise, including homosexual practices together with fellation, connubilium, threesomes, copulation in unusual positions and the use of olisboi (masturbation aids). Waetjen (1996:111) refers to some references but depends for his information on Dover (1978); he mentions extravagant and uninhibited language, which was employed to express relations between women and also girls.

There are three reasons, says Boswell (1980:108-109), why he views the Romans passage not to be about temple prostitution: (a) temple prostitution was not limited to homosexual activities; (b) it is clear that the sexual behaviour itself is objectionable to Paul, not merely its associations; (c) Paul is not describing cold-blooded dispassionate acts performed in the interest of ritual or ceremony. He refers to lust as motivation for homosexual behaviour. Therefore, the persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual. What he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons. It is to our mind valid to state that Paul is not concerned here with temple prostitution or any other form of homosexual prostitution. However, it is not valid to state that he is concerned with heterosexual people committing homosexual acts in lust. Rather, Paul is profoundly against homosexual acts per se. Boswell's view of heterosexual people committing homosexual acts goes unsupported by Bible references.

When one views the way Paul's contemporaries use the contrast κατά φυσιν/παρα φυσιν (according to nature/contrary to nature) in relevant contexts, it is obvious that Paul had an exchange of nature in mind. Plato (Laws, 636C) writes that when a male unites with female for procreation the pleasure experienced is held to be due to nature, but contrary to nature when male mates with male or female with female, and that those first guilty of such enormities were impelled by their slavery to pleasure. Plutarch (ca. 100AD) contrasts natural love between men and women with union contrary to nature with males and those who consort with males do so against nature (Erotikos, 751C, E). Philo (Abraham, 135) remarks that men of Sodom threw off from their necks the law of nature to mount males not respecting the common nature with which the active partner acts upon the passive. In Special Laws (III: 37-42) he characterizes pederasty as a transformation of the male nature (Schmidt 1997:101). These quotes support the argument that Paul has had an exchange of female for male relations in view (contrary to nature) and not a mere exchange of function.

Brooten (1996) quotes Plato, Seneca the Elder, Martial, Ovid, Ptolemy, Artemidoros and Dorotheos of Sidon, all of them referring to female same-sex intercourse as being παρα φυσιν.

Indicative of this widely accepted censure by Paul is the fact that even the so-called revisionists accept Paul's condemnation of homosexual acts (Miller 1995:1; Boswell 1980:112-113; McNell 1977:53-56).

Countryman (1989:117-123) argues that in Paul's mind, God handed non-Christians over to homosexual practices only after they were already filled with the sinful vices in Romans 1:29-31. Gagnon (2001:274) refutes Countryman's stance by referring to the two most extensive vice lists in the undisputed Pauline letters outside of Romans 1:29-31. These are 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-21. In the beginning of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 the sexually immoral (fornicators: πορνοὶ), idolaters, adulterers, males who perform the sexual roles of the female and who take males to bed, are mentioned. Galatians 5:19-21 begins with sexual immorality (fornication: πορνεία), uncleanness, licentiousness (as also in Eph 5:3-4 and Col 3:5-8). In Romans 13:13 unrestrained sexual activity is mentioned (compare 1 Tim 1:9-10 as well) and also at the very end of 2 Corinthians 12:20-21. Gagnon (2001:275) is right in concluding that the prominence of sexual vices in the textual data does not necessarily mean that sexual vices
are the worst of all sins, but it may suggest that sexual vices are the most pernicious in terms of temptation and addiction.

There are four views to be evaluated. Scroggs (1983) proposes that Paul refers to pederasty (male with child) relations; Gagnon (2001) reason for adult homosexual acts whilst in the third place Boswell (1980) and Miller (1995) argues for heterosexual adults performing homosexual acts. Jewett (2000:237) is the opinion that neither pederasty nor homosexual acts between adults are at stake in verse 27; Paul condemns homoeroticism without making any distinction between pederasty and relationships between adult, consenting males or between active and passive partners as Roman practice of the day was inclined to do.

THE TEXTUAL STRATEGY OF EPHREM THE SYRIAN'S HYMN CONTRA HAERESES I

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Abstract

The first hymn in Ephrem the Syrian’s cycle Contra Haereses is translated and analysed in terms of its rhetorical and argumentative features. It seems that Ephrem used various rhetorical strategies to construct a polarity between a jealous Satan and a loving God. He argues that the heretics that became known under the names of Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani are merely different manifestations of Satan’s jealous attempt to hurt mankind. He urges the orthodox faithful to flee from this threat by illustrating how great the danger is with the help of analogies from everyday life and biblical stories.

1. Introduction

Ephrem the Syrian’s collection of hymns known by the name Contra Haereses has drawn more attention from theologians than perhaps any of the other cycles collected under his name. The reason for this is the information it contains on the teachings of dissidents from mainstream Christianity such as Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani. The purging of the documents of such movements left a void in our understanding of what they taught, so that the anti-heretical polemics became an important (although very unsatisfactory) source for knowing what they believed. The focus of this article, however, is not on the doctrines of these ‘heretics’, but on Ephrem’s technique of countering their beliefs and their influence.

What techniques did Ephrem use? He, realised, to begin with, that liturgical hymns would be more effective than prose refutations, although he made use of that medium also. Hymns, especially those composed by a gifted and much beloved poet such as Ephrem was, would be repeated often or at least sung or heard each year at the same time. They would therefore be absorbed by the minds of the orthodox. The parallels, antitheses, metaphors, and word play that form the building blocks of his poetry (and his theology) could also become powerful instruments with which the teachings of heretics could be ridiculed, stereotyped, explained or exposed.

From a superficial reading of the first hymn in this cycle, it would seem that parallelism and antithesis, both used to construct polar thought