

# Case Not Made:

A Response to Prof. John Thorp's "Making the Case"  
for Blessing Homosexual Unions  
in the Anglican Church of Canada

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## Table of Contents

Preface	3
Introduction	4
Moral Evolution	8
Reason	12
Scripture	17
Tradition	23
Conclusion	24
Other Resources by Dr. Gagnon	29

## Preface

A paper entitled “Making the Case: The Blessing of Same Sex Unions in the Anglican Church of Canada” (May 2007) has been circulated to all the delegates at the 2007 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada (29 pages—or 31 if one counts the two-page list appendix at the end). The writer of the paper is a certain John Thorp, who is a professor of philosophy at the University of Western Ontario. A copy of the paper can be found on the web at the Anglican Church of Canada website at <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/ethics/documents/Making-the-Case-Thorp.pdf>.

Although Thorp apologizes in his preface for the limited scope of his essay, this does not stop him from making many bold claims. He ends with the following: “Gay liberation is *clearly* the work of the Spirit. How can it reasonably be judged otherwise?” (p. 29; his emphasis). He believes that the case he has made for blessing homosexual unions at three levels—Scripture, Tradition, and Reason—“*easily* overcomes the surface prohibitions” against homosexual practice in Scripture (p. 19; my emphasis).

The reality of the matter is quite different. I see very little evidence that he is even aware of the major counterarguments to his position, much less that he responds effectively to these arguments. This circumstance apparently forms the basis for his overconfidence. True, he has some understanding of the philosophical discussions in ancient Greece; see, for example, his essay “The Social Construction of Homosexuality” in *Phoenix* 46.1 (1992): 54-61 (online at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/thorp.html>). But his lack of expertise in biblical studies, theology, and science shows throughout the essay. Even where one would expect him to be strongest, namely in his own area of philosophical argumentation, the presentation is surprisingly weak.

Even so, I never assume that what appears as a markedly weak case to the trained eye will also appear so to the untrained eye. The rebuttal below presents in relatively short order some of the major counterarguments, following in order the basic outline of his essay. We can only be cursory here given the short turnover time that delegates will have to read and digest this material. Fuller documentation of my arguments can be obtained by reading material from the abridged bibliography. Hopefully Prof. Thorp will begin reading some of these resources.

## **Introduction: A Faithful, Not “Frozen,” Church in Matters of Significance**

In his introduction (pp. 1-3), Thorp repeatedly warns against a “frozen” church. Sadly, he shows precious little concern for a *faithful* church. His straw man consists of groups in the church that allegedly hold to “eternal and unchanging religious law, enshrined in the Bible and governing human life in *every last one of its details*” (p. 1; emphasis added). Thorp contends that “if at first” embracing homosexual unions “appears to be a radical break in the faith and order of the Church, it is in fact not so.” In response I lift up the following points for reflection:

**1. *The two-sexes prerequisite is no little “detail” in Scripture but a core value in sexual ethics.*** The universal witness of Scripture to a male-female prerequisite for valid sexual unions—the flip side of which is the witness of Scripture against every form of homosexual practice—is no little “detail.” It is a core value among Scripture’s sexual ethics. It is a value held:

- a. *pervasively*, that is, within each Testament and across Testaments;
- b. *absolutely*, that is, without exception;
- c. *strongly*, that is, as or more offensive than adultery and the worst forms of consensual adult incest;
- d. *counterculturally*, that is, in opposition to broader cultural trends.

As such, retaining the Bible’s position on this matter renders the church faithful, not frozen. Violating this foundational stance is not “dynamic,” as Thorp claims, but profoundly disobedient.

**2. *Thorp’s attack on a position of “no change” beats a dead horse.*** Perhaps surprisingly for Thorp virtually *no one* is arguing for the eternal and unchanging character of every one of Scripture’s commands. Indeed, such a position would be patently unbiblical inasmuch as Jesus himself overruled the Law of Moses when he revoked exemptions to the monogamy principle that had been given men but never women (Mark 10:2-12 par. Matt 19:3-9).

Jesus acknowledged that these exemptions in the Law were nothing more than concessions made to human (chiefly male) hardness of heart. Now Jesus was declaring that such concessions would no longer be allowed. So clearly Jesus accepted the view that the Old Testament or covenant could be improved upon; that is, aligned more closely to the perfect will of God. Thorp is beating a dead horse of his own making when he argues against the unchangeable character of “every last detail” of the Bible.

**3. *Jesus himself is Thorp’s main obstacle for discounting a two-sexes prerequisite.*** What was the basis for Jesus’ unilateral amendment of the Law of Moses that eliminated the right of men to more than one wife? Here the matter becomes embarrassing for Thorp’s position, for Jesus cited as his justification God’s creation of “male and female”

in Gen 1:27 and the marriage standard of a “man” and his “woman” being joined together in Gen 2:24—two texts that Thorp seeks to circumvent by endorsing homosexual unions.

Jesus’ declared these two texts as constituting the foundation for his limitation of the number of parties in a sexual bond to two. In other words, the ‘twoness’ or duality of a sexual bond is predicated on the ‘twoness’ or duality of the sexes. Eliminating the significance of the latter for defining appropriate sexual bonds leaves the church without basis for a monogamy principle. God’s creation of two primary sexes is the foundation for prohibiting additional persons beyond two in a sexual bond, whether concurrently (polygyny) or serially (repeat divorce/remarriage). The union of the two sexes into one makes a third party both unnecessary and undesirable.

That was Jesus’ opinion, which should have considerably more significance than Thorp’s opinion or that of any bishop who also seeks to contravene Jesus’ view. Since Jesus lifted up Gen 1:27 and 2:24 as normative, with proscriptive implications, for all matters of human sexual ethics, it is not surprising that when Paul indicts homosexual practice absolutely in Rom 1:24-27 and 1 Cor 6:9 he has these same two texts from Genesis in the background. He simply shows himself to be a good disciple of Jesus.

**4. *The male-female prerequisite is the foundation or prior analogue for defining other critical sexual norms.*** A powerful indicator of the significance of a male-female prerequisite is its relationship to other key sexual standards.

- a. For Jesus the two-sexes prerequisite grounded in God’s creation will in Scripture must have been more important than his rulings against **polygyny and divorce/remarriage** inasmuch as the foundation is greater than the positions predicated on the foundation.
- b. The Bible’s stance against **adult, consensual incest** cannot be more important than its stance against homosexual practice since:
  - 1) Though both are rejected in Scripture on grounds of too much formal or structural sameness (incest on a familial level, homosexual practice on the level of sex or gender), this degree of structural sameness is felt more keenly in the case of homosexual practice. For sex or gender is a more integral component of sexual relations, and more foundationally defines it, than is and does the degree of blood relatedness.
  - 2) While the Old Testament accommodated at different points of Israel’s history to some forms of incest, Scripture never makes an accommodation for homosexual practice of any sort.
  - 3) An implicit proscription of homosexual behavior can be grounded in the creation narratives in Gen 1-2 (as Paul certainly did, see below) but as regards incest at most only an implicit prohibition of intergenerational incest might be found.

- c. **Adultery** becomes an applicable offense only when the sexual bond that the offender is cheating on is a valid sexual bond. One can't cheat against a union that is structural invalid, and thus immoral, from the beginning—or at least the notion of cheating must be considerably diluted (much as the idea of 'cheating' on a mistress must, by definition, be diminished in significance). Consequently, incest and homosexual practice violate God's sexual standards at a more foundational level than adultery.

**5. Same-sex intercourse radically offends against God's intentional creation of humans as "male and female" (Gen 1:27) and the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24).** Genesis 1:27 links God's image imprinted on humans with the complementary sexual differentiation of humans into male and female. Although animals are similarly differentiated, only in humans is that differentiation connected with being created in God's image. This suggests that what humans do sexually can affect either negatively or positively the stamp of God's image on them. It also suggests that, while male and female each have individual integrity as God's image, the union of male and female brings together complementary expressions of the divine image into a full-orbed sexuality. Entering into a homosexual union disregards the sacred foundation on which Gen 1 predicates sexual activity and dishonors one's God-given sex by merging with a person of the same sex as though that person were the complement to one's sex.

Genesis 2:21-24 give a beautiful illustration in story form of the inherent complementarity of a man-woman sexual bond and so the implicit, inherent discomplementarity of a same-sex sexual bond. Woman is drawn from the "side" of the human (a better translation than "rib"). She is the missing part, sexually speaking, to a man—the missing sexual complement if one is seeking a sexual relationship with another. Man and woman may be (re-)joined into one flesh because the two emerged out of one flesh. This is a lovely picture of the basic point that men and women are each other's sexual "other halves"—not two males or two females.

**6. Every text in Scripture that treats the issue of homosexual practice treats it as a high offense abhorrent to God.** A triad of stories about extreme depravity—attempted sexual assault of male visitors by the men of Sodom (Gen 19.4-11), the attempted sexual assault of the Levite passing through Gibeah (Judg 19.22-25), and (as I and others have argued elsewhere) Ham's offense against his father Noah (Gen 9.20-27)—feature man-male intercourse as an integral element of the depravity. Arguing that these stories indict only homosexual practice characterized by coercion (rape) is like arguing that a story about an adult raping a parent (which, incidentally, is probably what the story of Ham and Noah is about) only indicts coercive forms of incest. If one examines these stories in their historical and literary contexts—the ancient Near Eastern evidence, other texts written by the same author, other texts in ancient Israel presupposing a male-female prerequisite or indicting homoerotic activity, and the history of interpretation—one sees that the same-sex dimension of the acts is a significant *compounding* offense, not an incidental act.

The Levitical prohibitions of homosexual practice (18:22; 20:13) treat it as a first-tier sexual offense (20:10-16), specifically tag it with the label *to'evah* (“abomination, abhorrent act”) that is normally reserved for high moral offenses, and in all other respects treat the act as a matter of moral impurity. Unlike merely ritually impure acts, homosexual practice is not contagious through physical contact and is not rectified by ritual bathing; nor does the prohibition encompass unintentional or inadvertent acts.

Jesus, as we have seen, predicated his view of marital monogamy and indissolubility on a male-female prerequisite for valid sexual bonds given in Gen 1-2. His view on homosexual practice is clear not only from this but also from: his view of the Old Testament as holy Scripture and his retention of the Law of Moses even on relatively minor matters such as tithing; his intensification of the Law’s sexual ethic in matters involving adultery of the heart and divorce and in his saying about cutting over body parts (Matt 5:27-32); the fact that the man who baptized him, John the Baptist, was beheaded for defending Levitical sex laws; early Judaism’s univocal opposition to homosexual practice; the early church’s united opposition to homosexual practice; the distinction that he drew between the non-defiling effect of food and the body-defiling character of gratifying sexual desires for behavior that God forbids (Mark 7:21-23); and other arguments.

Paul in Rom 1:24-27 treated homosexual practice as comparable to idolatry insofar as both radically suppress the truth (one about the Creator, the other about the way the Creator made us) transparent in the material structures of creation/nature. He refers to homosexual practice, both female and male, as an act of sexual “uncleanness” or “impurity” (*akatharsia*), an “indecency” or “shameful act” (*aschēmosune*), a “dishonoring (*atimazesthai*) of their bodies among themselves,” the product of “dishonorable passions” (*pathē atimias*), and an act “contrary to nature” (*hē para phusin*) that, in part, was its own “payback” (*antimisthia*). Twice later in the same letter he alludes back to homosexual practice as a paradigmatic example of sexual impurity and immorality that believers must put aside or else still face God’s coming judgment (6:19-23; 13:13-14). The continuation of the vice list from 1:19-27 to 1:28-31 does not mean that Paul regarded idolatry and homosexual practice as “just two of many vices,” nor does the continuation of the argument in ch. 2 suggest that Paul is opposed to the Christian community judging idolatry and homosexual practice as high moral offenses.

Paul in 1 Cor 6:9 lists “soft men” (*malakoi*, i.e. men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners) and “men who lie with a male” (*arsenokoitai*; cf. also 1 Tim 1.10) among a series of sexual offenders that include adulterers and, implied in the context, men who engage in incest and men who have sex with prostitutes (*pornoi*, cf. 5.9-11; 6.15-16). Such persons, whether they claim to be believers or not, “shall not inherit the kingdom of God” if they do not repent (6.9-10; cf. 2 Cor 12:21).

The reasons given above make clear that the Bible’s male-female prerequisite for sexual unions is no little “detail.” Deviating from this foundation for sexual ethics is indeed a “radical break in [i.e. from] the faith and order of the Church.”

## Moral Evolution

Thorp appeals to Richard Hooker's three-stranded cord (later identified as a three-legged stool) consisting of Scripture, Reason, and Tradition (Thorp subsumes experience under reason). However, he does not use this hermeneutical model in the manner that Hooker would have. Particularly problematic is the short shrift that Thorp gives Scripture, which for Hooker occupied "that first place" to which "both credit and obedience is due." In a 29-page paper Thorp gives Scripture a grand total of two-and-one-third pages, discussing it only after he treats both "Moral Evolution" and "Reason." Even his handling of "moral evolution," "reason," and "tradition" contain fatal errors and misinterpretations. We will begin with his section on "Moral Evolution" (pp. 4-9).

Thorp makes the single point here that "*morals change*" (p. 9) and cites the church's stance on usury and slavery to make his point. That changing circumstances may result in changing moral standards from those enunciated in Scripture *within limits* is, as I have already observed, patently obvious. Making this point, however, does not in any way establish Thorp's case for changing in the specific area of homosexual practice. Indeed, proper analogical reasoning shows the matter to be otherwise. Here there are three main problems with Thorp's argument.

First, the concept of "moral evolution" implies steady improvement in the morality of society in all, or virtually all, areas over the centuries. Any minimal understanding of history will show this assumption to be false. There is at least as much moral *devolution* over time, as witnessed not least in the sexual looseness and infidelity that characterizes modern Western society.

Second, valid moral change is not always in the direction of greater permissiveness. One need only look at the six antitheses that kick off the Sermon on the Mount, two of which have to do with sex, where Jesus summarizes his message as: You used to be able to get away with the following things; I tell you that such is no longer the case because I'm closing these loopholes (Matt 5:17-48).

Third, the two analogues that Thorp cites for jettisoning the Bible's stance on homosexual practice are poor analogues. In fact, Thorp has chosen to eschew near analogues (incest, polyamory) in favor of adopting more remote analogues (usury, slavery). He has done so for the obvious reason that the closer analogues won't get him to his desired ideological outcome.

**Usury.** The Bible's stance on usury does not remotely approach the consistency, severity, absoluteness, and strongly countercultural character of the Bible's stance on homosexual practice. Thorp's analogy is akin to comparing usury law and incest law. In other words it makes little sense.

**Slavery.** The analogy with slavery also has insurmountable problems. Note the following differences between the Bible’s stance on slavery and the Bible’s stance on homosexual practice:

1. *No mandate.* There is no scriptural mandate to enslave others, nor does one incur a penalty for releasing slaves. No noble values ever ‘rode’ on the preservation of the institution of slavery. Selling oneself into slavery was seen as a last-ditch measure to avoid starvation—at best a necessary evil in a state with limited welfare resources (Lev 25:39). There *is*, however, a scriptural mandate to limit sexual unions to heterosexual ones, with a severe penalty (in this life or the next) imposed on violators.
2. *Not pre-Fall.* Unlike the opposite-sex prerequisite, Scripture does not ground slavery in pre-Fall structures. Even if one were to contend that this is a de-historicizing argument, based on myth, the creation story still tells us that the biblical writers viewed heterosexual unions, unlike slavery, as normative and transcultural.
3. *The Bible’s critical edge toward slavery.* One can discern within the Bible a significant critical edge toward slavery. Front and center in Israelite memory was its remembrance of God’s liberation from slavery in Egypt (e.g., Exod 22:21; 23:9; Lev 25:42, 55; Deut 15:15). Christian memory adds the paradigmatic event of Christ’s redemption of believers from slavery to sin and people (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; and often). Israelite law put various restrictions on enslaving fellow Israelites—mandatory release dates, the right of near-kin redemption, not returning runaway slaves, and insisting that Israelites not be treated as slaves.

The “undisputed Paul” in 1 Cor 7:21 and Phlm 16 regarded liberation from slavery as at least a penultimate good. The ultimate good, of course, was freedom of moral purpose, something that not even slavery could deprive someone of. First Corinthians 7:21 is best translated as: “Were you, a slave, called? Don’t let it trouble you. But if also (or: even if, if indeed) you are able to become free, all the more (or: rather) use (it, i.e. your freedom),” that is, to redouble your efforts to serve God. As regards Philemon, Thorp inaccurately characterizes Paul’s message as: “And, of course, the whole of the letter to Philemon is about the return to him of his runaway slave Onesimus, whom Paul had encountered in prison” (p. 8). No, the whole of the letter is about Paul getting Philemon to look at Onesimus in an entirely new light, including as a person who should be treated “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord” (i.e., in the sphere of both society and church; v. 16).

The canon of Scripture shows considerable discomfort with the institution of slavery. Yet there is not the slightest indication anywhere in the canon that same-sex intercourse is anything other than a detested practice to be utterly eschewed by the people of God in all circumstances. The discomfort that Scripture shows is not with any opposition to same-sex intercourse but rather with any accommodation to it.

4. *The Bible's countercultural witness.* Although the contemporary church has gone beyond the Bible in its total opposition to slavery, the biblical stance was generally more critical of slavery than were the surrounding cultures out of which the Scriptures emerged. The countercultural edge was in the direction of criticizing and weakening the institution of slavery. The precise opposite happens to be the case with the Bible's stance on same-sex intercourse. The authors of Scripture expressed far greater disapproval of such behavior and maintained a far more rigorous male-female sexual prerequisite than did the cultures of their day. The countercultural edge was decidedly in the direction of intensifying opposition to homosexual practice. For Paul liberation in the Christian life here meant freedom from the tyranny of intense urges that dishonor the human creation as male and female, not necessarily by losing the intense urges but rather by gaining a new power, that of the Spirit, to enable obedience amidst hardship (compare Rom 1:24-27; 6:19-22; 7:5-6; 8:12-17).

Simply put, *Scripture nowhere expresses a vested interest in preserving slavery but rather in many ways strong reservations, whereas Scripture does express a clear countercultural and creational vested interest in preserving an exclusive male-female dynamic to human sexual relationships.* Scripture itself does not provide the kind of clear and unequivocal witness *for* slavery that it exhibits *against* same-sex intercourse.

An emancipation movement would not have appalled Jesus and Paul but acts of same-sex intercourse would have done just that. There is much to suggest that Jesus and Paul would have condoned an emancipation movement, though they might have questioned: (1) how it could be accomplished without massive violence (they did not live in democratic states and lacked political power); (2) how some particularly destitute persons would survive (they did not live in welfare states so some people might face starvation); and (3) how the disciples of Jesus would survive if it made emancipation a cornerstone (they would confirm for authorities suspicions that Christian faith was a seditious threat to the Roman Empire). Thorp's stance on same-sex intercourse represents a fundamental challenge to the authority of Scripture and Jesus that far supersedes any challenge posed by emancipation movements. It is a challenge to Scripture's core values.

What the authors of Scripture, and Jesus, meant by "slavery" was also something significantly different from what we Americans normally mean by slavery. Slavery in the ancient world was not predominantly race-based, often did not mean lifelong servitude, often served as a form of criminal justice (in the absence of long-term prison facilities), often allowed private enterprise, sometimes led to social advancement, and operated in a social and political economy that made complete abolition of the institution problematic (totalitarian states that disallowed such political reform; no welfare net). These differences are well documented and help to mitigate the problem of different stances toward the institution of slavery held by ancient and modern believers.

**Better analogues: incest and polyamory.** Instead of fixating on the relatively remote analogies of usury and slavery, why doesn't Thorp focus attention on the much closer analogies of incest and polyamory? After all, these are also sexual offenses. Incest is

closest to homosexual practice as a severe sexual offense in Scripture. Both incest and homosexual practice are rejected, ultimately, because they constitute an attempt at merging with someone who is too much of a structural same. As noted above, polyamory (multiple-partner sexuality) is rejected by Jesus on the ground that it violates the twoness of the sexes established by God at creation. So clearly there is a logical link that can be made between homosexual practice and incest, on one hand, and homosexual practice and polyamory, on the other.

Homosexual practice, incest, and polyamorous unions all can be conducted by adults as consensual, loving relationships. Homosexual practice and incest can also be monogamous, while even a polyamorous bond can express fidelity in a lifelong commitment. None of these relationships is *intrinsically* harmful, if by harm we mean *scientifically measurable* harm. Absolute prohibitions for all three depend significantly on a principle of embodied structural congruity that transcends the will and orientation of the participants.

The best analogies are obviously those that share the greatest number of points of correspondence with the thing to which they are being compared. Thorp has ignored the best analogies. It is clear that Thorp doesn't want to focus attention on the analogues of incest and polyamory because doing so would lead the church to the conclusion that it should continue to oppose homosexual practice. For we continue to oppose absolutely in the church incest and polyamory—even those instances of an adult, consensual, and committed sort. Since Thorp doesn't want to reach the conclusion that a prohibition of homosexual practice be maintained, he chooses the more remote analogues of usury and slavery. That is an intellectually dishonest form of analogical reasoning.

In promoting homosexual practice Thorp is actually pushing for a reinstatement of slavery, the kind of slavery that Paul warns against in Rom 6:1-8:17: a slavery to the sinful impulses of the flesh to do what God expressly forbids.

## Reason

Thorp's argument from reason is thin on reasons even though this represents his only hope of overturning Scripture and Tradition (pp. 10-16). His argument has two parts.

The first part claims that the church originally did not regard homosexual practice as a severe offense but "just one vice among others" with "the grounds for its disapproval" being "quite various" (p. 11). This claim is false. From its roots in ancient Israel, through the New Testament, and to the Church Fathers and beyond, homosexual practice has consistently been regarded as (1) a high moral offense that is (2) contrary to God's design in nature/creation. Thorp's contention that homosexual practice first becomes a high offense in the work of Peter Damian (ca. 1050) is historically absurd. Certainly there is no justification in the New Testament for hating persons who engage in homosexual practice. There is justification, however, for being repulsed by homosexual practice in a manner akin to the revulsion felt for incest between a man and his mother (1 Cor 5). At the same time offenders are not to be consigned to hell and done with, but rather sought out for the purposes of being recovered for the kingdom of God.

Typical of Thorp's misreading of texts is his handling of *Didache* 2:2-3. Thorp assumes that because pederasty is mentioned in the *Didache* among an array of offenses it is being viewed as "just one vice among others." *Didache* 2:2-3 simply constructs a vice list based on the second half of the Decalogue without attempting to provide a ranking. To give an analogous example, Paul is clearly morally outraged by the case of the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5, a person whom Paul refers to as a  *pornos*, i.e. a sexually immoral man. He clearly does not regard incest as "just one vice among others," say, as merely the equivalent of the sin of fornication (i.e., non-incestuous, heterosexual intercourse outside of marriage). Yet he simply includes the  *pornoi* as one among many offenders in the vice lists in 1 Cor 5:9-10 and 6:9-10 from whom the church should temporarily disassociate (pending repentance) and who (if repentance is not forthcoming) run the risk of exclusion from God's kingdom.

The second part of Thorp's argument from reason is that "the secular understanding of homosexuality has changed in recent decades" in that we now know, allegedly, that homosexuality, "like left-handedness, . . . is a normal abnormality" and that it is a proclivity that is "either inborn, or at any rate acquired so early in life that the agent has no say in its acquisition" (p. 15). Persons who engage in homosexual practice are "sexual minorities," on the analogy of "racial and religious minorities" (ibid.). They can live well-adjusted lives.

A later section of his paper entitled "Other Considerations" (pp. 23-26) also belongs here. Thorp argues that homosexual practice cannot be "contrary to nature" inasmuch as it is exhibited in many animal populations (to stress the point Thorp even appends a 2-page list of mammals exhibiting homosexual behavior, drawn from Bruce Bagemihl's book, *Biological Exuberance*; pp. 30-31). Against a procreation argument, Thorp argues that the church has accepted non-procreative sexuality among heterosexuals.

None of these are strong arguments for overturning the powerful witness of Scripture against homosexual practice. Consider the following:

1. ***Innateness as anticipated in the ancient world and as irrelevant for assessing an act as moral.*** The argument about innateness of homosexual desire is a complete wash, for two reasons. First, already in the ancient world congenital causation factors for at least some forms of same-sex attraction were posited. As classicist Thomas K. Hubbard notes in his *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (University of California Press, 2003): “Homosexuality in this era [viz., of the early imperial age of Rome] may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category of personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation” (p. 386).

Second, as even Thorp has to admit (p. 26), the “born that way” argument does not do justice to the Christian view of original sin, nor the fact that humans experience a wide array of innate impulses that are sinful. Quite simply, “no clear conclusions about the morality of a behavior can be made from the mere fact of biological causation, because all behavior is biologically caused” (J. Michael Bailey and Brian S. Mustanski, “A therapist’s guide to the genetics of human sexual orientation.” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18.4 [2003]: 429-36, here p. 432). Pedophilia, for example, is every bit as “innate,” that is, not a product of willful choice, as homosexuality. The same can be said for “polysexual” impulses, the common (especially male) dissatisfaction for lifelong monogamy. While at present it is more difficult to tie “orientation” to incest, incest would (or should) not be acceptable even if there were such a thing as an orientation to incest on the part of some. None of God’s commands are predicated on people lacking or losing any innate desire to violate the command in question.

2. ***The absurdity of analogies with left-handedness and ethnicity.*** Left-handedness is a bad analogue for homosexuality because left-handedness is not an impulse to do something God expressly forbids. It is not a desire to merge sexually with another structurally discordant to oneself.

Comparisons between benign non-sexual conditions and disputed forms of sexual relationship are fraught with difficulties. Sexual intercourse has its own distinctive rules. For example, it would be absurd to argue, as Thorp and other proponents of homosexual unions do, that the love commandment validates all sexual unions where love is present. The problem with such a use of the love commandment would be readily apparent if one realized that, while Jesus commanded us to love everyone, he at the same time restricted the number of persons with whom one could have sex to one other person lifetime (based, as we have seen, on a two-sexes prerequisite). Obviously, then, Jesus had a distinctive sex ethic. He absolutely prescribed love of everyone with whom one comes into contact, including an enemy, while absolutely proscribing sex with more than one other person and limiting that one other person to a person of the other sex.

Sexual intimacy is not just more love. It has its own distinctive character from generic, non-sexual love. Accordingly, parents who “love” their children by

having sex with them go to prison. A few years ago at the American Academy of Religion national meeting the Gay Men's Issues in Religion Group had a theme session that advocated for "polyfidelity" (faithful, multiple-partner sexual unions). One of the presenters compared an erection to a particularly warm handshake. Another likened the Trinity to a sexual 'threesome.' These presenters did not realize that sexual unions have their own unique prerequisites that are not required by, and sometimes are at diametrical odds with, the command to love everyone.

A polysexual orientation is a much closer, and thus better, analogue than the non-sexual and non-moral condition of left-handedness. Again, Thorp doesn't want the closer analogues because they lead to a conclusion that Thorp finds undesirable.

The attempt to develop the category of "sexual minorities," on analogy to ethnic minorities, leads to ludicrous results. An ethnicity is a condition that is 100% heritable, absolutely immutable, primarily non-behavioral, and therefore inherently benign. Homosexual orientation is a sexual impulse and, like many sexual impulses, it is:

- Not 100% heritable. Homosexual development cannot be predicted with the degree of certainty that one can predict that two people, say, of French ancestry will always produce a child of French ancestry.
- Open to some change in the course of life, at least as regards the intensity of the impulse. Needless to say, persons of French ancestry do not become more or less French in the course of life.
- Primarily a behavioral desire to do something. Being French or any other ancestry or ethnicity is more a condition of being than of behavior.

Thus homosexuality, unlike ethnicity but like polysexuality (i.e. polyamory), pedosexuality (pedophilia), and desires to have sex with close blood relations, is not an inherently benign condition. Of course, a person is not held culpable merely for experiencing an impulse to do what God forbids. But such an impulse is a sinful impulse because it seeks to violate God's commands. If it were not a sinful impulse there would be no need to refrain from expressing it. When an individual acquiesces to the impulse in thought and/or deed, then the individual becomes culpable for sin.

3. ***Why homosexuality in the animal kingdom does not make homosexual practice natural in the deepest sense.*** Thorp's argument about homosexuality in the animal kingdom is irrelevant even for making his nature argument. I never used my dear departed dog "Cocoa" and her instinctive sexual habits as a basis for determining what is "natural" behavior. You can find animals of various species where some part of the population at least practices incest, pedophilia, extreme polyamory, and cross-species sex, along with same-sex sexual activity. Does this make all such activity "natural"? In one sense, perhaps, but not in all senses.

Nature cannot be limited to impulses but rather must be broadened to include the formal, embodied structures of human existence. The sheer structural incongruence of an incestuous bond, a sexual bond involving more than two

persons concurrently, and an adult-child sexual bond are enough for people to categorize such bonds as unnatural. The unnatural character of homosexual practice does not stem in the first instance from what animals do or don't do. It stems from the totality of embodied maleness, if male, or femaleness, if female, each of which represent only one half of the sexual spectrum. In other words, it stems from the structurally incongruous character (anatomically, physiologically, and psychologically) of same-sex sexual unions. Homosexuality is unnatural in the sense that it is narcissistic arousal for the distinctive features of one's own sex; or the self-deluded desire to complement one's own sex (which is intact) through merger with someone of the same sex, as if one were only half one's own sex.

4. ***Why an otherwise well-adjusted life does not validate homosexual practice.*** The fact that some homosexual persons live otherwise well-adjusted lives does not establish the validity of homosexual practice.

First, the definition of immorality is not limited to what produces *intrinsic, scientifically measurable* harm. If it were otherwise, society would have to endorse some type of virtually every sexual bond. Even adult-child contact does not produce inherent measurable harm, as two APA studies have noted, to say nothing of adult incest or faithful polyamory. Homosexual persons do not become complete moral werewolves simply because they engage in homosexual practice. People compartmentalize their impulses and behaviors, being good in some areas and bad in others. The good doesn't convert the bad into good.

Second, Thorp's claim overlooks the fact that homosexual persons experience disproportionately high rates of measurable harm *in ways that typify their specific sex*. Same-sex erotic bonds lack a person of the other sex to moderate the extremes of a given sex or to fill in the gaps of that given sex. Not surprisingly, homosexual men experience on average markedly higher numbers of sex partners in the course of life and a markedly higher rates of sexually transmitted disease. Homosexual women experience on average unions of shorter duration and higher rates of mental health issues, probably due to the greater personal expectations that women put on sexual relationships (thus putting added pressure on the relationship) and a higher investment of self-worth in the success of the relationship (which, when the relationship fails, leads to greater depression). Because men and women were designed by God to complement each other in a sexual bond, not men and men or women and women, the former type of union is natural, the latter type unnatural.

This leads to the third point: Such problems are symptomatic of a deeper root problem; namely, conceiving a person of the same sex as the appropriate sexual complement to one's own sex.

5. ***A proper use of a procreation argument.*** Thorp dismisses a procreation argument on the grounds that heterosexual relationships are blessed even when lacking a procreative capacity. Procreation was clearly not Paul's main concern either (cf. 1 Cor 7) but that didn't stop him from issuing a severe indictment of homosexual practice in his letters. The procreation argument is a heuristic device—one more clue for why God did not design two persons of the same sex for sexual pairing.

There is a big difference between having equipment failure (infertility among heterosexual couples) and not having the equipment at all (the inherent incapacity for procreation in homosexual bonds).

Thorp's argument from reason is thus badly constructed. He seems not even to be aware of the main counterarguments to his position, much less answer them effectively.

**Thorp's misogyny argument.** A final point needs to be said about Thorp's predictable use of a misogyny argument in this section of his paper. He suggests that "the *deep* reason for the loathing of homosexuals that our culture has known" stems "ultimately from the disprizing of women that was a common feature of the cultures of the Mediterranean basin" (pp. 14-15). But this argument will not work, for at least three reasons.

- First, even Greco-Roman critiques of homosexual practice were more broadly motivated than simply a desire to keep women down. Greco-Roman moralists also appealed to the structural complementarity of the sexes, as regards both anatomical and procreative design. "Basic to the heterosexual position [against homosexual practice in the first few centuries C.E.] is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other" (Hubbard, *Sourebook*, 444). The misogyny argument ignores concerns for formal or structural congruence that they applied (and we still apply) to various forbidden sexual practices.
- Second, in the Greco-Roman milieu opposition to male homosexual practice intensified as appreciation for women grew. Advocates for the superiority of male-female love generally espoused a *higher* view of women as suitable companions and friends deserving of equal pleasure in the sexual bond.
- Third, the illogical but inevitable corollary of the misogyny argument is that ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity were the most misogynistic cultures in the ancient world. For it is in these cultures that one finds the strongest opposition to homosexual practice. As it is, the idea that these cultures were more deeply misogynistic than "pagan" cultures is absurd. Therefore, it is also absurd to argue that the *primary* stimulus for opposing homosexual practice in the pages of the Bible was a fundamental fear or hatred of women.

## Scripture

As we have already noted, Thorp's discussion of Scripture (pp. 17-19) is poor indeed. At no point does he provide a careful examination of any texts of Scripture. Instead he focuses on two main philosophical arguments that are more asserted than substantiated.

1. ***Why a prohibition of "committed" homosexual unions is both reasonable and scriptural.*** Thorp first contends that "it seems extremely unlikely" that the Bible could be expressing opposition to "lifelong, committed, nurturing" homosexual relationships since "the language is too harshly dismissive to allow us to think it is motivated by any knowledge" of such (p. 18).

Before offering my main critique an aside is in order. First, one should bear in mind that the characterization "lifelong" is problematic given that only a tiny fraction of all homosexual relationships turn out to be lifelong—certainly less than 5% and probably less than 1% in cases where there is not premature death through AIDS. A more realistic expectation for about 10-25% of committed homosexual unions is "long-term," meaning something like a union of 5-20 years duration.

I offer two main points in response to Thorp's argument.

First, this is nothing at all unusual or unreasonable about an absolute prohibition of homosexual unions, even of a committed sort. In fact, Thorp would presumably apply the same logic to dismissing absolutely all adult consensual incestuous bonds, say, between a man and his (widowed or divorced?) mother or between a woman and her brother. Surely he would not argue here that our retention of an absolute prohibition of such unions is "too harshly dismissive" when it does not make exceptions for adult incestuous bonds that are "lifelong, committed, nurturing" (and, I might add, that are infertile or that use birth control)? Presumably, he would recognize that formal or structural prerequisites exist for sexual bonds irrespective of whether the sexual union exhibits love and commitment. As I have argued, the structural discomplementarity of homosexual bonds is even more severe than that of incestuous bonds.

We have also noted that faithful polyamorous arrangements—whether a traditional polygamous bond or non-traditional "threesomes" and the like—are not as severe a violation of God's sexual norms as are homosexual unions. Jesus predicated his view of monogamy on a two-sexes prerequisite and the foundation must be more important than the structure built on the foundation. And yet in the Western Church we don't make any allowances for polygamy, even in circumstances where consenting adults are involved and love and commitment are evident. Thorp refers to the tolerance of polygamy "in many Anglican jurisdictions in Africa . . . in cases where men who [already] have several wives convert to Christianity" (p. 18). Yet presumably even Thorp would not make exceptions (not even in Africa) for Christians who want to enter into a *new* polygamous arrangement. But isn't this view "too harshly dismissive"?

Thorp's problem here is that he simply assumes in the case of homosexual practice (though apparently only here) that love and commitment ultimately trump all formal requirements for a sexual union, so long as intrinsic measurable harm cannot be demonstrated. But such a position leads to absurd results that not even he would accept (hopefully).

Parenthetically, Thorp makes an argument based on the church's partial accommodation to **divorce and remarriage** in modern times, an accommodation that he attributes to changing circumstances (p. 18). However, the argument won't get him to where he wants to go as regards validating homosexual unions, for at least two reasons. First, as we have already noted, Jesus and the entire apostolic witness (to say nothing of the Old Testament witness) understood the two-sexes prerequisite for marriage to be more, not less, important than the lifelong character of such bonds. The dissolution of a natural bond cannot be compared to an active entrance into a strongly unnatural bond. This is particularly true in cases where one has largely been the victim of the dissolution rather than the perpetrator but it is even true in the case of the perpetrator. It is not possible to reason correctly from accommodation for a lesser offense to an accommodation for a greater offense. For the same reason I've not heard anyone arguing that greater laxity on divorce/remarriage permits greater laxity on "committed" incest. Second, the church doesn't ordain anybody who has been divorced and remarried five times, let alone someone who declares that s/he will continue to get divorced and remarried monthly with the fewest negative side-effects. Yet that is precisely what Thorp and other advocates of homosexual unions want the church to do with someone who is actively and unrepentantly engaged in serial homosexual practice.

My second point to Thorp's assumption that the Bible's indictment of homosexual unions could not have embraced committed homosexual bonds is this: Demonstrating that homosexual practice is rejected absolutely (i.e., without exception) by the authors of Scripture is easy to demonstrate. I will lay out only a brief outline here with respect to Paul's view because (1) Thorp himself has made no attempt to document his conclusions by careful exegesis of Scripture in its historical context and (2) demonstrating this fully would add at least another ten pages of text to this paper when I have already demonstrated this fully in many other writings that Thorp and others simply need to take the time to read. Here are six main arguments:

- 1) *Appeal to the creation texts.* Paul clearly had in view the creation texts in Gen 1:27 and 2:24 behind his two main indictments of homosexual practice, Rom 1:24-27 (note eight points of correspondence, in a parallel tripartite structure, between Gen 1:26-27 and Rom 1:23-27) and 1 Cor 6:9 (see the citation of Gen 2:24 in 1 Cor 6:16). These echoes establish that Paul's main problem with homosexual practice was that it was a violation of God's will for male-female pairing established in creation, not that it was typically exploitative.
- 2) *The nature argument.* Paul's nature argument in Romans 1.24-27 does not lend itself to distinctions between exploitative and non-exploitative manifestations of homosexual behavior but rather to an absolute rejection of all homosexual bonds.

By *para phusin* (“beyond nature” in the sense of “contrary to, against nature”) Paul meant that the evidence from the material structures of creation—here the complementary embodied character of maleness and femaleness—gives clear evidence of God’s will for human sexual pairing (cf. the quote from Hubbard above against the misogyny argument).

- 3) *The absolute wording of Rom 1:24-27*. In Rom 1:24-27 Paul emphasizes the *mutuality* of the homoerotic desires (“inflamed with their yearning for one another” and “their bodies being dishonored among themselves”). This proves that Paul is not restricting his remarks to coercive, exploitative acts. Moreover, the wording of “exchanging” and “leaving behind” the other sex for the same sex is absolute. The text does not say that men and women exchanged or left behind committed relationships with either sex for exploitative relationships with either sex. It states clearly that the problem was solely the exchange or leaving behind of other-sex sexual unions to pursue same-sex sexual unions.
- 4) *The indictment of lesbian intercourse in Rom 1:26* does not support the view that Scripture’s indictment is limited to exploitative homosexual acts, since lesbianism in antiquity was not characterized by pederasty, prostitution, or abuse of slaves. Indeed, Greco-Roman moralists in antiquity who wanted to argue against man-male intercourse in its entirety sometimes cited intercourse between women as the ultimate trump card inasmuch as lesbian intercourse was disapproved of even by men who advocated for man-male intercourse. Thorp contends in a footnote that “it has been persuasively argued” that Rom 1:26 refers to heterosexual anal intercourse” rather than lesbian behavior. This is false, given the following facts: (a) the parallel phrasing of Rom 1:26 and 1:27, where “even their females exchanged the natural use” parallels “likewise also the males, having left the natural use *of the female*”; (b) Paul’s attribution of blame exclusively to “females” with no mention of males in 1:26; (c) instances in ancient sources where one finds a pairing male homoeroticism and female homoeroticism; (d) references to lesbianism as unnatural in ancient “pagan” literature but no such references to heterosexual anal intercourse as unnatural; (e) the uniformly negative view of female homosexual practice among men in the Greco-Roman world; and (f) the dominant history of interpretation of Rom 1:26 as lesbianism by the Church Fathers. On the last point Augustine (ca. 410) is a notable exception, but (as B. Brooten notes) this may have been due to his debates with the Pelagians, who in Augustine’s view had an overly positive view of sex in marriage apart from its procreative function. All the other Church Fathers from Augustine’s time or earlier who commented on what Paul meant by unnatural female intercourse in Rom 1:26 understood it as lesbian intercourse: Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200), Tertullian (ca. 200), “Ambrosiaster” (ca. 370), and John Chrysostom (ca. 390; cf. Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women* [University of Chicago Press, 1996]).
- 5) *The inclusive character of the terms malakoi and arsenokoitai in the historical and literary context for 1 Cor 6.9*. As regards the meaning of *malakoi* (lit., “soft

men,” in the sense of men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners) note:

- a. Its place in amidst other participants in illicit sexual intercourse and its pairing with the immediately following word *arsenokoitai*.
- b. Philo of Alexandria’s use of cognate words to refer to men who actively feminize themselves for the purpose of attracting other men.
- c. Greco-Roman uses of *malakoi* and the parallel Latin word *molles* (soft men) to denote effeminate *adult* males who are biologically and/or psychologically disposed to desire penetration by men.

As regards the meaning of *arsenokoitai* (literally, “men lying [*koitē*] with a male [*arsēn*]”) note (among other reasons):

- d. That the word is a specifically Jewish/Christian word formulated from the prohibitions of man-male intercourse in Lev 18:22 and 20:13, which Jews of the period interpreted absolutely to include consensual adult male contact.
- e. Actual usage of *arsenokoitai* and cognates in Christian texts written after 1 Corinthians, which was not limited to pederasts or men who had sex with call boys.
- f. The implications of the broad context in 1 Cor 5-7, such as the parallel case of incest in ch. 5, the presumption of consent in the vice list in 6:9-10, the citation of Gen 2:24 in 6:16, and the presumption of a male-female prerequisite in the treatment of marriage in ch. 7 (cf. also 1 Cor 11:2-16).
- g. The fact that sex between two free adult males in the Roman Imperial Age was regarded as more offensive, not less so, than sex with an adolescent boy.

- 6) *The existence of committed homosexual love in the Greco-Roman world.* A conception of caring homoerotic unions already existed in Paul’s cultural environment. Yet even homosexual unions of this sort were rejected by some Greco-Roman moralists. For example, in a debate over heterosexual and homosexual bonds, Plutarch’s friend Daphnaeus admits that homosexual relationships are not necessarily exploitative, for “union contrary to nature does not destroy or curtail a lover’s tenderness.” Yet, he declares, even when a “union with males” is conducted “willingly” it remains “shameful” since males “with softness (*malakia*) and effeminacy (*thēlutēs*) [are] surrendering themselves, as Plato says, ‘to be mounted in the custom of four-footed animals’ and to be sowed with seed contrary to nature” (*Dialogue on Love* 751).

Historically speaking, then, the evidence is overwhelming that Paul, like all other Jews and Christians of the period, opposed homosexual practice categorically and absolutely. Louis Compton was correct when he stated in his massive *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Harvard University Press, 2003):

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

**2. Why the "Big Picture" of Scripture doesn't disavow a prohibition of homosexual practice.** Thorp's second line of reasoning is that "even if Paul means to condemn such relationships," we should read the Bible "for the big picture," which "urges us in the direction of love and acceptance of gay and lesbian people" and "abstinence from judgment" (pp. 18-19).

The problem with this argument is that there is nothing in the "big picture" of the Bible on sexual ethics that moves "in the direction of" support for homosexual practice. The New Testament, to say nothing of the Old Testament, certainly doesn't define love as tolerating behaviors that Scripture strongly, pervasively, and counterculturally forbids. "Love does not rejoice over wrongdoing (or: unrighteousness, *adikia*) but rejoices in conjunction with the truth" (1 Cor 13:6). In a context having to do with sexual behavior Paul insisted that what counts is "keeping the commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19). An outraged Paul asked in the case of the incestuous man, "Isn't it the case that you are to judge those inside (the church)?" (1 Cor 5:12). He intended this rule to apply equally to men who have sex with a male and to adulterers (6:9).

Jesus was no different. Jesus coupled his outreach to tax collectors and sexual sinners with a call for repentance as an essential precondition for inheriting the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15 par.; 6:12 par.; Matt 11:20-21 par.; 12:41 par.; Luke 13:3-5). In the paradigmatic story of the woman caught in adultery Jesus prevented the crowd from stoning the woman—dead people don't repent—but clearly commanded the woman to "no longer be sinning" (John 8:11). This command is combined elsewhere in John with the warning "lest something worse happen to you" (i.e., loss of eternal life; John 5:14). In Matthew's Sermon on the Mount the saying about cutting off offending body parts in order to avoid being sent to hell full-bodied is sandwiched in between two sets of teaching on the importance of sexual purity (Matt 5:27-32). Jesus viewed rebuke of the recalcitrant as an integral part of what it meant to love one's neighbor (compare Luke 17:3-4 par. Matt 18:15, 21-22 with Lev 19:17-18). He repeatedly warned about the perils of the coming judgment for those who only hear his words but do not do them (e.g., Matt 7.13-27). He defined discipleship to him as taking up one's cross, denying oneself, and losing one's life (Mark 8.34-37; Matt 10.38-39; Luke 14.27; 17.33; John 12.25)—in short, radical death to self, not accommodation to preexisting intense bodily urges to do what God forbids.

As we have seen, the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" that Jesus lifted from Lev 19:18 as the second greatest commandment does not lead us to accept a wider array of sexual behaviors. For Jesus interpreted "neighbor" as broadly as possible to mean "everyone with whom one might come into contact, including one's enemy." Yet

he developed a sexual ethic that narrowed further the sexual ethics of the Old Testament by restricting the number of persons with whom one could have sex to one other person of the other sex lifetime—an interpretation, as we have seen, derived from the male/female, man/woman prerequisite enunciated in Gen 1:27 and 2:24. Now perhaps Thorp understands Jesus' interpretation of the love commandment better than Jesus himself did. But I seriously doubt it.

Another person who understood the love commandment was Augustine.

Do not imagine that . . . you then love your neighbor when you do not rebuke him. This is not love, but mere feebleness. Let love be fervent to correct, to amend. . . . Love not in the person his error, but the person; for the person God made, the error the person himself made. (*Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John* 7.11; *NPNF*, slightly modified)

Tolerating or accepting sinful behavior would only convey to the perpetrators that the sin in question is “no big deal,” leave the individual exposed to the wrath of God, and put such a one at risk of exclusion from an eternal relationship with God—not to mention the harmful effects of undermining the community's resolve to resist sexual impurity (1 Cor 5.6-7: a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough) and provoking God's judgment on the community as a whole.

As an aside, we should note that Thorp's understanding of the Spirit/letter contrast does not mean in Scripture (i.e. Paul in 2 Cor 3:6; Rom 2:27, 29; 7:6) what Thorp alleges that it means. Whereas Thorp understands it to mean “surface rules” versus “the deep lessons of Scripture” (p. 28), Paul meant a mere script that does not empower one to do what is commanded versus the impartation of the gift of the Spirit that enables us to do what God commands (i.e., the law written on the heart). In short, the issue is not one of overturning God's foundational commands (Thorp) but rather one of being empowered at long last to keep these commands. Of course, I prefer Paul to Thorp.

Given the arguments that can be mounted against Thorp's use of Scripture and reason, there seems to be unwarranted arrogance in Thorp's statement: “A deep reading of the Scripture . . . combined with what Reason tells us about homosexuality, *easily* overcomes the surface prohibitions” (p. 19; my emphasis). Thorp has offered neither “a deep reading of the Scripture” nor even a convincing presentation of the case from reason.

## Tradition

As regards his treatment of “Tradition” (pp. 20-22), Thorp offers nothing positive to bolster his case. Indeed, he tacitly admits that there is nothing in the long history of the church that might lead to an openness toward homosexual practice—other than the fact that the church has changed on some other issues (usury, slavery), none of which, as we have seen, remotely approximates the extensive change that would be required to affirm homosexual practice. Rather than offer something positive from tradition, Thorp performs two ‘rear guard’ actions.

First, he argues that “what has been believed everywhere, at all times, by everyone” (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*) is not necessarily “reliably catholic teaching.” Thorp goes so far as to argue that the Church “*should* change” its teachings “in the light of evolving *circumstances*” (p. 22, his emphases). Such a statement, however, requires qualification. “Evolving circumstances” are only relevant if they fundamentally refute the primary premise on which the scriptural teaching is based. We have already shown that Thorp has not made this case with regard to the issue of homosexual practice. Indeed, the evidence indicates that the premise for Scripture’s opposition—namely, that men and women are each other’s sexual “other halves,” not men and men or women and women—is not fundamentally affected by the existence of “lifelong” or “loving” homosexual unions. Scripture doesn’t indict homosexual practice on the sole basis of a lack of longevity or loving affect.

Then, secondly, Thorp defines what Hooker meant by “tradition” as that which the Church believes to be true on the basis of Reason (note: Thorp says “Scripture and Reason” but his whole discussion indicates Reason as the driving force). In effect, although Thorp refers to Hooker’s three-legged stool, Thorp’s own understanding of Hooker leaves one with a two-legged stool since he interprets Tradition to be the virtual equivalent of Reason. Since we have already shown that Thorp is far from making his case from reason, let alone from Scripture, his discussion of Tradition gets him nowhere.

## Conclusion

Thorp concludes as follows:

This essay set out to make an Anglican case, in an Anglican way, for the blessing of same sex unions in the Canadian Church. It has undertaken to show that the introduction of such a practice . . . would sit comfortably on the three-legged stool of Scripture, Tradition and Reason. (p. 27)

As it is, though Thorp may have “set out to make an Anglican case, in an Anglican way,” the case that he has attempted to make is no different from the case that other proponents of homosexual practice have attempted to make from their own denominational heritage—whether it be Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, or Baptist. Neither Hooker’s delineation of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, on the one hand, nor Thorp’s contention that circumstances may change the “details” of the Bible’s commands, on the other, represents a peculiarly Anglican approach to hermeneutics.

Rather than demonstrating that blessing homoerotic unions “sits comfortably on the three-legged stool of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason,” Thorp has rather shown that his position has no leg to stand on (or, to fit the image, sit on). Scripture is decisively against any blessing of homosexual unions, inasmuch as blessing such a union would constitute implicit endorsement for the homosexual activity that constitutes the union. In the same way, blessing an adult, committed incestuous relationship or polyamorous relationship would imply an endorsement of the incest or polyamory that establishes the sexual bond. Neither Reason nor Tradition provides substantive grounds for deviating from Scripture’s two-sexes prerequisite for valid sexual unions. Indeed, Reason and Tradition actually support Scripture’s stance rather than stand in tension with it.

The truth is that Thorp adopts a distinctly anti-Anglican position both in the secondary or even tertiary status that he gives Scripture (contrast the primacy that Hooker gave Scripture in his three-legged stool) and in the way that he mishandles Reason and Tradition. His position is anti-Anglican because it is anti-Christian. Christians can hold deeply anti-Christian positions and this is apparently one such case.

Recapping our main points:

- In the **Introduction**, we argued that Scripture’s two-sexes prerequisite for marriage (and thus all sexual bonds) is no little “detail” but a core value in Scripture’s sexual ethics. We showed this in several ways.
  - We pointed to Jesus’ use of this core value in sexual ethics, which he believed to be firmly ensconced in the creation stories (Gen 1:27 and 2:24), as a foundation for extrapolating a more demanding approach to monogamy and marital indissolubility.

- We noted that the male-female prerequisite is the foundation or prior analogue for defining other critical sexual norms, including prohibitions of incest, polyamory, and adultery.
- Consistent with Jesus' and Paul's teaching, we showed that same-sex intercourse radically offends against God's intentional creation of humans as "male and female" (Gen 1:27) and the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24).
- To this we added the fact that every text in Scripture that treats the issue of homosexual practice treats it as a high offense abhorrent to God. Along the same lines we noted that the assumption of a male-female prerequisite and the attendant opposition toward homosexual practice in ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity was pervasive, absolute, and countercultural.
- In our treatment of Thorp's argument for "**Moral Evolution**," we noted that Thorp took no account of (1) the more common pattern of moral devolution and (2) the fact that for Jesus moral evolution meant a tightening, not loosening, of God's moral standards. We also showed that (3) Thorp's attempt at analogical reasoning, comparing the Church's current stance on homosexual practice to its earlier positions on usury and slavery, failed at two key levels:
  - It failed to note the major differences between these alleged analogies and the Church's appropriation of a core value in Scripture's sexual ethics. Here we focused on the slavery argument, demonstrating that Scripture exhibits a decisively critical edge toward slavery while maintaining a deep, vested interest in a male-female prerequisite.
  - Moreover, it failed in ignoring the much closer analogues that can be found in the Church's stance against incestuous and polyamorous relationships of an adult, committed, and caring sort. We noted that Thorp apparently fixated on more remote analogues in order to 'fix' the game of analogical reasoning; that is, he accommodated the results to his desired ideological objective. This, we suggested, was a dishonest use of analogical reasoning. Fair use of analogical reasoning demands that one follow the lead of the closest analogies, even when doing so leads one to results that one would prefer not to reach.
- In our discussion of **Reason**, we noted (1) that (contrary to Thorp's profile of historical development) the Church has maintained a consistent stance against homosexual practice as a high moral offense that is contrary to the Creator's design embedded in nature. (2) As regards allegedly radical new knowledge about homosexuality, we made a number of points.

- We underscored, first, that already in the Greco-Roman milieu of Paul’s day orientation theories had been formulated for at least some forms of homosexual practice; and, second, that the innateness of a given impulse is no argument for the morality of that impulse since all impulses have a biological basis.
- We showed the attempted analogies to left-handedness and ethnicity to be fatally flawed since neither of these analogies involves an impulse to do what God expressly forbids. We argued that Jesus himself did not believe that application of the love commandment was a *sufficient* standard for defining acceptable sexual relationships; that sexual relationships necessitated special formal or structural prerequisites which did not apply to love generically construed. If it were otherwise, then having sex with everyone (including close blood relations, multiple persons concurrently, and children) would be an appropriate fulfillment of the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself.
- We also demonstrated that evidence of homosexuality in the animal kingdom does not prove that homosexual practice is “natural” in the deepest sense. For animals regularly engage in lots of behavior that we would consider “unnatural” because “nature” entails not just innate urges but considerations of embodied complementarity. As unnatural characteristics of homosexuality, we referred both to the narcissism of being erotically aroused by the distinctive features of one’s own sex and the self- and other-dishonoring delusion of imaging a person of the same sex as the sexual complement to one’s own sex.
- We argued that Thorp’s point about well-adjusted homosexual persons is mitigated by two facts: first, that no form of consensual sexual behavior that we currently regard as immoral produces intrinsic, scientifically measurable harm; and, second, that homosexual males and homosexual females do experience disproportionately high rates of measurable harm in ways that typify the extremes and gaps of their given sex.
- We indicated that a procreation argument had validity as a heuristic device; namely, as a clue about God’s larger design for human sexual pairing.
- We showed that Thorp’s attempt to blame the Church’s opposition to homosexual practice on a latent misogynistic impulse was misguided for three reasons: first, that it took no account of arguments based on formal or structural congruence employed in the ancient (and modern) world; second, that it failed to recognize that higher views of women in antiquity led to increasing opposition to homosexual practice; and, third, that it led to the manifestly absurd corollary that the most misogynistic cultures in antiquity were ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity.

- As regards **Scripture**, we noted the serious deficiencies in the attention and priority that Thorp gave to the subject, which is understandable in light of Scripture’s profound opposition to homosexual practice and preservation of a two-sexes prerequisite.
  - We first established that, contra Thorp, there was nothing “extremely unlikely” or “harshly dismissive” about the view that Scripture is absolutely opposed to homosexual practice, for this is comparable to Scripture’s stance against committed incestuous unions and to the New Testament’s consistent opposition to committed polyamorous bonds (note too the Old Testament’s opposition to polyandry). Quite simply, there are formal or structural prerequisites for sexual bonds, involving the complementarity of embodied existence, that transcend the question of how two (or more) people feel about each other sexually.
  - We then showed that the modern ecclesiastical accommodation to divorce and remarriage is a less helpful analogue, both because Scripture doesn’t treat divorce and remarriage as significant an infraction as homosexual practice and because divorce/remarriage doesn’t approach the serial or highly repetitive character of homosexual practice.
  - We followed this with six main arguments (and many sub-arguments) for concluding that Paul’s opposition to homosexual practice—consistent with the opposition everywhere in early Judaism and early Christianity (including Jesus)—was absolute and inclusive of caring homosexual bonds. Most of these arguments Thorp appears not even to be aware of and to none does he mount a credible counterargument.
  - We concluded by showing that Scripture’s “big picture” in no way disavows a prohibition of homosexual practice; that love in Scripture is always “love in truth” (perhaps a better phrasing than “truth in love”) and cannot be reduced to toleration or affirmation of behaviors which God declares to be abhorrent and which put persons in jeopardy; that Scripture demands that the Church should make judgments against sexual immorality while lovingly seeking to recover the lost for an eternal relationship with God; and that Jesus’ call to discipleship involves a radical denial of self.
- Finally, in our discussion of **Tradition** we indicated that Thorp could derive no positive argument from tradition to substantiate the radical change in Christian sexual ethics that Thorp and others are advocating. The best that Thorp could come up with is (1) contending that “what has been believed everywhere, at all times, by everyone” is not necessarily “reliably catholic teaching,” restating his fatally flawed “moral evolution” examples of usury and slavery; and (2) reinterpreting Tradition to be the virtual equivalent of the Church’s use of Reason,

which is not helpful to Thorp's overall argument since he failed to make the case from both Reason and Scripture.

Thorp ends with two final thoughts. First, he presents as the only two alternatives for the Anglican Church of Canada: either continue "loathing" homosexual persons or "fully accept" homosexual persons by blessing homosexual unions. These are false alternatives. Replace "homosexual persons" with "polysexual persons" and you get the point. Persons who experience homosexual desires are like any persons who experience desires to do what God expressly forbids (which, ultimately, takes in everyone). They are welcome in the Church but not to engage unrepentantly in behavior that Scripture treats (and, I might add, Reason confirms) as abhorrent to God—irrespective of whatever intense impulses are experienced. The Church obviously should not loathe persons struggling with same-sex attractions either by consigning them callously to hell *or* by blessing behavior that will put their inheritance in God's kingdom at risk. The Church expresses its love *precisely* in a refusal to condone homosexual practice, coupled with efforts at meeting intimacy needs short of violating God's clear commands.

Thorp's second point is that homosexual persons are capable of exhibiting fruits of the Spirit. The point, however, is both trivial and problematic: trivial because most persons in the church are able to exhibit such fruit in some areas of their life even as they sin in other areas; problematic because the very act of engaging in same-sex intercourse (like incest and 'polyfidelity') is itself evidence that insufficient fruit has been borne.

The fruit-bearing analogy was used by the early Church to bring in Gentile believers who were uncircumcised and who did not observe the full array of dietary commands in the Law of Moses. However, both Jesus and Paul expressly *rejected* comparisons between such ritual observances and moral matters involving sexual practice (Mark 7:21-23; 1 Cor 6:12-20; 7:18-19). Scripture does not ground circumcision in creation structures but it does so ground a two-sexes prerequisite for sexual activity. Circumcision and dietary laws were Jewish ritual prescriptions enjoined only on proselytes and, like ritual generally, affected the body only superficially. But Judaism included a prohibition of homosexual practice among its "Noahide laws" enjoined on all Gentiles. And both Judaism and the early church understood that sexual immorality affected the body holistically. Gentile inclusion in the first-century Church was about welcoming persons, not about accepting the sexual practices (including homosexual practice) that typified much of Gentile life. Such practices, according to both the Apostolic Decree and Paul's letters, were distinctly unwelcome (Acts 15:20; 1 Thess 4:3-8).

I trust that Prof. Thorp is sincere in his beliefs. However, when he ends by saying that

Gay liberation is *clearly* the work of the Spirit. How can it reasonably be otherwise?

one can only shake one's head in astonishment at the degree to which he is sadly mistaken, *and* in loving concern at the prospect that he might contribute to the self-deception of those struggling with same-sex attractions, *and* in holy fear at the danger of God's judgment faced by the Anglican Church of Canada. May it be otherwise.

## Additional Resources by Dr. Robert Gagnon

For some of the resources cited below and other materials go to [www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net).

- 2001 *Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- 2002 “Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts? A Critique of Walter Wink’s Views on the Bible and Homosexuality,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24:72-125. Online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoWinkHBTResp.pdf>.
- 2003 *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, with Dan O. Via. Minneapolis: Fortress. Also: “Notes to Gagnon’s Essay in the Gagnon-Via *Two Views* Book.” 50 pgs. Online: <http://www.robagnon.net/2Views/HomoViaRespNotesRev.pdf>.
- 2003 “Does the Bible Regard Same-Sex Intercourse as Intrinsically Sinful?” Pp. 106-55 in *Christian Sexuality: Normative and Pastoral Principles*. Ed. R. E. Saltzman. Minneapolis: Kirk House.
- 2003 “A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture*, Part 2.” *HBT* 25: 179-275. Online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoBalchHBTRReview2.pdf>.
- 2003 “An Open Letter to the Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold.” 3 pages. Online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoGriswoldLetter.pdf>.
- 2003 “Response to Countryman’s Review in *Anglican Theological Review*: On Careful Scholarship.” 18 pages. Online: <http://www.robagnon.net/Reviews/homoCountrymanResp.pdf>.
- 2005 “Old Testament and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of the Case Made by Phyllis Bird.” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117: 367-94.
- 2005 “Scriptural Perspectives on Homosexuality and Sexual Identity.” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 24: 293-303.
- 2005 “Sexuality.” Pp. 739-48 in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Eds. K. J. Vanhoozer, et al. London: SPCK; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- 2005 “Why the Disagreement over the Biblical Witness on Homosexual Practice? A Response to Myers and Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together?*” *Reformed Review* 59: 19-130. Online: <http://www.westernsem.edu/wtseminary/assets/Gagnon%20Aut05.pdf>.

- 2006 "Homosexuality." Pp. 327-32 in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*. Eds. C. Campbell-Jack, G. J. McGrath, and C. S. Evans. Leicester, U.K.: Inter-Varsity Press.
- 2006 "Does Jack Rogers's New Book 'Explode the Myths' about the Bible and Homosexuality and 'Heal the Church?' Part 3." 15 pgs. Online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/RogersBookReviewed3.pdf>.
- 2006 "Does Jack Rogers's New Book 'Explode the Myths' about the Bible and Homosexuality and 'Heal the Church?' Part 4." 16 pgs. Online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/RogersBookReviewed4.pdf>.
- 2007 "Is Rowan Williams wrong on the meaning of Romans?" *Church of England Newspaper (The Record)*, 4 May 2007, pp. 22-23, online: <http://www.churchnewspaper.com/Get-CEN-Online.aspx>. Fuller version: "Rowan Williams' Wrong Reading of Romans (. . . and John 14.6)," 11 pgs. Online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homosexRowanWilliamsResp.pdf>.
- 2007 "Did Jesus Approve of a Homosexual Couple in the Story of the Centurion at Capernaum?" 8 pages. Online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homosexCenturionStory.pdf>.