

A Literature Survey of the History of Interpretation of the Sodom and Gomorrah Incident of Genesis 19:1-29, With Special Reference to the Homosexuality Debate

By

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any institution for a degree.

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Abstract

The homosexuality debate is fast proving among the most divisive in the Christian world today. The Sodom account of Genesis 19:1-29 is perhaps the most famous in this regard.

For most of church history this account has been interpreted as a condemnation of homosexual activity. In recent decades, however, this traditional interpretation has been challenged. In 1955 Derrick Sherwin Bailey produced *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, a work that started the revisionist move toward reinterpreting the Bible's stance on homosexual behaviour. Bailey's argument concerning the Sodom account focused on a retranslation of the Hebrew word *yada*. Usually translated 'to know', but understood as 'to have sexual intercourse with', Bailey reinterpreted the word to mean 'get acquainted with', in the sense that the Sodomites merely desired to get to know their visitors in the context of hospitality.

Bailey's views have been largely discarded by Traditionalist and Revisionist alike, but newer revisionist arguments were developed from the 1980's. The new arguments did not deny the presence of homosexual activity in Sodom, but merely redefined the framework, averring that the Sodomites were not homosexuals themselves, but heterosexuals with motives to humiliate the guests sexually, outside of any sexual desire per se. This view has gained more credibility than that of Bailey, though is not universally embraced.

Evangelical and Traditionalist scholarship began to appear from the 1980's, but at this stage representatives of this camp are outnumbered by their revisionist counterparts. Such works concentrated on expounding and re-affirming the traditional view, and on rebutting the revisionist arguments from inhospitality and culture.

At this point in the debate, then, there is still very much division among scholars on the issue.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

The question of the interpretation of the sin or sins of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 falls within the context of the so-called same-sex debate, which is fast proving one of the most divisive and relevant topics in the church today. For instance, Njongonkulu Ndungane, Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, has commented that the same-sex issue is one that 'is not going to go away'. (Address at the *Consultation on Homosexuality* conference, Wednesday, 22 October, 2003, a conference initiated by the Church of the Province of South Africa and organised through the University of Natal-Pietermaritzburg's School of Theology, headed up by Prof. Gerald West and Rev. Gary Leonard).

Notably, the Sodom and Gomorrah story is probably the best known, and perhaps the most debated, text invoked in the debate. Thus Gagnon (2001:71) avers that, 'Traditionally, the so-called 'Sodom and Gomorrah' account of Genesis 19:1-29 has been interpreted as the classic Bible story about homosexuality' (see also Wenham 1994: Explanation; Rogers 2006:70).

1.2. Aim and Objectives

The following paper will attempt to establish a literature survey of studies conducted on the Genesis 19 Sodom encounter, with special attention on the period 1955 to the present, which is the focal point for the current debate.

1.3. Current State of Scholarship

The state of scholarship in this area may be said to be in flux. The same-sex debate has become a point of focus for Traditionalist and Revisionist scholars alike. In this regard Evangelical scholar De Young (2000:9) avers that:

The traditional Christian view was that homosexuality displeases God so much that its practice was the reason God destroyed the city of Sodom. From that account in the book of Genesis on through Revelation, scholars have found that Scripture consistently disapproves of homosexual behavior. This view has prevailed in the Christian church until the closing years of the twentieth century.

(It must be noted, however, that even this notion of uninterrupted condemnation of homosexual behaviour through church history has come under dispute, see Boswell 1980:334; Furnish 1994:19; Scroggs 1983:73. This will be discussed below). Pertinent to the scope of this thesis, however, is that recent decades have seen a shift in scholarship on the question of the Bible's stance on homosexual conduct. It is this new arena of scholarly debate (specifically the Sodom and Gomorrah incident) that will be the focus of this paper.

The first major work in this regard was that of Bailey (1955), who was followed by McNeill (1976:54-55), Boswell (1980:93-94), Doyle (1998:84-100); and Morschauer (2003: 461-485). The gist of revisionist scholarship generally follows one of two hypotheses:

1. the Bailey model, that the Sodom and Gomorrah incident did not mention sexual behaviour at all;
2. from the 1980's on, the post-Bailey model, that it did mention sexual behaviour, but did not condemn consensual homosexual behaviour as such.

As regards the ratio of Traditionalist as opposed to Revisionist scholars, Gagnon (2001:38) notes:

While book-length treatments of homosexuality by biblical scholars or church historians supportive of homosexuality have appeared in a steady stream since

1980 (particularly those by Boswell, Scroggs, Edwards, Countryman, Brooten and Nissinen), those by biblical scholars who question the legitimacy of homosexual behavior are fewer and more recent.

The various scholars in their respective camps are placed as follows:

I. Traditional

Botha (2008); Davidson (1979); Davidson (2007); De Young (2000); Fields (1997); Gagnon (2001); Grenz (1998); Gudel (1993); Hamilton (1995); Kidner (1967); Letellier (1995); Malick (1993); Sarna (1974); Schmidt (1995); Soards (1995); Ukleja (1983); Webb (2001); Wenham (1994); Wold (1998).

II. Revisionist

Bailey (1975 [1955]); Bechtel (1998); Bird (2000); Boswell 1980; Brueggemann (1982); Countryman (1988); Doyle (1998); Furnish (1994); Germond and de Gruchy (1997); Greenberg (1988); Hanigan (1988); Kugel (2001); Loader (1990); McNeill (1993 [1976]); Milgrom (2000); Morschauser (2003); Newman (1998); Nissinen (1998); Pronk (1993); Rogers (2006); Scanzoni (1978); Scroggs (1983); Seow (1996); Stiebert J & Walsh (2001); Stone (1995); Tonson (2001); Via (2003).

It must be noted that there are some Evangelical scholars who concur that the Sodom account by itself is limited in commenting satisfactorily on the question of same-sex relations. Grenz (1998:40), for example, avers:

At the same time, we must readily admit that what is depicted and condemned in these texts is violent homosexual rape. As a result, as come away from these texts with a crucial question not satisfactorily answered: What about homosexual relationships between consenting adults?

Gagnon (2001:71) concedes that 'To the extent that the story does not deal directly with consensual homosexual relationships, it is not an "ideal" text to guide contemporary Christian sexual ethics.' However, for him, 'Nevertheless, many go too far when they argue that the story has little or nothing to do with homosexual

practice' (see also Soards 1995:16). Such scholars do, however, find in other biblical passages sufficient sanction against homosexual relations.

1.4. Definitions

Some definitions and clarifications are in order:

- Rather than use the term 'Evangelical' to describe the traditional church viewpoint, I use the term 'Traditionalist'. This is because not all scholars in the conservative camp (or who have voiced conservative opinions on this matter) would necessarily view themselves as Evangelical as such (e.g., Gagnon, Pannenberg, Catholic scholars, Jewish scholars). In this regard 'Traditionalist' may be a better umbrella term.
- Likewise the term 'Revisionist' is used instead of 'Liberal', as we feel that the former term is a better umbrella term. For example, there are some who would term themselves 'Evangelical' who would opt for a prohomosexual interpretation of Scripture (e.g., those of the Emerging Church).

Chapter 2

The Traditional Interpretation of the Sodom Account

2.1 Early Jewish Interpretation

As regards pre-Christian interpretation, Josephus, Philo, apocryphal and intertestamental sources, as well as the rabbis, all condemned Sodom for homosexual practice, albeit along with other listed sins (Fields 1997:182; Gagnon 2001:79-100; Schmidt 1995:88-89).

So Josephus refers to the Sodomites as 'abusing themselves with Sodomitical practices.' (*Ant.* I.XI.1); and avers that 'when the Sodomites saw the young men to be of beautiful countenances... they resolved themselves to enjoy these beautiful boys by force and violence' (*Ant.* I.XI, 3; see e.g., Gagnon 2001:91). Likewise Philo makes similar claims (*Abr.* 26.133-136; 27.137-141; *QG* 4.37), e.g.: '...not only did they go mad after women, and defile the marriage bed of others, but also those who were men lusted after one another, doing unseemly things...' (*Abr.* XXVI. 135. For a discussion see Gagnon 2001:91; and so conceded by Bailey 1975:21-23).

Apocryphal and Pseudopigraphal references to the sin of Sodom as homosexuality or aberrant sexuality include *Wis.* 14:23-27; *Jub.* 16:5-6; 20:5-6; *T Levi* 14:6; *T Benj* 9:1; *2 En.* 10:4, and 34:1-2. For example, Jubilees avers that the Sodomites were 'polluting themselves and they were fornicating in their flesh' (*Jub.* 16:5-6. For discussions see Fields 1997:181-182; Gagnon 2001:88-89; and Schmidt 1995:88-89).

Bailey, however, disputes that these references are to homosexuality as such, though admits that various sexual sins are condemned (Bailey 1975:10-24). In this regard it must be noted that Bailey, Boswell, etc. propose that the view of Sodom's sin as homosexuality was a late development in Jewish thought, appearing only in the Second Temple period (Bailey 1975:26-27). For a rebuttal to these claims, see De Young (1990:43-47).

Rabbinic sources cited include: *m. Sanh.* 10:3; *Gen. Rab.* 49-51; *t. Sot.* 3:11-12; *b. Sanh.* 109a-b; *Pirque R. El.* 25); possibly *Lev. Rab.* 23:9 (For a discussion see Gagnon 2001:89). There does, however, appear to be some debate as to rabbinical reference to homosexuality as the chief vice. Here Scroggs concedes that 'These early rabbis picture the Sodomites as totally perverse', but adds that, 'Never, however, is there any hint of homosexual lust or activity. The sexual sins are all heterosexual.' (Scroggs 1983:80; see also Bailey [1975:23-24], who avers there is only one place in rabbinic literature where sodomy is expressly forbidden).

Here Gagnon gives a brief discussion of the relevant texts. According to him, some of these are admittedly ambiguous, but could infer homosexual sin. Thus *b. Sanh. 109a* speaks of their being 'wicked with their bodies', (which Gagnon understands as sexual immorality); likewise, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* refers to the Sodomites being 'sinful with their bodies before the Lord'. *Gen. Rab.* 49-51, however, definitely refers to the Sodomites' raping of all visitors (Gagnon 2001:89).

2.2. Classic Christian Interpretation

The generally held interpretation of church history is that homosexual practice was universally condemned by the church over the past 2000 years. Thus Grenz (1998:63):

Until recently most Christians assumed that the church had spoken with nearly total consistency on homosexuality. Church teaching on this topic, they believed, formed an unbroken line from the biblical documents to the present.

Gagnon (2001:343-344) concurs that, '...until the last few decades, the church has maintained a consistent stance against homosexual behavior as sin.' The contrary view of Boswell (1980) will be discussed below.

The church fathers seem to have adopted an anti-homosexuality stance from their Jewish forebears. Here Bailey (1975:25) concedes, 'The Fathers of the Christian church...entertained no doubt whatever that the Sodomites were peculiarly and inordinately addicted to homosexual practices.' For example, Augustine (*De Civ. Dei*

xvi.30) refers to ‘the impious city, where custom had made sodomy as prevalent as laws have elsewhere made other kinds of wickedness.’ Other passages include Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* iii.8), Chrysostom (*Ad Pop. Antioch. Hom.* xix.7), and Augustine (*Const. Apost.* vii.2) (for a discussion see Grenz 1998:64-68).

Likewise, the Reformation Saints were adamant in their denunciation of homosexuality, identifying it as the sin of Sodom: ‘Luther confessed that he could not read the chapter without a feeling of deep revulsion’ (Leupold 1992:554). Calvin, interestingly enough, interprets the words of the Sodomites as, ‘We wish to know whom you are bringing as guests into our city’ (cited in Bailey 1975:4). This would accord with the inhospitality interpretation espoused by many prohomosexual writers (see chapter 3 below, esp. 3.2). However, Calvin does hold that the Sodomites practiced homosexuality, but that they used the above excuse to hide their real motives (Bailey 1975:4).

In terms of twentieth century scholarship, up to the publication of Bailey’s 1955 work scholars generally identified the sin of Sodom as intended homosexual activity. Thus Gunkel 1997 [1901]:208) viewed the sin as desired ‘pederasty with the deity.’ Skinner (1930 [1910]:306) likewise refers to the ‘depravity of the inhabitants’ [of Sodom] and that, ‘The unnatural vice which derives its name from the incident was viewed in Israel as the lowest depth of moral corruption.’

Regarding the general biblical attitude to homosexuality, other older scholars likewise concur. So Barth: ‘The command of God shows him irrefutably – in clear contradiction of his own theories – that as a man he can only be genuinely human with a woman, or as a woman, with a man’ (Gays on the March 1975:46; Soards 1995:43).

2.3. Boswell’s Argument: The Church View Up to the 13Th Century

In response to the commonly held view, however, Boswell (1980) averred that for much of its early history, the church was ambivalent toward homosexuality, an approach that changed only by the thirteenth century due to social and political factors. For Boswell (1980:334), ‘Beginning roughly in the latter half of the twelfth

century, however, a more virulent hostility appeared in popular literature and eventually spread to legal and theological writings as well.' This was 'probably closely related to the general increase in intolerance of minority groups', including the Crusades against non-Christian groups, anti-Jewish activity, the Inquisition, etc. (Boswell 1980:334).

Boswell's view has, however, been disputed by a number of scholars. For Hays (1986:202):

In point of fact, however, every pertinent Christian text from the pre-Constantinian period (Romans, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Testament of Naphtali [if this is indeed a Christian text], the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Clement of Alexandria, Minucius Felix, etc.) adopts an unremittingly negative judgment on homosexual practice, and this tradition is emphatically carried forward by all major Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries (Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, et al.). A critical reading of Boswell's own discussion will confirm the point: he is unable to cite a single early Christian text which approves homosexual activity.

For pertinent surveys of church history in this regard, and rebuttals of Bailey, see also Coleman (1980:124-133); Gagnon (2001:344); Grenz (1998:63-80, esp. 80); Hays (1986:202-204); and Soards (1995:37-41).

2.4. Conclusion

It is apparent, therefore, that for the bulk of its history, the church has held an unequivocally condemnatory view of homosexual practice. As we will see, however, the start of revisionist theology in this area began in earnest in 1955, which saw the start of an increase in scholarship toward a liberal alternative more sympathetic toward the homosexual position.

Chapter 3

Bailey and the Advent of the Yada/Inhospitability Theory

3.1 Introduction

In 1955 Derrick Sherwin Bailey produced the work *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. This introduced the theory that the sin of the Sodomites was not sexual at all, but that a retranslation of a single word (*yada*) would change the entire understanding of the passage.

In the Genesis 19 narrative, the Sodomites surround Lot's house, where the angelic visitors are residing, and demand that Lot release them from his house, that they may 'know' (Gen. 19:5, AV) (*yada*) them. Traditionally interpreters have understood this to mean the Sodomites' desire to 'have sexual intercourse with' the visitors. However, Bailey pointed out that the usual meaning of *yada* elsewhere in the OT is not to have sexual intercourse with, but merely 'to know.' For Bailey (1975:3-4):

The story does not in the least demand the assumption that the sin of Sodom was sexual, let alone homosexual – indeed, there is no evidence to show that vice of the latter kind was prevalent there...We are simply told that Sodom and Gomorrah were wicked and grievously sinful, but the writer does not specify their iniquity more exactly, and only on a priori grounds can it be assumed that it was an iniquity solely or predominantly sexual in character.

A later supporter of Bailey puts the argument like this:

Briefly put, the thesis of this trend in scholarship is that Lot was violating the custom of Sodom (where he was himself not a citizen but only a "sojourner") by entertaining unknown guests within the city walls at night without obtaining the permission of the elders of the city. When the men of Sodom gathered around to

demand that the strangers be brought out to them, “that they might know them,” they meant no more than to “know” who they were, and the city was consequently destroyed not for sexual immorality but for the sin of inhospitality to strangers (Boswell 1980:93-94).

3.2. Bailey's Arguments for the New Interpretation

Bailey invokes several arguments:

1. An argument from statistics, that while *yada* ‘occurs very frequently in the Old Testament’ (943 times), yet ‘it is only used ten times (without qualification) to denote coition (these instances not including Gen 19 or ‘its undoubted derivative Judg. xix. 22’)' (Bailey 1975:2).
2. In the place of the ‘*yada* = sexual intercourse’ rendering, Bailey invokes an argument from hospitality:

Our ignorance of local circumstances and social conditions makes it impossible to do more than guess at the motives underlying the conduct of the Sodomites; but since *yadha* commonly means “get acquainted with”, the demand to “know” the visitors whom Lot entertained may well have implied some serious breach of the rules of hospitality (1975:3-4).

For Bailey, then, *yada* should best be translated ‘get acquainted with’ in this instance. Bailey employed a cultural rationale, that Lot was a *ger* (foreigner) to Sodom, there by the grace of the inhabitants and, by admitting other foreigners to the city without due process, had not fulfilled cultural laws of hospitality.

Thus:

Is it not possible that Lot, either in ignorance or in defiance of the laws of Sodom, had exceeded the rights of a *ger* in that city by receiving and entertaining two “foreigners” whose intentions might be hostile, and whose credentials, it seems, had not been examined? (Bailey 1975:4).

3. Bailey (1975:7) also invokes ANE and other pagan legends of cities visited by gods, who destroyed the city or town in question for not observing the laws of hospitality. He appeals, for instance, to the myth of Philemon and Baucis (Ovid *Metamorph* viii 625ff; cited in Bailey 1975:7). This argument is taken up by later scholars (e.g., Boswell [1980:96] cites the seminal example of Zeus Xenios, regarded as 'the patron of strangers'. Bailey uses this as a basis for his claim that these myths influenced the Sodom story. For him the original Sodom account did not contain homosexual references, but was more akin to other mythical accounts of gods destroying cities for inhospitality. Thus: 'This, again, suggests that the association of homosexual practices with the Sodom story is a late and extrinsic feature which, for some reason, has been read into the original account' (Bailey 1975:8). (For this phenomenon in ANE and Mediterranean literature, see also Bruce 1990:370; McNeill 1993:44; Westermann 1984:275).

4. Bailey also cites subsequent biblical and extra-biblical passages that refer to Sodom, claiming that such texts seldom, if ever, refer to sexual misconduct as the sin of the Sodomites, and that other issues (such as pride and oppression of the poor) were the real sins of the townsfolk (Bailey 1975:9-25). Such texts include Jer. 23:14; Ezek. 26:49-50; Wis. 10:8; 19:8; Eccles. 16:8 (This argument and the relevant texts will be examined more fully in a later section).

Consequently, Bailey also endeavours to prove that references to homosexuality occur late in the Hebrew-Christian tradition. He avers that 'it is not until we reach the late New Testament books, 2 Peter and Jude, that we find the sin of Sodom connected in any way with homosexual practices' (Bailey 1975:10). For Bailey, therefore, a homosexual interpretation for Sodom is a later development, probably inspired by pagan practices during the Hellenistic era:

Thus the traditional Christian opinion that the Sodomites were annihilated because of their homosexual practices can be traced to its origin in the

conception of the sin of Sodom which appeared first in Palestine during the second century BC...The theory of their [the Sodomites'] fate seems undoubtedly to have originated in a Palestinian Jewish reinterpretation of Gen. xix, inspired by antagonism to the Hellenistic way of life and its exponents, and by contempt for the basest features of Greek sexual immorality (Bailey 1975:26-27).

Bailey was duly followed by other scholars. Thus Boswell (1980:93) could say, 'since 1955 [i.e., the first published date of Bailey's work] modern scholarship has increasingly favored' the hospitality interpretation. Boswell (1980:93-95) likewise invoked arguments based on the statistical occurrence of *yada*, and on subsequent references to Sodom in Scripture which, he argues, focus on other issues rather than the sexual.

Likewise, McNeill (1993 [1976]:43), cited similar arguments to prove his case that 'there is no actual necessity to interpret 'know' in Gen. xix, 5 as equivalent with 'to have coitus with.' It may mean no more than 'get acquainted with'.'

3.3. Decline of the *Yada* Argument

Although support of the prohomosexual position grew in the eighties, Bailey's view that *yada* should be interpreted to mean 'get acquainted with' tended to wane (Gagnon 2001:74). Such rejection came from Traditionalist and Revisionist scholars alike.

As early as 1964, Speiser had affirmed that the primary sin in question is homosexual intercourse, noting with regards to *yada*, that 'the same circumlocution for sexual relations as in iv. 1, but used in different circumstances' (Speiser 1964:139). von Rad (1972:217-218) likewise confirmed a sexual interpretation of the passage.

Regarding Bailey's argument from the statistical usage of *yada*, the prohomosexual work of South African scholars Germond and de Gruchy (1997:214) notes:

However, it is certainly not satisfactory to decide the meaning of the word by statistics, or otherwise the less common meaning of the word would never be

probable. The primary reference point for determining the meaning of a word is the immediate context in which it is used...It seems to me that the force of the context indicates that in this case *yada* is to be understood as sexual violence.'

For the Evangelical De Young (2000:33), 'When a word can have more than one meaning, context, not frequency, is the crucial factor. Word frequency only enables one to weigh the likelihood of a meaning or to consider the range of possible meanings when the context is unclear.'

Moreover, scholars were quick to point out that *yada* appears elsewhere in the context of Genesis 19, where it clearly means sexual intercourse. Thus de Young (2000:33), 'In addition, another tool to find meaning is proximity to uses of the same word elsewhere in the text or usage by the same writer.' A common argument involves the use of *yada* in 19:8, in connection with Lot's daughters. Thus Hamilton (1995:34):

This interpretation can only be evaluated as wild and fanciful. For when Lot responds by offering his daughters "who have never known a man" (v. 8), it becomes clear that the issue is intercourse and not friendship. Lot would never have made such an unusual suggestion if the request was only for a handshake and moments of chitchat.

Similar arguments are proposed by Davidson (2007:146-147); Kidner (1967:136-137); Letellier (1995:146); and Ukleja (1983:261-262); see also Wenham 1994.

Gagnon (2001:74) invokes a comparison with the parallel passage Judges 19:

even so, the immediate context (Lot's offer to give the men of Sodom his "two daughters who have not known a man," 19:8) and the close parallels in the related story of the Levite's concubine in Judg 19. 22, 25 (which clearly use "know" in the context of "have sexual intercourse with") leave little room for doubting the sexual connotation.

Nissinen (1998:46) likewise insists that, 'The sexual aspect of the actions of the men of Sodom cannot be gainsaid.' He argues from a parallel with the Flood account. For

Nissinen, it is no coincidence that as the Flood was preceded (and precipitated by) sexual sin (Gen. 6:1-7), so too the judgment on Sodom.

Wold (1998:82-84) invokes an argument from the LXX, and from ANE texts, which also know of a euphemistic usage for *yada* as sexual intercourse. For Wold, such parallels further bolster a sexual meaning for *yada* in Genesis 19.

Other scholars, Traditionalist and Revisionist alike, who reason similarly include Arnold (2009:184); Botha (2008:136); Coleman (1980:34); De Young (2000:34); Schmidt (1995:87); and Stiebert & Walsh (2001:129).

Consequently, Grenz (1998:37) confirms this trend that, 'Despite its wide influence, most scholars find Bailey's innovative conjecture unconvincing.' For Gagnon (2001:74), 'Few scholars today, even among supporters of homoerotic behavior, adopt Bailey's argument.' Wenham (1994) confirms that *yada* as sexual intercourse 'is recognized by all the major commentators', and for Nissinen (1998:46), 'his [Bailey's] theories ultimately fail' (see also Arnold 2009:184; Botha 2008:136; Davidson 2007:146; Greenberg 1988:136; Leupold 1992: 558-559; Scroggs 1983:73; and Pronk 1993:268). However, Germond & de Gruchy (1997:214) are somewhat less emphatic, 'This theory has been taken up subsequently by many writers, with varying degrees of acceptance.'

3.4. Recent Enjoining of the Bailey Interpretation

More recently, however, Morschauer (2003) has attempted to prove a non-sexual argument for *yada*. For him, 'it is completely unnecessary to take the Sodomites' oration as a demand for 'sexual intercourse'. (Morschauer 2003:471-472). He invokes a series of arguments from ANE culture and language to illustrate his point of the sin of inhospitality. For instance, he cites ANE sources to prove that Lot was the 'man at the gate', holding a juridical function whereby visitors to the community were screened for security purposes. According to Morschauer, Lot failed in this duty and was seen as guilty of putting the city at risk (Morschauer 2003:482-485). As regards this 'sitting at the gate', he avers:

Those situated therein were often engaged in 'decision-making', acting as 'judges' for the community. Clearly, the description of Lot as 'sitting in the gate' is not gratuitous or incidental to the narrative of Genesis 19. For an Israelite audience, the epithet would have led people to infer that the patriarch is an individual of influence and standing within the social order of Sodom: he is one who - on some level - has been empowered to adjudicate for the populace-at-large (Morschauser 2003:464).

He avers that Sodom was on the defensive and wary of attack and infiltration, and so would have extra reason to express anger at Lot's permitting of the visitors into the city limits. Here he cites the historical example of the Trojan Horse (Morschauser 2003:464-465).

Doyle (1998) advances the theory that *yada* implies that the Sodomites wanted access to the divine presence: sinful men wanted to 'know' God. He cites Isa 29:16 to show that their sin was one of hubris, wanting to usurp deity. They didn't want to know sexually, but 'to know' *spiritually*, the divine presence (Doyle 1998:438). For Doyle, 'Ultimately, then, the men of Sodom were not out on a frenzied search for sexual gratification of any kind. The narrative suggests that we understand their purpose as an act of hubris, a demand to know what for them had become unknowable.' Thus they are 'rewarded with blindness in their futile endeavours to find the 'door' to knowledge of God'. (Doyle 1998:100)

3.5 Refutations of Recent Arguments

Morschauser and Doyle too, however, have met with criticism. Concerning Morschauser's thesis, Bolin (2004:50) notes that:

his own interpretation of the Sodom account is problematic. It requires idiosyncratic reading of Hebrew terms in the narrative. Moreover, the martial background necessary to explain the Sodomites' need to interrogate the strangers is alien to the story in Genesis 19, forcing Morschauser awkwardly to

supply this background by appeal to Sodom's participation in the war against the northern kings in Genesis 14.

Bolin also criticises Morschauer for understanding *yada* as 'to investigate' in v.5 and yet to 'sexual intercourse' in v.8. He also notes:

Also problematic for Morschauer is the claim that the phrase 'to do good according to one's eyes' in 19.8 refers to the juridical assignment of responsibility; while that is certainly a meaning of the phrase in the Old Testament, the claim overlooks the use of the phrase at the end of the book of Judges (Judg. 21.25) to describe the anarchy of ancient Israel, 'in those days when there was no king' (Bolin 2004:50).

Likewise, he criticises Doyle interpretation in that, 'Ultimately, Doyle's reading requires a level of intertextual subtlety on the reader's part that cannot be assumed, and moreover, overlooks the clear parallels between the divine visitation in both Gen. 18 and 19' (Bolin 2004:46).

It is therefore apparent that while Bailey's views have been largely abandoned by the theological fraternity, they continue to find some support in major journals.

Chapter 4

Evolution of the Prohomosexual Argument Since Bailey

4.1. Introduction

Although Bailey's view found comparatively few supporters, there soon followed other interpretations of the Sodom story more amenable to a prohomosexual stance. Such interpretations proved more sophisticated and varied. Three such aspects of these interpretations will be discussed in this chapter:

1. The invoking of a Liberal hermeneutic, whereby the authority of scripture was questioned, and with it the effectiveness of the Sodom account for the making of moral judgments today.
2. In essence, post-Bailey scholars no longer denied that homosexual activity was present in the Sodom account, but rather came to emphasise other sins as the real cause of judgment. Consequently, the nature of the sexual sin was reinterpreted in the light of culture and science.
3. A sociological framework was placed around the Sodom episode. Issues of honour and shame, so relevant to ANE culture, were made the new context of interpretation for the account.

4.2. The Question of Hermeneutic

The Liberal view of the authority and inspiration of Scripture has been the focus of much discussion. Of relevance to the interpretation of passages concerning the same-sex debate, this Liberal view follows that: (1) the biblical writers were governed by their cultural and scientific understanding of the world around them, and their (biblical) writings reflect this limited understanding. We today have superior scientific

knowledge and understanding, and are in a better position to perceive the mind and will of God on various matters; (2) Connected with this is the notion that it is impossible to transcend one's own prejudices and presuppositions and the cultural and environmental factors that mould us; consequently, it is impossible to know or make statements of objective truth. Thus it is difficult to be dogmatic on matters of morality or lifestyle. Such hermeneutical views are proposed by Kuhn (2006:313-329); Malchow (2004:466-467); Ndungane (2000); Pronk (1993:281-301); and Via (2003:2-3).

Of particular relevance to the same-sex debate is the view that incorporates the findings of modern science (and psychological science) into one's hermeneutical framework. These aspects, it is said, may even supercede biblical statements. Thus Njongonkulu Ndungane, Anglican Archbishop emeritus of Cape Town, speaking in the context of the same-sex debate, avers:

Given that the scriptures were written at least 20 centuries ago, before the advent and development of our current medical, psychological and sociological studies, this attitude toward scripture might validly be accused of being simply a way to support a particular prejudice (Njongonkulu Ndungane. Address at the *Healing Leaves* conference at Berkeley, California, 20 January, 2000).

The Archbishop has used this as a springboard for his comparison of the gay issue with slavery and the role of women in the church. For similar affirmation of science as a part of one's hermeneutical framework see also Malchow (2004:467) and Via (2003:3). Pertinently, the science of sexology is included in this 'science and psychology' ambit, thus de Young's observation on the Liberal hermeneutic that, 'Modern sexology must correct the unenlightened Bible' (DeYoung 2000:30). Such views naturally allow for a view that even if the Bible and its writers did subjectively condemn homosexual activity, such views are outdated.

In response, various attempts have been made by Evangelical scholars to confirm and expound on the traditional view of the Bible as the Word of God. Perhaps the most comprehensive is Webb's *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* (2001). The work is an

effort to distinguish those aspects of scripture that are culturally-bound from those which reach beyond cultures, that have eternal theological application. Thus Webb attempts to assess which OT laws and mandates apply to us today and which do not. His chief means of so doing is through what he calls the 'redemptive movement hermeneutic'. Here Webb differentiates between three aspects to be considered when dealing with the relationship between culture and biblical mandate. In this regard he proposes an 'X-Y-Z' model for ascertaining various texts/doctrines and their modern day application. In his words, the

central position (Y) stands for where the isolated words of the Bible are in their development of a subject. Then, on either side of the biblical text, one must ask the question of perspective: What is my understanding of the biblical text, if I am looking at it from the perspective of the *original culture* (X)? Also, what does the biblical text look like from our contemporary culture, where it happens to reflect a better social ethic – one closer to an *ultimate ethic* (Z) than to the ethic revealed in the isolated words of the biblical text? (Webb 2001:31).

Webb therefore makes a 'crucial distinction' between 'a redemptive spirit appropriation of Scripture, which encourages movement beyond the original application of the text', and a 'static appropriation of Scripture, which understands the words of the text aside from or with minimal emphasis upon their underlying spirit and thus restricts any modern application of Scripture to where the isolated words of the text fell in their original setting' (Webb 2001:30-31). For Webb, it is the former movement or flow of the 'redemptive movement' that is the key.

For him the redemptive movement of the theology/ethic moves through various stages in a sort of progressive revelation until reaching the 'ultimate ethic'. For instance, the laws concerning slavery in the OT must be properly grasped in the light of the 'final ethic' revealed in the NT in Galatians 3:28, where 'There is neither...slave nor free...for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (NIV). By contrast, homosexuality is always condemned through Scripture, and so is a moral evil in the absolute sense (Webb 2001:39).

Evangelical response to Webb's work has been somewhat mixed. A *Christianity Today* review commends it in that, 'many theologians before Webb have seen the Bible in a way consistent with the redemptive movement hermeneutic. But Webb seems to be the first to articulate it so clearly' (Tennant 2002:66). A JETS review regards it as an 'important and timely contribution to the field of biblical hermeneutics' (Graham 2002:681). Also writing in JETS, Hiebert (2002:678), is supportive, though does note that, 'his applications (especially concerning women and homosexuals) will naturally be disputed at various points both by some who share Webb's high view of biblical authority and by many who do not.' Webb's book was also commended by Craig Keener and Darrell F. Bock (Tennant 2002:67).

On the other hand, however, Grudem holds that Webb's work is 'deeply flawed', and departs somewhat from Reformation principles of sola scriptura. In Grudem's (2004:337) view:

Webb's entire system is based on an assumption that the moral commands of the NT represent only a temporary ethical system for that time, and that we should use Webb's "redemptive-movement hermeneutic" to move beyond those ethical teachings to a "better ethic" (p. 32) that is closer to the "ultimate ethic" God wants us to adopt.

Therefore 'it nullifies in principle the moral authority of the entire NT and replaces it with the moral authority of a "better ethic"' (Grudem 2004:346).

Gagnon, although holding to some liberal views, and even maintaining that the Bible contains errors (2001:345), does hold to the authority of scripture in matters regarding faith, in that, 'When all is said and done, however, Scripture must retain its status as the single most important authority for faith and practice' (Gagnon 2002).

Akin to Webb, Gagnon comments on the relationship between the slavery, women, and homosexuality texts, and on possibly related cultural issues. Concerning the first two issues (women and slavery), he observes, 'There is tension within the canon itself

on these issues', but on the third, 'there is no scriptural tension on the question of homosexual behavior' (Gagnon 2002).

Wolfhart Pannenberg, although usually associated with the Liberal camp, likewise criticises the revisionist approach as too culturally fixed:

The biblical statements about homosexuality cannot be relativized as the expressions of a cultural situation that today is simply outdated. The biblical witnesses from the outset deliberately opposed the assumptions of their cultural environment in the name of faith in the God of Israel, who in Creation appointed men and women for a particular identity (Pannenberg 1996:37).

Similarly, Oden, a former liberal, notes regarding the mechanics of Revisionist thought that:

The first evasion is that the normative moral force of all biblical texts on same-sex intercourse may be explained away by their cultural context. This leads to the conclusion that any statement in the Bible can be reduced to culturally equivocal ambiguity and indeterminacy on the premise of cultural relativism. This is an inventive, but all too obvious, evasion of the normative character of Scripture. Admittedly every sacred text is written and delivered and shaped within some cultural context, but not reducible to that context (Oden 1995:154).

Gudel (1993:2-3) provides evidences from scripture to support the traditional position. He cites the example of Jesus and the Jews, who both adhered to the full inspiration of Scripture, and quotes John 10:35 ('the scripture cannot be broken' [AV]) in support of scripture's full authority (see also Botha 2008:20).

4.3. Post-Bailey Interpretations of the Sodom Story: In Essence

We now examine the course of the debate in the 'post-Bailey' era. As was said above (4.1), the prohomosexual argument took a new direction the 1980's: the presence of homosexual activity among the Sodomites was not necessarily denied, but such activity was given a new context and interpreted with reference to other sins. Thus the

Sodom account was either minimised or entirely dismissed as irrelevant to the modern same-sex debate.

This new tack is perhaps most typically expressed in the following statement of Scroggs (1983), who avers on the one hand, 'it seems to me difficult to deny the sexual intent of the Sodomites. I still believe the traditional interpretation to be correct' (Scroggs 1983:73); yet on the other, 'Any claim, however, that the story is a blanket condemnation of homosexuality in general is unjustified. The attempt on the bodies of the guests is but an example of the general evil...' (Scroggs 1983:74).

Generally speaking, the new line of argument may be broken down as follows:

1. Subsequent biblical and extra-biblical (Jewish and Christian) passages do not (or seldom) mention homosexual activity as the sin of Sodom. Here other sins, such as inhospitality, pride, and oppression of the poor, seem to be emphasised. The sin of Sodom may therefore be categorised as general sin or wickedness, rather than homosexual activity per se.
2. Moreover, inhospitality is clearly a strong motif in the Gen. 18-19 cycle, as well as in other biblical references to Sodom. Notably, inhospitality is also an important ANE cultural motif, what with the various ANE references to visiting deities treated inhospitably by various townsfolk. Inhospitality may therefore also be added to the list of general sins above (Note that this means that the demise of the *yada* argument has not also seen the end of the argument from inhospitality, which is now invoked from the viewpoint of context and culture).
3. If homosexual activity was present, it must be seen in the context of general mob rape of persons who were not necessarily homosexual in orientation. The purpose of the desired rape would then not be sexual as such.
4. The Sodom narrative therefore does not concern genuine homosexual relationships between persons of homosexual orientation, but rather concerns heterosexual persons who desired to commit the sin of mob rape as an

expression of their sinfulness, specifically expressed in terms of hostility to the poor, pride/arrogance, and inhospitality.

To summarise more succinctly, the three key sins or areas of sin of the Sodomites would be:

1. Inhospitality.
2. General sins as emphasised by other biblical books, e.g., pride and oppression of the poor.
3. An emphasis on general mob rape rather than homosexuality per se.

As a vital proviso, it must be said that there are aspects of the above four-stage theological model that are shared by mainstream commentators and Evangelical commentators alike (e.g., the inhospitality motif, reference to other sins). Such cannot therefore be said to be the product wholesale of prohomosexual scholars. Similar theological motifs of the Sodom narrative were identified by Genesis commentators even prior to Bailey. Notably, such scholars did (and do) not necessarily follow all four points above, nor do they necessarily come to the same conclusions. In this regard there is a degree of ambivalence among the various commentators.

4.3.1. The Sin of Sodom as General Sin, rather than Homosexuality per Se

For the prohomosexual school, then, it is general sin and wickedness rather than homosexual activity per se that is the focal point of the Genesis 19 narrative. In this respect, all of inhospitality, pride, oppression of the poor, and general mob violence are brought together in an effort to show that it is these issues that are the focal concern.

To reiterate and expand on the Scroggs reference above:

Any claim, however, that the story is a blanket condemnation of homosexuality in general is unjustified. The attempt on the bodies of the guests is but an example

of the general evil, which has already caught God's attention. It is, furthermore, an attempt at *rape*. The most that can be said is that the story judges homosexual rape to be evil and worthy of condemnation... Virtually none of the other references to his story in the Hebrew Bible (unless it is that of the Levite and his concubine) explicitly interpret the sin as sexual (Scroggs 1983:74).

This is borne out more explicitly by Loader, who synthesises these various misdemeanours of the Sodomites as follows:

Their sin is a three-in-one matter. They violate the sacred law of *hospitality* and in so doing give themselves over to *depravity of a homosexual nature* (cf Lv 18:22; 20:13). At the same time it must be said that the sin here is not just a private homosexual act, but homosexual mob rape (Loader 1990:37).

He minimises the sexual aspect thus:

...sexual misdemeanour, even though it certainly is part of the sin of 'sodomy', is not the central or most important part. The Sodomites are engaging in an anti-social act of violence and oppression. It is not for nothing that this is expressed in the motif of perverse sex. This is not only to show that the Sodomites wanted to humiliate and demasculinize the guests (as Shafer 1984: 773 calls it). The Sodomites make natural intercourse impossible by violating the social fibre of the community as represented by the motif of hospitality. They pervert the natural obligations by which life in ancient communities was made possible. It is therefore expressed by means of an appropriate narrative vehicle, viz the motif of sex in which the natural intercourse is likewise perverted and expressly denied (when Lot's offer of his guests is turned down) (Loader 1990:37).

Likewise Scanzoni (1978) minimises the homosexual aspect, and divides the sins of Sodom into two: '(1) violent gang rape and (2) inhospitality to the stranger.' (Scanzoni 1978:57). Similar views are voiced by Brueggemann (1982:164); Countryman (1988: 31); Germond and de Gruchy (1997:214); Greenberg (1988:136); Hanigan (1988:38-39); Nissinen (1998:49); and Via (2003:5).

For these scholars, then, the homosexual act so condemned is not an expression of homosexuality by homosexuals, but that of coerced sexual assault by heterosexuals (this homosexual/heterosexual question will be discussed in further depth below).

4.3.2 The Sin of Sodom According to Subsequent Texts

As with Bailey, adherents to the post-Bailey view cite post-Genesis texts to prove that the emphasis of Sodomitic sin lies in other areas of misdemeanour. By contrast with Bailey, however, the newer scholars attempt to prove not that no sexual activity was present, but rather that it is not the key matter at hand. Such subsequent texts include: Deut. 29:23, 32:32; Isa. 1:9-10, 13:19; Jer. 49:18; Ezek. 16:46, 48-49, 53, 55-56; Lam. 4:6; Amos 4:11; and Zeph. 2:9.

Seow summarises the findings of such scholars that, 'the problem is never the homoeroticism of the offence.' Rather, 'the traditions speak of injustice, sin of adultery, lies, pride, gluttony, excess wealth, indifference to the poor, and their hospitality.' (Seow 1996a:15). Moreover, 'Not once in the Bible is homoeroticism given as the reason for the annihilation of the cities.' (Seow 1996a:15).

In his discussion of the individual texts, Brueggemann (1982:164) avers, 'Thus in Isa 1:10; 3:9, the reference is to injustice; in Jer. 23:14, to a variety of irresponsible acts which are named; and in Ezek. 16:49 the sin is pride, excessive food, and indifference to the needy.' Likewise, Scanzoni (1978:58) cites Ezekiel's listing of pride and oppression of the poor (Ezek. 16:49-51), and Jesus' emphasis on inhospitality (Luke 10:10), etc., to prove that these are the primary vices.

Nissinen (1998:48) likewise invokes 'inhospitality and xenophobia' as the real sin. He concludes on an agnostic note as regards the attitude of the biblical contributor (for him, the Yahwist) toward homosexual activity: 'Homoeroticism appears in the story of Sodom only as one aspect of hostile sexual aggression toward strangers. Other than that, the Yahwist's attitude towards same-sex interaction remains unknown.' (Nissinen 1998:49)

Other scholars who follow similar arguments include Countryman (1988:31); Greenberg (1988:136); Germond and de Gruchy (1997:216); Morschauser (2003:461-485); Newman (1998: 35-42); Rogers (2006: 71); and Stiebert & Walsh (2001: 129-130). The Evangelical Davidson (2007:147) gives a good overview of this position in that:

Most modern interpreters now acknowledge that homosexual activity along with inhospitality is described in Gen 19 but insist that the sexual issue is that of rape or violence and that thus this passage gives no evidence for the condemnation of homosexual practice in general.

4.4 A Sociological Rationale: Honour, Shame, Culture and Homosexuality

Adherents of the prohomosexual school also utilise a socio-cultural model as a sociological basis for their viewpoint, explicating the sin of the Sodomites with reference to socio-cultural mores (or lack thereof). In this view, the mob rape motif can best be understood with reference to the motif of honour and shame, as well as a culture operating within a patriarchal framework.

Thus for Stone (1995:103), 'Homosexual rape is interpreted as a process by which a male subject threatens the masculinity and honor of another male.' Commenting on Genesis 19 and the Judges 19 parallel, he avers:

An extended analysis may well reveal that male characters in the biblical texts attempt to carry out indirectly, by means of homosexual contact, a desire that is expressed more directly here by homosexual rape: that of power over, and dishonor of, another man (Stone 1995:102-103).

Thus the motifs of honour and shame, and of what is construed as an oppressive patriarchal system, are both understood as part of the sociology of the Sodom account.

Carden invokes a similar motif whereby homosexual rape is not a matter of orientation or homosexual desire as such, but a means of dominating or showing power over

another male. He cites Dover in that, 'anal penetration is treated neither as an expression of nor as a response to... beauty, but as an aggressive act demonstrating the superiority of the active to the passive partner.' (Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* 1978:104, cited in Carden 1999:90).

He concludes, 'it is wrong to read the Sodomite's demand as anything but an act of abuse of outsiders. The threatened rape of the angels is an attempt to inscribe the outsiders as queer and therefore not real men' (Carden 1999:90).

For Tonson (2001:99), 'The assault of the men of Sodom on Lot's house seeking sexual liaison with his guests... has often been attributed to the motive of lust. However, it may be an attempt to shame him through the abuse of those in his house.' So too Nissinen (1998:48), who cites Hellenistic sources in his assertion that the sexual act of the Sodomites must be seen under the umbrella of inhospitality and xenophobia.

For the prohomosexual school, then, the rationale for the reference to sexuality here is important in that it is through the sex act that inhospitality is expressed. In other words, the importance of the homosexual act must be assessed in the light of the importance of the inhospitality, and not from the viewpoint of sexuality per se.

Bird (2000:148) contributes a feminist perspective, citing Lot's offering of his daughters to the rapacious Sodomites that, 'The account carries the clear message that male honor is threatened by homosexual intercourse and that it is valued even above a daughter's virginity.'

The sociological argument from honour/shame is bolstered somewhat by appeal to custom regarding civic security vis-a-vis outsiders. Thus Morschauser's (2003:464-465) view that Lot had a guardian function at the gate of Sodom, and thus had a civic duty to assess the visitors before letting them in.

For Bechtel (1998:117-118), the two men are perceived as breaching hospitality and therefore boundaries, and so becoming a threat to the community, whose response is therefore to breach boundaries in turn, in their intended homosexual rape. For

Bechtel, the issues are not sexual as such (homosexuality for homosexuality's sake) but cultural and sociological (see also Rogers 2006:70).

4.5 Homosexuality as Orientation or Behaviour

Contingent on the socio-cultural argument is the claim that the Sodomites were not homosexual in orientation per se, but were those of heterosexual orientation who engaged in homosexual acts. The sociological rationale for this has been discussed above (4.4). In this view, the Sodom story does not bring comment on so-called loving relationships between those of homosexual orientation.

Scanzoni (1978:55-56) provides a good summary of this view:

First, we must take note that the men of Sodom could not possibly have been exclusively homosexual in orientation in the sense that the term is used today. Quite likely, they were primarily heterosexual, out for novelty, and seeking to humiliate the strangers. For the city to have any continuing population at all, the group must have included a substantial number of husbands and fathers, since every last one of the city's male's is said to have taken part in this attempted gang rape!

For Furnish (1994:19):

However, this is not a story about homosexual behavior in general - and certainly not a story about homosexual acts performed by consenting adults...It is only incidental to the story that, had the attack succeeded, it would have meant the rape of Lot's two male visitors by a mob of other males.

Seow likewise shares the view that, 'It is evident, however, that the narrative is not about same-sex love. Rather, it is a story about wickedness in general, violence, and the violation of a sacrosanct code of hospitality. Gang rape is at issue in the passage, not same sex love' (1996a:15), and, 'If homosexual gang rape proves that same-sex love is wrong, then heterosexual rape and adultery must also be said to show that heterosexual love is wrong' (1996a:16). In this view, the ancient world knew nothing

about homosexual orientation. Thus Nissinen (1998:128), 'The biblical authors could obviously not think of homoerotic behavior as arising from any particular identity or orientation. Thus same-sex contacts were regarded as a voluntary perversion.'

Bird seems to display some ambiguity when she says, on the one hand, that 'the ancient Israelites had no experience or conception of male homoerotic relations as consensual or expressive of a committed relationship', yet on the other hand, 'It is not clear whether they [the Israelite authors] viewed homoerotic activity among the inhabitants of these wicked cities as consensual and habitual or only as perverse sport with visitors' (2000:148; see note by Gagnon 2001:78-79). Others concurring with this view are: Furnish (1994:19); Stiebert & Walsh (2001:127-8); and Via (2003:15).

The upshot of this argument is that the biblical writers could not have viewed the Sodomites as homosexuals per se, but as heterosexuals engaging in homosexual acts. By extension, the Sodom story cannot be used to condemn homosexuality per se.

4.6 Conclusion

It is clear that these new arguments are far more complex than those of Bailey. Consequently, they have found more support from mainstream commentators, although there is still dispute as to the conclusions of the prohomosexual school.

As was indicated earlier (4.3), Traditionalist scholars likewise embrace some of the motifs invoked above, and there are some who concede that Genesis 19 is unclear on the issue of same-sex relations per se (see 1.3), and who would rather invoke other texts to prove divine displeasure with homosexual conduct. Traditionalist rebuttals to the revisionist claims will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Traditional Scholarship in Response to the Prohomosexual Position

5.1 Introduction to Post-Bailey rebuttals

In response to post-Bailey scholarship, Evangelical rebuttals began to appear from the 1980's. Accordingly, the main thrust of these rebuttals focussed on:

1. To what degree other sins, e.g., inhospitality, oppression of the poor, etc., are relevant to the Sodom narrative.
2. Consequently, if they supercede the sexual as the most salient aspect of the Sodomites' sin.
3. Whether the sexual element of the Sodomitic sin pertains to general (heterosexual) rape, or else condemns homosexual acts in their own right.

As was averred earlier, such Evangelical-orientated works do not appear to be as prolific as their prohomosexual counterparts (Gagnon 2001:38).

5.2. Sodom: A Miscellany of Sins

It must be noted that these Traditionalist scholars do not deny the relevance of other motifs in the Sodom account (e.g., hospitality), nor the possibility of the Sodomites' other sins. However, what is averred is that homosexuality has a special place even among these. Thus effort is made to demonstrate, through context, exegesis, or other means, that sexuality, specifically homosexuality, is the most salient factor for the Genesis 19 account.

Therefore Gagnon, suggesting that the other sins mentioned in fact provide a context for the events of the narrative, connects inhospitality and sexual sin, regarding the homosexual element as an extension of inhospitality. So:

It may well be that inhospitality and social injustice constitute the overarching rubric for the story, as subsequent interpretations of the event indicate. Yet what makes this instance of inhospitality so dastardly, what makes the name "Sodom" a byword for inhumanity to visiting outsiders in later Jewish and Christian circles, is the specific form in which the inhospitality manifests itself: *homosexual rape* (2001:75-76; see also Botha 2008:136).

Schmidt likewise argues that it is not inhospitality in its own right that is the issue, but the fact that inhospitality is expressed through sexual aggression. He cites Job 31:31-32 ('O that we may be sated with his flesh', referring to inhospitality exercised through sexual assault on a guest), to demonstrate the link between inhospitality and sexual abuse in the context of Gen 19 (1995:87-88).

Davidson's argument focuses on direct context:

The immediate context also indicates that the wickedness of Sodom goes far beyond (although it does not eliminate) issues of hospitality. The narrator first describes the condition of Sodom's men as "wicked, great sinners against the Lord" (13:13), and then the same message is recorded from the mouth of God: "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin!" (18:20). Such language could hardly describe merely a spirit of inhospitality (2007:146).

For Fields, however, inhospitality is the prime sin for the Genesis tradition, with sexual misdemeanour of secondary importance. However, he does not dismiss the sexual out of hand, regarding it as one of the aspects so condemned (Fields 1997:72). He draws much of his reasoning from subsequent biblical references to Sodom. He concludes:

Male homosexuality is detestable (Lev 18.22) and is punishable by death (Lev 20.13). There are no laws regarding homosexual rape, but since all male

homosexuality is forbidden, it follows that homosexual rape is also forbidden (Fields 1997:117).

5.3 Extra-Genesis References to Sodom

These scholars also assess the objection from post-Genesis references to Sodom. Here the arguments usually follow the line of (1) demonstrating the presence of sexual references among these texts, whether direct or oblique, and (2) providing direct sexual references in later Jewish and NT writings.

For example, Grenz (1998:39) avers that the Ezekiel 16:50 reference to Sodom does indicate homosexual practice, in that the word *toebah* ('abominable things') is the same word as used in Holiness Code for Homosexual acts (Lev. 18:22). Similarly, Davidson agrees that Ezekiel 16 condemns inhospitality, but pushes for a deeper meaning as well. Thus:

That the opprobrium attached to the Sodomites' intended activity involved not only rape but the inherent degradation of same-sex intercourse is confirmed by the intertextual linkages between Ezekiel and the sexual "abominations" mentioned in the Levitical legislation (Davidson 2007:149).

Mathews (2005:235) also links the sexual shamelessness of Sodom with the shamelessness referred to in the Ezekiel passage. Gagnon (2001:78-97) produces a similar argument involving Ezekiel 16, but in far more depth. He also provides evidences of sexual misdemeanour in subsequent passages (e.g., Judges 19:22-25; Jer. 23:14; Jude 7; 2 Pet. 2:6-10) (2001:79-100; see also Wold's argument from the use of *zimma* ['wickedness, lewdness, depravity'] in Ezek. 16:43, that 'it refers to premeditated sexual crimes' in, e.g., Lev. 18:17, 20:14; Judges 20:6, etc [Wold 1998:88-89]).

So too other subsequent texts. It is commonly argued among such scholars that texts such as 2 Pet. 2:4, 6-8; Jude 6-7; and various late Jewish books clearly identify the sin of Sodom as sexual, if not homosexual. Thus Davidson (2007:147) avers:

The larger context of the later prophetic passages that refer to this narrative clearly indicates a sexual interpretation (Ezek 16:43, 50; cf. Jude 6-7; 2 Pet 2:4, 6-8) and a castigation of homosexual activity per se and not just homosexual rape.

Gagnon (2001:87-91) also deals in some measure with the Jude and 2 Peter readings, as does Davidson (2007:148); Fields (1997:182-183); and Grenz (1998:39).

Likewise apocryphal and pseudopigraphal references to the Sodomitic sin as sexual include: Wis. 14:23-27; *Jub.* 16:5-6; 20:5-6; *T. Levi* 14:6; *T. Benj* 9:1; *T. Ash.* 7:1; *2 En.* 10:4; 34:1-2. (For a discussion see Fields 1997:181-182 and Gagnon 2001:88-89). Rabbinic references include *Gen. Rab.* 49-51; *t. Sot.* 3:11-12; *b. Sanh.* 109a-b, and *Lev. Rab.* 23.9 (For a discussion here see Gagnon 2001:89). It is also noted that Philo and Josephus both identified the sin of Sodom as homosexuality (for Philo: *Abr* 133-141; and *QG* 4.37; for Josephus: *Ant* 1. 194-195, 200-201; *J.W.* 4.483-485; and 5.566 [Likewise see Gagnon 2001:91]). (In this regard Miller pens a brief response to Gagnon [2007:87-88], reiterating revisionist points regarding late Jewish writings, cf. the previous chapter, though adding little new).

Fields (1997:158) follows a similar tack, concluding from the passages studied that:

the actions of the Sodomites are archetypical instances of wickedness, especially with reference to (a) overbearing arrogance, inhospitality and lack of compassion for the socially weak and disadvantaged... and (b) sexual transgressions of various descriptions.

For Fields, therefore, while the sexual element is regarded as secondary to the sin of inhospitality, it does stand among the listed sins of Sodom (Fields 1997:178-179).

5.4 Mob or general rape

Traditionalist scholars also assess the argument from the dichotomy between 'mob rape' and 'homosexual activity' as such. For them, the emphasis of the biblical writers

rests on the latter rather than the former. Therefore Gagnon concedes, on the one hand, that:

thus three elements (attempted penetration of males, attempted rape, inhospitality), and perhaps a fourth (unwitting, attempted sex with angels), combine to make this a particularly egregious example of human depravity that justifies God's act of total destruction (2001:75-76).

However, he also emphasises the sexual aspect thus:

Ultimately, however, since the story is used as a type scene to characterize the depth of human depravity in Sodom and Gomorrah and thus to legitimate God's decision to wipe these two cities off the face of the map, it is likely that the sin of Sodom is not merely inhospitality or even attempted rape of a guest but rather an attempted homosexual rape of male guests...the stress is entirely on the mob's horrible plans for mistreating the seemingly helpless visitors - not just that they wanted to mistreat them but the way in which they chose to mistreat them. As with the author(s) of the Levitical prohibitions, the Yahwist is less concerned with motives than with the act of penetrating a male as if he were a female, an act that by its very nature is demeaning regardless of how well it is done (2001:75, 78).

Hamilton furnishes four exegetical reasons why, in his view, the emphasis ought to be on the sexual act itself rather than on general rape per se:

1. 'Nowhere in the OT does the verb *yada* have the nuance of "abuse" or "violate."
2. 'The OT uses unmistakable language to relate rape incidents. The Shechemites "seized" and "lay with" and "humbled" Dinah (Gen. 34:2). Amnon "forced" and "lay with" his half-sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13:14). Similarly, the biblical laws about rape also use these terms: "seize," "lie with" (Deut. 22:25-27).'

3. 'This interpretation forces one meaning on "know" in v.5 (i.e., "abuse") but with a different meaning on "know" three verses later (i.e., "have intercourse with"), for it is unlikely that Lot is saying: "I have two daughters who have never been abused."
4. 'Such an interpretation forces these incredible words in Lot's mouth: "Do not rape my visitors. Here are my daughters, both virgins - rape them!"' (Hamilton 1995:34-35).

He also cites Gordis that, 'it is difficult to see how the clear indication in both Genesis and Judges that homosexuality is worse than rape can be ignored' (Hamilton 1995:35). Davidson (2007:148) likewise argues that depravity lies at the heart of the Genesis 19 context (see also Fields 1997:117).

5.5 Contextual Arguments

Arguments from direct context and parallel accounts are also invoked to demonstrate a special place for homosexual sin in the narrative.

One such argument involves a parallel with the Noahic cycle:

As with Gen 9:20-27, the perversion of same-sex male intercourse appears to be an integral part of the story, along with other factors. Just as one form of illicit copulation (between angels and women) contributed to the earlier cataclysm of the great flood in Genesis 6 (an important element in the general "wickedness of humankind," 6:5), so too another form of unnatural sexual relations (between men) served as a key contributing factor in the cataclysmic destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gagnon 2001: 75).

Similarly:

many go too far when they argue that the story has little or nothing to do with homosexual practice; that, instead, the story is only about inhospitality or rape. As with the story of Ham's incestuous, homosexual rape of Noah, the inherently degrading quality of same-sex intercourse plays a key role in the narrator's

attempt to elicit feelings of revulsion on the part of the reader/hearer (Gagnon 2001:71).

De Young makes a further argument from context, citing other sexual encounters in Genesis which, he claims, run in parallel. For De Young three such encounters (Sodom, the incest of Lot's daughters [Gen 19:30-38], and Sarah and Abimelech [Gen 21]) precede the birth of Isaac, and 'delay and pose a threat to the fulfilment of God's promise of seed for Abraham'. For De Young:

Each of the three episodes poses a threat to the fulfillment not alone of the promised birth of Isaac but the whole future of God's plan, whereby the Gentiles are also blessed. Each episode relates sexual sin and its punishment... Without the homosexual meaning for Sodom and its consequences, there is no coherence among the episodes. The revisionist view fails to meet the demands of the literary structure of the text (De Young 2000:39-40).

Fields provides a further parallel in a further comparison between the genealogies of Abraham and Lot. Fields reasons as follows: Terah has three sons, Abram, Nahor and Haran, and Lot is son of Haran and nephew of Abram (with Lot of course falling prey sexually in the 'epilogue account' of Gen. 19:30-38). By comparison, Noah likewise has three sons (Ham, Shem and Japheth). A sexual misdemeanour also takes place in the aftermath of the Flood judgment, and, like the first triumvirate of brothers, it is one of their sons who falls into sexual sin, producing a reprobate line. Thus sexual sin is noted running parallel in both instances (Fields 1997:36).

5.6. The Question of Sexual Orientation

Further, the objection concerning homosexual orientation in the ancient world is also examined. For instance, Gagnon cites Middle Assyrian Laws (19 and 20, tablet A) and other ANE texts to indicate that ANE peoples were certainly aware of consensual homosexual acts, which were an aspect of ANE life (2005:376). He also notes that the Sodomites were probably guilty of both violence and sexual lust:

A strict either/or interpretation, either homosexual/bisexual lust or an aggressive disgrace of visitors, goes beyond the wording of the text and imposes a distinction that did not always hold true in the ancient world. As we have seen, homosexual desire was not unknown in the ancient Near East, not to mention ancient Greece. Heterosexual rape is an act of aggression, but it is usually not void of all sexual desire...To suggest that the story does not speak to the issue of homosexual behavior between consenting adults, even in an indirect way, is misleading (Gagnon 2001:77-78).

5.7 Conclusion

Traditional scholars have thus endeavoured to counter the arguments formulated by the revisionist camp. However, it is apparent that these efforts have not been generally embraced, and wide division persists between the two camps.

In all, it appears that the debate will continue for some time to come.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The same-sex debate is clearly one of the most emotive and controversial of our generation. For this reason it is important to approach the matter with a clear head and heart: to be open to God and His leading, and also not to be enflamed with bias or emotion.

Sadly, accusations of bias have been levelled from both sides of the debate. Ndungane, commenting on the traditional condemnation of homosexual behaviour, suggests:

Given that the scriptures were written at least 20 centuries ago, before the advent and development of our current medical, psychological and sociological studies, this attitude toward scripture might validly be accused of being simply a way to support a particular prejudice (Ndungane 2000).

The Archbishop has used this as a springboard for his comparison of the gay issue with slavery and the role of women in the church.

On the other hand, Robert Gagnon suggests that several purportedly unbiased anthologies on the same-sex debate bear clear leanings toward the Liberal school, in that:

In each collection, contributions from scholars opposed to same-sex intercourse are in a distinct minority: four or five out of thirteen in Siker; two out of nine in Brawley; three or four out of thirteen in Seow; and four out of eleven in Balch (Gagnon 2001:39; see also the provisional criticism of Haas 2002:502).

Likewise, Thomas Oden, a former theological Liberal and since convert to conservatism, opines as to bias and political manipulation within church bodies regarding same-sex forums, noting:

Each time the issue is tested, the sexual experimenters think they have the votes. Then comes the floor test. Then the rejection, by a stable two-thirds majority, which more recently has been extended to a three-fourths majority. Then the outcries are heard about populist homophobia and reactionary stupidity...Every General Conference of The United Methodist Church since 1972 has been tested (especially in liberally tilted media interpretation) by advocates of the legitimization of any-gender, all-orifice intercourse (Oden 1995:153).

It is also important to consider the possible influence of postmodernism, which may result in a (conscious or otherwise) bias in favour of vaguaries and against dogmatism. It is clear that the Bible does contain grey areas. If homosexuality is one of them, then this must be honestly acknowledged; but if the matter is clear-cut, then a certain courage and integrity is essential in confronting the truth on the matter.

It is clear, then, that further study is imperative either way. On the one hand, if the matter is open, that is, if there is no definite conclusion that can be drawn at this stage in the debate, then further study is necessary, as it may shed the final light needed. However, if it is a 'closed book' that the Sodom encounter clearly condemns all same-sex activity, then so too is deeper study needed in order to bring irrefutable evidence and revelation on the matter, so as to dispel erroneous theology once and for all.

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