

*An era can be considered over when its
basic illusions have been exhausted.*

Arthur Miller

“I think I'd better think it out again!”¹ The Clobber Text of Rom 1:18-32

Arthur J. Dewey

0. A Contemporary Instance

Recently Rom 1:24-32 figured prominently in a critique of the presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg. This passage from Paul’s Letter to the Romans was trotted out to denounce what was seen as a major attack upon Christian values and American life.

In the name of progressivism we now have a male presidential candidate who has a husband whom he publicly introduces and even kisses without shame, while millions of Americans applaud and approve. And perhaps worse yet is that the shock effect has been so reduced that the rest of us are numb and desensitized to this most shameful and abominable behavior.²

¹ See footnote n.61. With apologies to Fagin.

² Bert Farias, “Gay Activism: The Death Rattle of a Nation.” (2/14/ 2020)
<https://www.charismanews.com/opinion/the-flaming-herald/79930-gay-activism-the-death-rattle-of-a-nation>

After blaming Churches and clergy who have swallowed “the lie of homosexual behavior,” Bert Farias denies that the peoples’ views can be “evolving” over such matters. Indeed, Farias cites the Scriptures to demonstrate that the Bible is hardly “evolving”:

In fact, when those who practice such things that are "deserving of death" also approve of others who practice them (Rom. 1:32), it is one of God's final signs of His wrath on a society. This is a description of gay activism and constantly pushing for its normalcy and marginalizing those who disapprove. This is present-day America. How far we've fallen!³

Farias goes on to convict Buttigieg et al of a fundamentally flawed condition as found in Romans:

Buttigieg and others of his kind will do everything in his power to normalize homosexual relationships even more in the eyes of America. They are products of what the Bible calls a "debased mind" or a mind void of judgment (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28) that God Himself has given them over to.⁴

Farias concludes that, despite Buttigieg’s attempts to convince the electorate that such homosexual relationships are normal, the sacred scripture is quite clear:

Buttigieg will also do his best to marginalize those who are convinced that these relationships are contrary to the will of God. But once again, the Scriptures are clear:

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not proper. ... Those who commit such things are worthy of death. They not only do them, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Rom. 1:28, 32).⁵

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Such a conclusion is hardly novel. But given the volatility of the political situation today as well as the recent history of aggression towards members of the LGBTQ community, these words convey a definite sense of threat. But this threat is not simply a singular intimidation. Farias invokes again and again a sacred text. The seriousness of the subject matter demands nothing less. This act of scriptural citation, thus, is not a mere reference; rather, it has the manifest design to defend what Farias considers sacred and to register a decided effect upon all those who are sympathetic to Buttigieg's position. In a nation that boasts of its Christian heritage, Farias' rhetorical move enlists the power of Scripture against "those who practice" such behavior. Farias' website article intends a far-reaching social critique.

What is quite apparent in Farias' online material is that the author considers the biblical text to be quite clear and readily applicable to a contemporary interpretation. There does not seem to be any concern over whether the scriptural text cited carries any ambiguity or need to be clarified. Moreover, Farias never indicates any apprehension over the possibility that his reading of Romans might be off the mark. His language battens down all the hatches as he launches into his opposition. He is totally assured of his reading of Romans and his condemnation of Buttigieg et al. For scripture is quite clear and it is not at all worth asking whether Paul meant what Farias offers.

It is, however, the contention of this paper that a reading of Rom 1:18-32 is not that simple. An historical critical investigation of Rom 1:18-32 cannot be avoided. First, we must go beyond a shoot-from-the-hips style of bible reading preferred by many today. This is because we need to be fair both to the modern bible readers and to the composer of the ancient text. For an unexamined reading fails to account for the complexity, depth and richness of contemporary bible readers as well as of the first century communities out of which these scriptures emerged. Second, a critical investigation of this biblical material may radically challenge the contemporary readers beyond what Rom 1:18-32 is

often thought to mean. Third, as we begin to observe how the text of Romans is woven we may gain a strategy of reading our own historical situation in addition to recognizing the limits of that first century argument. Let us then move to the text and its likely historical situation.

1.0 Rom 1:18-32 – Content and Context

1.1 The passage under investigation: Rom 1:16-32

<p>16 I'm not embarrassed by this news, because it has the power to transform those who are persuaded by it, first Jews and then Greeks.</p> <p>17 God's character is shown by this news to be trustworthy and that leads to having confidence in God, just as scripture says: "The one who decides to live on the basis of confidence in God is the one who gets it right."</p> <p>18 At the same time heaven's just indignation is being shown against all disregard of God and God's justice on the part of those who try to repress the truth (about God) by their wrongdoing.</p> <p>19 What can be known about God is all around them for God has made this clear to them.</p> <p>20 Indeed, God's invisible qualities—eternal power and divine nature—can be visibly apprehended, ever since creation, through the things God made. As a result, they have no excuse.</p> <p>21 Even though they knew about God, they failed to honor or give God what God is due.</p>	<p>Ου γαρ επαισχυνομαι το ευαγγελιον, δυναμις γαρ θεου εστιν εις σωτηριαν παντι τω πιστευοντι, Ιουδαιω τε πρωτον και Ελληνι</p> <p>δικαιοσυνη γαρ θεου εν αυτω αποκαλυπτεται εκ πιστεως εις πιστιν, καθως γεγραπται, Ο δε δικαιος εκ πιστεως ζησεται.</p> <p>Αποκαλυπτεται γαρ οργη θεου απ ουρανου επι πασαν ασεβειαν και αδικιαν ανθρωπων των την αληθειαν εν αδικια κατεχοντων,</p> <p>διοτι το γνωστον του θεου φανερον εστιν εν αυτοις ο θεος γαρ αυτοις εφανερωσεν.</p> <p>τα γαρ αορατα αυτου απο κτισεως κοσμου τοις ποιημασιν νοουμενα καθοραται, η τε αιδιος αυτου δυναμις και θειοτης, εις το ειναι αυτους αναπολογητους</p> <p>διοτι γνοντες τον θεον ουχ ως θεον εδοξασαν η ηυχαιστησαν, αλλ</p>
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Instead, their thinking became warped and their muddled minds grew clouded.

²Although they portrayed themselves as enlightened, they became fools. ²³They traded the majesty of the immortal God for imitations—a likeness of a mortal man, as well as of birds, cattle, and reptiles.

²⁴So God handed them over in their cravings to self-destructive behavior so that they degraded their bodies among themselves.

²⁵They traded the truth about God for a lie; they adored and were devoted to the creature, instead of the creator—who is praised forever. Amen!

²⁶For this reason God handed them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for what is unnatural;

²⁷in the same way, the men abandoned natural sexual relations with women and became inflamed with desire for each other—men engaging in shameless acts with men and paying the price personally for the error of their ways.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to recognize God, God handed them over to an unfit mind, to do what is not fitting.

²⁹They became preoccupied with every kind of injustice, immorality, greediness, and depravity; they are consumed by jealousy, murder, strife, deceit, and spite. They have become gossips, ³⁰slanderers, and despisers of God. They are haughty, arrogant, and pretentious. They invent evil schemes and

εματαιωθησαν εν τοις διαλογισμοις αυτων και εσκοτισθη η ασυνετος αυτων καρδια.

φασκοντες ειναι σοφοι εμωρανθησαν, και ηλλαξαν την δοξαν του αφθαρτου θεου εν ομοιωματι εικονος φθαρτου ανθρωπου και πετεινων και τετραποδων και ερπετων.

Διο παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εν ταις επιθυμιας των καρδιων αυτων εις ακαθαρσιαν του ατιμαζεσθαι τα σωματα αυτων εν αυτοις, οιτινες μετηλλαξαν την αληθειαν του θεου εν τω ψευδει, και εσεβασθησαν και ελατρευσαν τη κτισει παρα τον κτισαντα, ος εστιν ευλογητος εις τους αιωνας αμην.

δια τουτο παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εις παθη ατιμιας αι τε γαρ θηλειαι αυτων μετηλλαξαν την φυσικην χρησην εις την παρα φυσιν,

ομοιως τε και οι αρσενες αφεντες την φυσικην χρησην της θηλειας εξεκαυθησαν εν τη ορεξει αυτων εις αλληλους, αρσενες εν αρσεσιν την ασχημοσυνην κατεργαζομενοι και την αντιμισθιαν ην εδει της πλανης αυτων εν εαυτοις απολαμβανοντες.

και καθως ουκ εδοκιμασαν τον θεον εχειν εν επιγνωσει, παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εις αδοκιμον νουν, ποιειν τα μη καθηκοντα,

πεπληρωμενους παση αδικια πονηρια πλεονεξια κακια, μεστους φθονου φονου εριδος δολου κακοηθειας, ψιθυριστας, καταλαλους, θεοστυγεις, υβριστας, υπερηφανους, αλαζονας, εφευρετας κακων, γονευσιν απειθεις,

<p>rebel against their parents. ³¹They are senseless, faithless, heartless, and merciless.</p> <p>³²Although they know full well God's judgment that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do these evil deeds themselves, but even support those who do them. (SV)</p>	<p>ασυνετους, ασυνθετους, αστοργους, ανελεημονας</p> <p>οιτινες το δικαιωμα του θεου επιγνοντες, οτι οι τα τοιαυτα πρασσουντες αξιοι θανατου εισιν, ου μονον αυτα ποιουσιν αλλα και συνευδοκουσιν τοις πρασσουσιν.</p>
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1.2 The historical and rhetorical context.

1.2.1 The larger Pauline horizon.

The letter to the Romans represents a pivotal moment in the life of Paul and the developing Jesus movement. Paul writes to Rome around 55 C.E. presumably from Corinth (Rom 15:25-27). Intending to deliver to Jerusalem the collection he had just completed among the assemblies of Greece and Asia Minor, Paul looks ahead as he writes to the "holy ones" at Rome. Although he is unsure of his reception in Jerusalem (Rom 15:31), he has set his sights on moving onto Rome and then to Spain (Rom 15:24). The collection was very important to Paul. In his mind the reception of the collection would confirm the basic equality of gentiles with Jews before the God of Israel. Working on that fundamental understanding, Paul anticipates visiting the Roman communities before he journeys to what was then considered the fullest expression of Roman conquest and culture.

By taking into consideration Paul's intent to move beyond the "center of the world" we can note that Paul was not simply rendering a comprehensive resume of his earlier thought nor a final testament. Rather, Paul presents in Romans a strategy of envisioning and maneuvering with the utopian forces of the world. He is inviting his listeners to join in this endeavor in asking the Roman communities to back his Spanish journey. He

challenges his Roman listeners to realize that their concern is not a closed circle but an ever-enlarging spiral.⁶

1.2.2 The Cultural Texture

It is difficult for modern Christians to imagine what the early Jesus movement was like, especially before the fall of the Temple (70 C.E.). During Paul's time both within and outside of Israel there were numerous ways of being Jewish. The followers of Jesus would have still been considered a sect within the pluralism that was Second Temple Judaism. While there were some two million Jews in Israel, there were more than four million around the Mediterranean. Scholars account for such an enormous Jewish population due to extensive missionary outreach. The earliest communities of Jesus believers in Rome may well have come out of this phenomenon. In fact, there may have been some 15,000 to 50,000 Jews living in Rome during the first century.⁷ Since the Jews there lived in densely populated and lower economic areas their tenement apartments and homes could accommodate between 20 to 40 people. The number of synagogues in Rome could have been quite significant⁸. Those addressed (primarily gentiles?⁹) by Paul may well have been affiliated with some of those synagogues.

⁶ Dewey 1994.

⁷ Lampe 2003, 84

⁸ At least evidence for eleven synagogues in Rome has been found (Jewett 2007, 57).

⁹ The question of the audience of Paul's letter is still a matter of debate. While it may be conjectured that the decree of Claudius, ordering Jews from Rome, resulted in the removal of many Jews, it is more likely that leaders of the community were dispatched, leaving a residual Jewish presence (Lampe 2003, 15ff.). This would be consistent with other Imperial removals of cults and philosophers. Mark Nanos (2018) has asked some important questions on this matter and brings a nuanced correction about Jewish presence to the conversation.

Diaspora Judaism offered an honorable religious tradition, ancient in lineage, which provided the basic tools to construct a civilized society. This tradition took root in Rome with Jewish presence during the Diaspora. This was increased by the slaves brought back from Pompey's taking over of Jerusalem (63 BCE). From epigraphical evidence it would appear that a number of the synagogues in Rome were established by freed persons or descendants from slaves and bore names that indicated connections with the larger Roman social web.¹⁰ Moreover, both practical and mystical, Hellenistic Judaism invited gentiles to experience a relationship (initially as "godfearers") with the God of the universe as embodied in the Torah. Nevertheless, to the Jews, who had been favored by God with the enlightenment of the Torah, the gentiles (until their full incorporation by circumcision) were perceived as radically inferior. From the Jewish perspective gentiles lacked the full expression of God's will and thus the benefits that would follow from such divine patronage. As we shall see, Romans 1:18-32 comes out of the synagogue appraisal of the gentiles.

1.2.3 The Text of Romans

The Letter to the Romans is actually a composite. The concluding benediction (16:25-27) has a suspect history. It appeared at various positions in ancient manuscripts. Because of its formal, liturgical tone and vocabulary not found elsewhere in Romans, most scholars regard this ending as a later addition.

Chapter 16:1-24 is a separate letter of recommendation for Phoebe a leader from the assembly at Cenchræe (16:1-2), with accompanying greetings to and from various members of the early communities (16:3-16, 21-24). There is great debate whether this letter of recommendation was sent originally with Romans 1-15. Some scholars argue

¹⁰ Three first century synagogues ("Augustenses," "Agrippenses," "Volumnenses") sport their social connections (Lampe 83).

that the letter of recommendation contains names associated with Greece and Asia Minor (Prisca and Aquila), while others actually see such people returning to Rome (cf. Acts 18:2) from which they were expelled under the emperor Claudius (49 C.E.). Finally, if this letter of recommendation was carried along with the letter for Rome, then Phoebe may well have delivered Paul's address.

1.2.4 The Epistolary Structure and Rhetoric of Romans

The Letter to the Romans is the longest of Paul's correspondence. Despite its length the letter shares the familiar structure of a Pauline Letter (Salutation 1:1-7; Thanksgiving 1:8-15; Body 1:16-11:36; Exhortation 12:1-15:32; Closing 15:33). Yet, Romans exhibits some unusual elements. Unlike other Pauline letter openings this one is quite extensively constructed. Moreover, although 1 Corinthians has a lengthy collection of material, the body of argument in Romans differs markedly in its rhetorical approach. While some scholars suggest that Paul produced his "last will and testament"¹¹ due to his anxiety over what he might face in Jerusalem, that interpretation is anachronistic, since it understands the strategy of the letter from events which had yet to occur.

We catch the vitality and momentum of Romans when we focus on the rhetorical effort of Paul. In Romans we can detect a strategy that is more than a resume of the past. Paul would persuade his listeners to envision and maneuver with the utopian forces of a transforming world.

In particular we can note that Romans is a letter essay built through the use of diatribe. Diatribe was a form of speech used by cynic and stoic philosophers. It was not used for simple speculation, nor for any systematic analysis. On the contrary, diatribe is primarily a teaching tool, which attempts to engage the listener directly. As a skilled

¹¹ Such as Bornkamm. 1991.

rhetorician Paul would have imagined in advance his prospective audience. He would have thought out his basic points to be made, along with noting the possible objections. He would have anticipated the expectations of his listeners. He would then pepper his argument with their probable objections (e.g., 3:1, 3, 5), observations from the audience’s perspective (2:2), speech directed at a fictional figure (2:2-29), and personification (7:7-25). All of this is done to get the listeners not only to imagine the argument more easily but to unpack the assumptions they uncritically hold. As we shall see, with Paul diatribal speech goes deep -- to fundamental human questions.

2.0 Rom 1:18-32 – A Critical Reading

2.1 Rom 1:1-7 (Salutation)

<p>Paul, slave of God’s Anointed, Jesus— summoned as an envoy [and] appointed to announce God’s world-changing news,</p> <p>²which was anticipated by the prophets in holy scriptures.</p> <p>³This news is about the “son of God” — who was physically descended from David,</p> <p>⁴appointed and empowered as “son of God,” in accordance with the spirit of holiness, from the time of his resurrection from the dead — Jesus, the Anointed, our lord.</p> <p>⁵Through him I have received the gracious favor of my calling to promote in his name the obedience that comes from a confident reliance upon God among all of the world’s nations.</p>	<p>Παυλος δουλος Χριστου Ιησου, κλητος αποστολος, αφωρισμενος εις ευαγγελιον θεου,</p> <p>ο προεπηγγειλατο δια των προφητων αυτου εν γραφαις αγιαις,</p> <p>περι του υιου αυτου του γενομενου εκ σπερματος Δαυιδ κατα σαρκα,</p> <p>του ορισθεντος υιου θεου εν δυναμει κατα πνευμα αγιωσυνης εξ αναστασεως νεκρων, Ιησου Χριστου του κυριου ημων,</p> <p>δι ου ελαβομεν χαριν και αποστολην εις υπακοην πιστεως εν πασιν τοις εθνεσιν υπερ του ονοματος αυτου,</p>
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<p>⁶You yourselves are among those who are called, since you belong to Jesus the Anointed.</p>	<p>εν οἷς εἰστέ καὶ ὑμεῖς κλητοὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,</p>
<p>⁷[I am writing this] to all of God’s beloved in Rome, called to be God’s own people: may gracious favor and peace from God our Great Benefactor and from our lord Jesus the Anointed be with you. (SV)</p>	<p>πᾶσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἀγαπητοῖς θεοῦ, κλητοῖς ἀγίοις χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.</p>

In an earlier sound analysis of Rom 1:1-7¹² I argued that the first seven verses of Romans displayed a well-crafted period (fully sounded sentence) that the ancient would consider a “polished” style. With such elevated language Paul would have “entered into competition with the elegant sounds of the empire.” It would demonstrate by its formality that Paul intended to deliver a discourse on equal footing with the competing imperial claims. From the outset Paul announces a very specific challenge to the Imperial social gospel with a universal scope. There is, right from the start, a motif of displacement. The slave of a newly declared Ruler (1:4) has been designated to deliver the newflash (euaggelion) that peace and prosperity (1:7) have arrived with this unlikely Lord. Received in the heart of the Empire, this letter’s delivery throws down the gauntlet as to who is the genuine sovereign of the world. Georgi rightly puts it, “Paul’s gospel enters into critical dialogue with the good news that universal peace has been achieved by the miracle at Actium” (1991, 87).

The audience of Paul would not have missed the political nuances of Paul’s words. “Favor” and “peace” were imperial slogans ever since Augustus established the miracle of the Pax Romana. The emperor embodied the virtues of loyalty (pietas/pistis) and justice (dikaiosune) and proclaimed a story (euaggelion) of remarkable success. Entitled

¹² Dewey, “Competing Gospels,” pp.70-72. In this analysis I relied heavily upon the ground-breaking work of Margaret Lee and Brandon Scott later published in *Sound Mapping the New Testament*.

“son of God” (filius divi), the emperor guaranteed the prosperity of the world through his official role and upheld an elitist pyramid of power, where the reigning 5% lived off the labor underneath. Romans’ formal introduction (1:1-7) and surprising claim that a ruler would die for his enemies (5:6ff.) would have offered a shocking counterpoint to the prevailing regime.

2.2 Rom 1:8-15 (Thanksgiving)

<p>First of all, through Jesus, the Anointed, I thank God for all of you, because your confident trust in God is being broad- cast throughout the world.</p> <p>⁹God is my witness, whom I serve wholeheartedly by spreading the world-changing news of the “son of God,” that I always mention you when I pray,</p> <p>¹⁰imploring that now at last I may succeed in coming to you, God willing. ¹¹I’m longing to see you so that I may share some inspiring benefit that will strengthen you —</p> <p>¹²or to put it more pertinently, that when we come together, we might be mutually encouraged by each other’s confident trust in God, both yours and mine.</p> <p>¹³I think you ought to know, my friends, how often I planned to visit you —but have been prevented until now —in the hope that I</p>	<p>Πρωτον μεν ευχαριστω τω θεω μου δια Ιησου Χριστου περι παντων υμων, οτι η πιστις υμων καταγγελλεται εν ολω τω κοσμω.</p> <p>μαρτυς γαρ μου εστιν ο θεος, ω λατρευω εν τω πνευματι μου εν τω ευαγγελιω του υιου αυτου, ως αδιαλειπτως μνειαν υμων ποιουμαι</p> <p>παντοτε επι των προσευχων μου, δεομενος ει πως ηδη ποτε ευοδωθησομαι εν τω θεληματι του θεου ελθειν προς υμας. επιποθω γαρ ιδειν υμας, ινα τι μεταδω χαρισμα υμιν πνευματικον εις το στηριχθηναι υμας,</p> <p>τουτο δε εστιν συμπαρακληθηναι εν υμιν δια της εν αλληλοις πιστεως υμων τε και εμου.</p> <p>ου θελω δε υμας αγνοειν, αδελφοι, οτι πολλακις προεθεμην ελθειν προς υμας,</p>
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may work as fruitfully among you, as in the rest of the world.	και εκωλυθην αχρι του δευρο, ινα τινα καρπον σχω και εν υμιν καθως και εν τοις λοιποις εθνεσιν.
¹⁴ [By virtue of my calling] I am under obligation both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish;	Ελλησιν τε και βαρβαροις, σοφοις τε και ανοητοις οφειλετης ειμι
¹⁵ that's why I'm eager to proclaim God's world- changing news also to you in Rome.	ουτως το κατ εμε προθυμον και υμιν τοις εν Ρωμη ευαγγελισασθαι.

Rom 1:8-15 functions as both a thanksgiving (the literary format) and as an exordium (vv.8-10, the rhetorical aspect) along with a brief narratio (vv. 11-15) or explanation of his desire to visit them. Here Paul moves from his arresting opening to giving thanks for the Romans because their confident trust is communicated world-wide. He then declares his good wishes for them and his constant intent to visit. Within the very prayer of thanks Paul honors his listeners with noting the extensive recognition of their life of trust. He then places his prospective visit within a frame that is characteristically Pauline: that such a mission is another instance of how the life in the Anointed is a life of mutual support and a building up of one another. He then locates his visit within the larger purview of his overall mission to “the nations.” In touching on his mission Paul declares that he is “obligated”:

Ελλησιν τε και βαρβαροις
σοφοις τε και ανοητοις

both to Greeks and barbarians
both to the wise and the foolish

While the distinction “Greeks and barbarians” is a cliché in the ancient world, Jewett (130) has rightly pointed out that this note of obligation “to hostile poles of ethnicity,

class and education” is quite remarkable. The ancients were quite keen to recognize social obligations. Indeed, the entire ancient system of honor rests upon such acknowledgement. But such acknowledgement was done to maintain these distinctions, not to conjoin the disparate poles. To be “indebted” to each and in such a global manner underscores the particularity of Paul’s mission to the nations. In effect, Paul matches the world-wide fame of the Roman community’s confident trust with his cosmic task (v.15). He is asking his listeners to participate in what Jewett (134) argues is a new way of honor, where the obligation carries beyond distinctions.

2.3 Rom 1:16-17

<p>16 I’m not embarrassed by this news, because it has the power to transform</p>	<p>Ου γαρ επαισχυνομαι το ευαγγελιον, δυναμις γαρ θεου εστιν εις σωτηριαν</p>
<p>those who are persuaded by it, first Jews and then Greeks.</p>	<p>παντι τω πιστευοντι, Ιουδαιω τε πρωτον και Ελληνι</p>
<p>17 God’s character is shown by this news to be trustworthy</p>	<p>δικαιοσυνη γαρ θεου εν αυτω αποκαλυπτεται</p>
<p>and that leads to having confidence in God, just as scripture says: “The one who decides to live on the basis of confidence in God is the one who gets it right.” (SV)</p>	<p>εκ πιστεως εις πιστιν, καθως γεγραπται, Ο δε δικαιος εκ πιστεως ζησεται.</p>

2.3.1 A Scandalous Proposition

Rom 1:15-16 contains what most scholars¹³ consider the basic premise of the Letter to the Romans. In rhetorical terms these verses form the *propositio*, the section that announces the basic point of contention. This *propositio* delivers a startling thesis. In fact, Paul introduces it by noting that he is not “ashamed” of this message. In mentioning the possibility of shame, Paul is quite aware of the dynamics of honor that maintain the imperial world. In contrast to the *ευαγγελιον* of Rome which delivers

¹³ Jewett 135.

honor and benefits through power,¹⁴ the εὐαγγελίον Paul proclaims turns, as Georgi puts it, “the Roman Empire upside down.”¹⁵ The Priene inscription leaves no doubt that the message of Rome provides a sustained flow of benefits, leaving all competition far behind.

Whereas the providence which divinely ordered our lives created with zeal and munificence the most perfect good for our lives by producing Augustus and filling him with virtue for the benefaction of mankind, blessing us and those after us with a savior who put an end to war and established peace; and whereas Caesar when he appeared exceeded the hopes of all who had anticipated the world-transforming message (εὐαγγελίον), not only surpassing the benefactors born before him but not even leaving those to come any hope of surpassing him; and whereas the birthday of the god marks for the world the beginning of the world-transforming message (εὐαγγελίον) through his coming... and suggested for the honor of Augustus a thing so far unknown by the Greeks, namely beginning their calendar with the god's (Augustus') nativity¹⁶...

Yet Paul is not “ashamed” to counter this powerful proclamation with the surprising news that God accepts what the world would consider “one without advantage,” enthroning a crucified criminal (1 Cor 1:18ff.; Phil 2; Rom 1:4). Such a declaration ensnares¹⁷ all who would base their hope of peace and prosperity on the competitive honor system in place.

Paul does not shy away from the question of power. He contends that the world transforming message delivers life-saving power (δυναμις γαρ θεου εστιν εις

¹⁴ Dewey, “The Gospel of Rome,”

¹⁵ Georgi 1991 148-57

¹⁶ F. C. Grant, ed., *Ancient Roman Religion* 1957, 174. Translation has been modified by writer.

¹⁷ Σκανδαλον Georgi (1991, 48) notes is not simply something one trips over. Rather it conveys a certain entrapment, deception and trickery. The word “ensnare” captures what the message of Paul does to the rival claims. This also intimates what Paul will rhetorically achieve in Rom 1:16-3:31.

σωτηριαν), that is universally accessible (παντι τω πιστευοντι). He then adds Ιουδαιω τε πρωτον και Ελληνι (first Jews and then Greeks). This is a variation of the distinction he already used (v.14).¹⁸ As noted, v.14 employs a cultural cliché, a standard way of dividing the civilized ones from the uncivilized. Greeks and Romans would subscribe in their own terms to this. Such a distinction also figured into the Jewish apprehension of the world. This distinction is inherently a tribal distinction, contrasting the group considering themselves to be truly human with all those others who are found wanting. What is crucial for our consideration is that such a distinction in first century society ratifies the social status and relative honor. *But this distinction in Paul cannot be read to reinforce the status quo.* For the divine power is accessible to “all,” not to the elite. Further, if Paul is addressing a community, where the Jewish members (due to the recent imperial action) may have diminished and are outnumbered by non-Jewish Jesus followers, then when Paul mentions “first to the Jews” he would be upending any pride of place among those who trust in this surprising God.

Paul then says that the very character of God’s trustworthiness is now being revealed (αποκαλυπτεται). For the apocalyptic Paul the acceptance of the crucified one by the God of Israel changed everything. The end had begun. The conditions of existence are fundamentally altered. He himself had been radically stunned by this insight. His former notion of a competitive approach to reality (Gal 1:13-14) was upended by what he considered a prophetic call (Gal 1:15-16). His task now extends not only to communicating to the communities in Rome but also to pushing onward into Spain. The word (αποκαλυπτεται) must be underscored. The proper relationship with God (δικαιοσυνη θεου), the way in which God establishes solidarity with humanity, has

¹⁸ The transition from “Greeks and barbarians” to “Jews and Greeks” is not just a variation of one for the other. The first social distinction reflects Paul’s mission to the nations. The second distinction of “Jews and Greek” may well be his attempt to recognize the Jewish presence and context of the situation in Rome.

been made known. It is on the basis of trust that genuine life can be and is being lived.¹⁹ And sacred scripture concurs (καθως γεγραπται). Jewett, summarizing the insights of Georgi puts it nicely:

...this gospel shatters the unrighteous precedence given to the strong over the weak, the free and well-educated over the slaves and the ill-educated, the Greeks and Romans over the barbarians. If what the world considers dishonorable has power, it will prevail and achieve a new form of honor to those who have not earned it, an honor consistent with divine righteousness.²⁰

Paul transmutes the gospel of Rome where fides/pietas (πιστις)²¹ is demonstrated by Rome in its Emperors, reprising the ideal of Aeneas' pietas. Instead, the life of trust is being carried out truly by those suspect Jesus communities in Rome. Paul contends that his message validates and energizes the life the Roman communities.²² Jewett adds the

¹⁹ When Paul uses the word "gospel" he does not have in mind any manuscript or extended narrative. For Paul the "gospel" is the oral communication of God's power touching those who trust in it. A breakthrough (revelation/apocalypse) occurs to those who are open to the message. It is like a light going on in a darkened room. All of a sudden you can see things for the first time. Life has texture and color; depth and contrast. Paul discovered that God directly relates to humanity in a surprising and fundamental way. God's "justice" (dikaiosune) rests on trust alone. God trusts us so that we can respond in kind (1:17). Even the written tradition speaks to that: "The just one will live out of trust (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17)."

²⁰ Jewett 139.

²¹ Dewey, "Gospel of Rome," See also the image of Aeneas on the Ara Pacis as well as Res Gestae 34: In my sixth and seventh consulates (28-27 B.C.E.), after putting out the civil war, having obtained all things by universal consent, I handed over the state from my power to the dominion of the senate and Roman people. And for this merit of mine, by a senate decree, I was called Augustus and the doors of my temple were publicly clothed with laurel and a civic crown was fixed over my door and a gold shield placed in the Julian senate-house, and the inscription of that shield testified to the virtue, mercy, justice, and piety, for which the senate and Roman people gave it to me. After that time, I exceeded all in influence, but I had no greater power than the others who were colleagues with me in each magistracy.

²² See my article "Switchback Codes" (2017) on Paul's hidden transcript to the Jesus communities.

point that Paul sees that this new way of living comes about not through “force of arms or apocalyptic military miracles” but by the human act of communication.

2.4 Rom 1:18-32

<p>18 At the same time heaven’s just indignation is being shown</p> <p>against all disregard of God and God’s justice on the part of those who try to repress the truth (about God) by their wrongdoing.</p> <p>19 What can be known about God is all around them for God has made this clear to them.</p> <p>20 Indeed, God’s invisible qualities—eternal power and divine nature—can be visibly apprehended, ever since creation, through the things God made. As a result, they have no excuse.</p> <p>21 Even though they knew about God, they failed to honor or give God what God is due. Instead, their thinking became warped and their muddled minds grew clouded.</p> <p>22 Although they portrayed themselves as enlightened, they became fools. 23 They traded the majesty of the immortal God for imitations—a likeness of a mortal man, as well as of birds, cattle, and reptiles.</p> <p>24 So God handed them over in their cravings to self-destructive behavior so that they degraded their bodies among themselves.</p> <p>25 They traded the truth about God for a lie; they adored and were devoted to the</p>	<p>Αποκαλυπτεται γαρ οργη θεου απ ουρανου</p> <p>επι πασαν ασεβειαν και αδικιαν ανθρωπων των την αληθειαν εν αδικια κατεχοντων, διοτι το γνωστον του θεου φανερον εστιν εν αυτοις ο θεος γαρ αυτοις εφανερωσεν.</p> <p>τα γαρ αορατα αυτου απο κτισεως κοσμου τοις ποιημασιν νοουμενα καθοραται, η τε αιδιος αυτου δυναμις και θειοτης, εις το ειναι αυτους αναπολογητους</p> <p>διοτι γνοντες τον θεον ουχ ως θεον εδοξασαν η ηυχαιστησαν, αλλ εματαιωθησαν εν τοις διαλογισμοις αυτων και εσκοτισθη η ασυνετος αυτων καρδια.</p> <p>φασκοντες ειναι σοφοι εμωρανθησαν, και ηλλαξαν την δοξαν του αφθαρτου θεου εν ομοιωματι εικονος φθαρτου ανθρωπου και πετεινων και τετραποδων και ερπετων.</p> <p>Διο παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εν ταις επιθυμιαις των καρδιων αυτων εις ακαθαρσιαν του ατιμαζεσθαι τα σωματα αυτων εν αυτοις,</p> <p>οιτινες μετηλλαξαν την αληθειαν του θεου εν τω ψευδει,</p>
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creature, instead of the creator—who is praised forever. Amen!

²⁶For this reason God handed them over to disgraceful passions.

Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for what is unnatural; ²⁷in the same way, the men abandoned natural sexual relations with women and became inflamed with desire for each other—men engaging in shameless acts with men and paying the price personally for the error of their ways.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to recognize God, God handed them over to an unfit mind, to do what is not fitting.

²⁹They became preoccupied with every kind of injustice, immorality, greediness, and depravity; they are consumed by jealousy, murder, strife, deceit, and spite. They have become gossips, ³⁰slanderers, and despisers of God. They are haughty, arrogant, and pretentious. They invent evil schemes and rebel against their parents. ³¹They are senseless, faithless, heartless, and merciless.

³²Although they know full well God's judgment that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do these evil deeds themselves, but even support those who do them.

και εσεβασθησαν
και ελατρευσαν τη κτισει παρα τον
κτισαντα,
ος εστιν ευλογητος εις τους αιωνας αμην.

δια τουτο παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εις
παθη ατιμιας

αι τε γαρ θηλειαι αυτων μετηλλαξαν την
φυσικην χρησην εις την παραφυσιν,
ομοιως τε και οι αρσενες αφεντες την
φυσικην χρησην της θηλειας
εξεκαυθησαν εν τη ορεξει αυτων
εις αλληλους, αρσενες εν αρσεσιν
την ασχημοσυνην κατεργαζομενοι
και την αντιμισθιαν ην εδει της πλανης
αυτων
εν εαυτοις απολαμβανοντες.

και καθως ουκ εδοκιμασαν τον θεον εχειν
εν επιγνωσει,
παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εις αδοκιμον
νονν,
ποιειν τα μη καθηκοντα,
πεπληρωμενους παση αδικια
πονηρια πλεονεξια κακια,
μεστους φθονου φονου εριδος δολου
κακοηθειας, ψιθυριστας,
καταλαλους, θεοστυγεις, υβριστας,
υπερηφανους, αλαζονας,
εφευρετας κακων, γονευσιν απειθεις,
ασυνετους, ασυνθετους, αστοργους,
ανελεημονας

οιτινες το δικαιωμα του θεου επιγοντες,
οτι οι τα τοιαυτα πρασσοντες αξιοι
θανατου εισιν,
ου μονον αυτα ποιουσιν
αλλα και συνευδοκουσιν τοις
πρασσουσιν.

2.4.1 Rom 1:18-23

Paul now delivers the shadow side of this apocalyptic breakthrough (v. 18 *Αποκαλυπτεται γαρ οργη θεου απ ουρανου*). The realization of God's justice revealed in the trusting response to the universal message proclaimed by Paul exposes an awful truth.²³ As a light illumines a room and simultaneously throws shadows, so also the recognition of how God genuinely relates (v.17 "God's character is shown ... to be trustworthy and that leads to having confidence in God) uncovers how humanity fails in relating to the divine.

At the same time heaven's just indignation is being shown against all disregard of God and God's justice on the part of those who try to repress the truth (about God) by their wrongdoing. (Rom 1:18)

Every act of impiety (*ασεβεια*) and injustice (*αδικια*) becomes seen for what it is. For both Jews and Romans impiety was the "most heinous crime."²⁴ Injustice was loathed by all those who lived around the Mediterranean. It is crucial to see that such impiety and injustice essentially are detected in the act of repression of the truth. In essence, the revelation of God's trustfulness lays bare the attempted cover-up by humans. Jewett lends a helpful comment:

What the gospel reveals is the ongoing human effort to suppress the truth. Persons and regimes constantly try to cover up the truth about themselves and their self-serving quests for superior honor...²⁵

²³ Rom 1:18 is not an antithesis to Rom 1:17. The revelation of the indignation of God is not equal to the revelation of God's trustworthiness. The use of *γαρ* in v.18 elaborates on some of the consequences of the revelation of God's trustworthy character. This is not a reprise of the double-barreled aspects of the Covenant, with a ledger of promises and curses. Jewett clarifies this by noting that a more traditional reading of the apocalyptic moment could be had if Paul had used "but" instead of "for." Jewett 151, n. 30.
²⁴ See Jewett 152, n. 39. "When piety goes, religion and sanctity go along with it. And when they are gone, there is anarchy and complete confusion in our way of life." Cicero, Nat. d. 1.4.

²⁵ Jewett, 153.

Paul then in v.19 (“What can be known about God is all around them for God has made this clear to them”) makes a remarkable point. He does not maintain the usual Jewish contention²⁶ that the “nations” cannot know the God of Israel, such as can found in the Wisdom of Solomon:

For by nature all men are foolish and have no perception of God. And from the good things to be seen had no power to know him, that neither by giving heed to the works did they recognize the artificer. Wis Sol 13:1

In fact, his position is closer to the Stoics.²⁷ He then in v.20 builds on that point by saying that the invisible qualities of God can be apprehended “through the things God has made.” The conclusion is that humans have no defense. In fact, despite the possibility of knowing God, they failed “to honor or give God what God is due.” Here Paul reiterates what impiety means in the ancient world: a failure to live out the relationship upon which everything depends.²⁸ Paul extends the critique beyond the usual lines of demarcation. It is not just one group singled out. All are caught in the net of foolishness. For humans did not properly acknowledge God as God (ουχ ως θεον εδοξασαν η ηυχαριστησαν)²⁹. They did not return proper thanksgiving³⁰ for the

²⁶ We see in Josephus that the contention that one people have superior knowledge of the gods, while others fall far short was also made against Jews who were reputed to worship an ass’s head (C. Ap. 2.80). In effect, Paul is transcending a tribal discrimination.

²⁷ Epictetus, Diss 2.20.4

²⁸ The image of Aeneas shouldering his aged father Anchises from the burning wreckage of Troy aptly embodies the essence of pietas, the virtue founding the Roman world.

²⁹ Paul combines the language of Jewish and Greco-Roman worship traditions. Jews give “glory to God” (cf. Jewett 157. nn.84-86), Greeks “return thanks.” What is important to see is that usually such a critique of a failure to worship was leveled not at one’s people but at some other group (e.g. 2 Bar 82.3-9). Paul, however, is not selecting favorite targets. Hence, he continues his universal perspective.

³⁰ Epictetus gives us a sense of this basic human response of gratitude to the gods. Diss.1.6.1-2. As a nightingale sings, so does a rational being sing hymns of praise to god (υμνειν με δει το θεον) Diss. 1.16.20.

benefits they were given. This failure to acknowledge God results in a benighted and fateful condition, which Paul brings into the argument's light.

Instead, their thinking became warped and their muddled minds grew clouded. Although they portrayed themselves as enlightened, they became fools. Vv.21b-22.

The claim "to be wise," which Wilckens notes provided supreme status in the ancient world,³¹ is revealed as a mask for those who are really fools.³² Although God could be known by them (vv.19, 21a), they

traded the majesty of the immortal God for imitations—a likeness of a mortal man, as well as of birds, cattle, and reptiles. v.23.

Here Paul is employing the typical Jewish critique against gentile worship. But he does not leave it as such. The folly in which humans are ensnared is not reserved for the non-Jew. All are caught in the cover up as they refuse to acknowledge God. Now we find in the Wis Sol not only the parody of those who "set their hopes on dead things" (13:10) but also a description of the fated origins of idolatry:

For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life; for they did not exist from the beginning, nor will they last forever. For through human vanity they entered the world, and therefore their speedy end has been planned. 14:12-14.

³¹ Wilckens, "σοφία κτλ," TDNT 7(1971) 473.

³² Paul is extending the Socratic tradition of unmasking those who think they are wise.

Paul may well be employing a synagogue critique³³ and the entrapment it entails but he sets his argument beyond the usual complaint against the nations. Further, Jewett points out³⁴ the active role played out by these fools:

They traded the truth about God for a lie
οιτινες μετηλλαξαν την αληθειαν του θεου εν τω ψευδει, v.25

This madness carries forward in devotion to counterfeit deities. The so-called wise ones cannot tell the real from the fake. The contrast between knowing the eternal, powerful God and worshipping a wide assortment of divine imitations becomes quite stark. Human foolishness can no longer be covered up. Such piety is exposed as it truly is: a lie.

P. Eisenbaum³⁵ sums this up:

Romans makes clear that idolatry is not just a sin; it's a sin of cataclysmic proportion. The wrath of God that Paul expects to be unleashed upon the world soon is due to this willful idolatry.

2.4.2 Rom 1:24-32 The Fate of the Cover Up

Rom 1:24-32 presents the argument of the fractured condition of those who would cover up their true situation. The consequence of humanity's suppressing of the truth of their condition results in what can be described as a constant fractalizing of human life. Not acknowledging God leaves humans on their own. Without that fundamental

³³ E. P. Sanders (1977) some time ago has argued that Rom 1:18-2:29 sounds quite contrary to Paul's theological assumptions. He suggests that the entire piece is a synagogue sermon inserted by Paul without any "distinctively Pauline imprint." W. O. Walker has argued that the entire piece is an interpolation (2001).

³⁴ Here Jewett cites Ps 106:20 LXX και αλλαξαντο την δοξαν αυτων εν ομοιωματι μοσχου εσθοντος χορτων ("they changed their glory into a facsimile of a calf that eats grass"). Stowers (1994, 93) cautions against a strong allusion to this line.

³⁵ P. Eisenbaum 2009, 151.

relationship everything breaks down. Everything is “out of joint” and lethal. Vv.24-25 provide the summary results of this fractured situation. It is important to note that God leaves humanity to their own devices.

So God handed them over in their cravings to self-destructive behavior
 Διο παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εν ταις επιθυμιας των καρδιων αυτων

In fact, to be “handed over to their cravings” places the action within the depth of the human heart. “Craving” (επιθυμια) was considered the most dangerous passion. Philo says that is the fountain of all evils, from which flow the calamities of the world.³⁶ But it is not simply “craving” that is the root of the predicament for Paul. Humans, beyond their relationship with the Creator, left to their own designs, suppress and distort the truth. They descend into degradation, dishonoring their own bodies. Corruption follows from the initial break in relationship, in trying to cover up the truth. Moreover, this “degrading of their bodies” probably entails what would be considered perverse sexual relations.³⁷ We have already pointed out above how humanity has settled for the fake over the real God (v.25).

2.5 Rom 1:26-27 the Clobber Text

<p>²⁶For this reason God handed them over to disgraceful passions.</p>	<p>δια τουτο παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εις παθη ατιμιας</p>
<p>Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for what is unnatural;</p>	<p>αι τε γαρ θηλειαι αυτων μετηλλαξαν την φυσικην χρησην εις την παραφυσιν,</p>
<p>in the same way, the men abandoned natural sexual relations with women and became</p>	<p>ομοιως τε και οι αρσενες αφεντες την φυσικην χρησην της θηλειας εξεκαυθησαν εν τη ορεξει αυτων</p>

³⁶ Philo. Spec leg. 4.80, 85. Paul explores this further in Rom 7:7ff.

³⁷ Wis Sol 13:10, noted above, “the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication” makes the explicit link between idolatry and fornication. Thus, for Paul, a broken relation with the Creator would entail brokenness through every other relation, including sexual. Cf. P. Eisenbaum (2009, 152).

inflamed with desire for each other—men engaging in shameless acts with men	εις αλληλους, αρσενες εν αρσεσιν την ασχημοσυνην κατεργαζομενοι
and paying the price personally for the error of their ways.	και την αντιμισθιαν ην εδει της πλανης αυτων εν εαυτοις απολαμβανοντες.

2.5.1 A Slight, But Necessary Digression: Is Rom 1:26-27 Pauline?

Before we consider Rom 1:26-27 explicitly, we need to ask whether these verses were in the original Pauline argument. E. P. Sanders (1977) recognized that the entire section of Rom 1:18-2:29 does not sound Pauline and suggested that Paul had inserted a synagogue sermon into his letter. W. Walker (2001) has argued that the entire section is a later interpolation. Both have recognized that the material veers significantly from Paul's usual language. Yet, it is important to point out that Paul demonstrates both in Romans and his other letters a remarkable rhetorical capacity. We have already noted that the opening of this letter moves far beyond the standard Pauline opening by imitating an ambassadorial speech pattern. The Hymn in Philippians 2 also shows how Paul could insert a song with some emendation; ch.13 of 1 Cor also may also be an inserted poem.³⁸ So the presence of a new trope or vocabulary in itself may not be sufficient to consider a passage non-Pauline. On the other hand, a close reading of the rhetoric in question might disclose some discrepancies that demand explanation. It also needs to be determined whether, if material were possibly non-Pauline, Paul could have employed it.

Perhaps a more important issue for this paper is whether Rom 1:26-27 belongs to the original argument. There are three arguments that suggest an interpolation.

³⁸ See Dewey et al, *The Authentic Letters of Paul* 113-4, 193ff.

First, J. Mazur and M. Vincent (2018) have noted that Tertullian's use of Marcion does not use Rom 1:26-27. If Marcion's version of Paul's letters can be read as one of the earliest collections of Paul, then a critical reading of Tertullian is warranted to determine if anything can be learned of the early Pauline texts. In an article primarily addressed to 1 Cor 6:9, they point out that Rom 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:9-10 are the three passages in Paul and the Pauline traditions concerning homosexuality.³⁹ They examine Tertullian's use of Marcion and conclude that, despite Tertullian's fixation of purity, it is "at least unusual that he has nothing to say to Rom 1:26 or 1 Cor 6:1-12."⁴⁰ They add:

Tertullian does provide commentary on Paul's discussion of sexual morality elsewhere, which indicates that when the text provided him with such statements, he picked them up and made use of them. Finally it could be that Tertullian's silence on the passages concerning homosexuality is simply an indication that those verses did not exist in Marcion's collection of Paul's letters, which still leaves open the question whether Marcion had deleted those or whether these were additions made by unknown redactors of Paul's letters in the second century.

Second, there is terminology in these verses found nowhere else in Paul. Now την φυσικην χρησην (literally "natural use") can be found in the philosophical discussions of the Stoics.⁴¹

Third, if one were to remove vv.26-27 from the argument, v.28 would pick up quite well the argument in v.25. The failure to recognize God (v. 28 ουκ εδοκιμασαν τον θεον εχειν εν επιγνωσει) mirrors how they "traded the truth of God for a lie"(v.25).

³⁹ See W. Walker (2017, 77-87) who addresses these texts.

⁴⁰ J. Mazur and M. Vincent, 160.

⁴¹ H. Koester, "φωσις κτλ.," TDNT 9 (1974) 262-5, 273.

moreover, v.28 then leads into the extended series of what is not proper and subject to judgment.

<p>²⁵They traded the truth about God for a lie; they adored and were devoted to the creature, instead of the creator—who is praised forever. Amen!</p> <p>²⁸And since they did not see fit to recognize God, God handed them over to an unfit mind, to do what is not fitting.</p>	<p>²⁵οιτινες μετηλλαξαν την αληθειαν του θεου εν τω ψευδει, και εσεβασθησαν και ελατρευσαν τη κτισει παρα τον κτισαντα, ος εστιν ευλογητος εις τους αιωνας αμην.</p> <p>²⁸και καθως ουκ εδοκιμασαν τον θεον εχειν εν επιγνωσει, παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εις αδοκιμον νουν, ποιειν τα μη καθηκοντα</p>
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Furthermore, in v.26a *δια τουτο* (“for this reason”) suggests an editorial attempt to connect with v. 24. For many readers this functions as a refrain to v.24a (“So God handed them over ... “ *Διο παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος*) as well as a lead into v.26b-27. Yet, what should be noted is that the fundamental breakdown, namely idolatry, is not mentioned. More, vv.26b-27 seem out of proportion to the surrounding material. This actually is an extended elaboration of v.24b (“they degraded their bodies among themselves”).

A counter argument can be made that we do not find any significant textual variations in the manuscript evidence surrounding these verses. Moreover, one can see that in Wisdom of Solomon, as mentioned above, a linkage between idolatry and fornication.

For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life; for they did not exist from the beginning, nor will they last forever. For through human vanity they entered the world, and therefore their speedy end has been planned. Wis Sol 14:12-14.

In addition, one can note also in the Wisdom of Solomon a number of elaborations on the activities of those ensnared in idol worship.

Lastly, the argument from the absence of Rom 1:26-27 in Tertullian (and thus, Marcion) borders on an argument from silence.

Yet, it should not be forgotten that the *textus receptus* is constructed out of problematic traditions. Walker reminds us that the collection of Pauline letters emerged during a period of intense controversy within the developing communities. Alteration and interpolation were standard tools for opposing sides. The text of Paul's letters "prior to the appearance of the earliest surviving edited collection (around 200 CE) remains, probably forever, shrouded in the mists of obscurity."⁴² In other words, it may well be a critical mistake to assume that the *textus receptus* settles the issue. Sometimes only an internal argument based upon evident discrepancies is left. In addition, if one were to argue for an interpolation then one would have to account for why this was inserted in light of the history of the tradition.

Without vv.26-27 the argument in Rom 1:16-25, 28-32 still works. In fact, the critique of the cover-up of idolatry and its consequences becomes sharpened. But one might then ask whether vv.29-31 are also an added elaboration. Yet, that would miss the rhetorical flourish of "doing what is not fitting" (v.28b). This rush of breakdown upon breakdown sets up well the condemnation of those who well know God's just decree (δικαίωμα). On the other hand, vv.26-27 sound much more like an emended clarification.

Additionally, the fact that there are only three references to homosexuality (all in material attributed to Paul) must be considered from the perspective of interpolation. The material of 1 Tim comes from mid-second century. If the witness of Marcion (through Tertullian) has any merit, then both of the texts in the authentic Paul could also be later interpolations, coming from a hand interested in reprising the social and

⁴² Walker 2017, 94

cultural assumptions of the empire.⁴³ In utilizing the work of Nancy Jay and Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Stowers provides a very helpful insight that allows us to see why such an elaboration would come at this juncture. He reminds us that there are certain unspoken connections in the ancient world. Worship and thanksgiving in the first century entailed sacrifice. And the systems of animal sacrifice conveyed codes of purity and pollution.

The codes of purity regulated access to temples and cults, signifying who could participate as well as when and how. The distinctions among classes of people thus established by the sacrificial systems turn out to be the most important social distinctions in the particular societies, for example: *male/female, priest/layman, child/adult, elite/common, slave/free, native/foreign*.⁴⁴

Stowers adds that comprehending this social order helps us to understand the hypersensitivity to gender errors and why gentiles were characterized by gender errors. This means that one can understand why vv.26-27 could have been appended to Paul's text by a later hand. Already vv.24-25 connected worship and sexual perversion.⁴⁵ Thus, for someone still sharing those cultural cues, such sexual errors could be easily appended to v.25 description of idolatry. Indeed, by putting these verses into a letter that had some authoritative voice the interpolator could reinforce what was actually the ancient status quo.⁴⁶

2.5.2 Returning to Rom 1:26-27

⁴³ More of this below.

⁴⁴ Stowers 1994, 95

⁴⁵ As we saw in Wis Sol 14:12-14.

⁴⁶ It should be noted that the argument just made for interpolation could also make the case for vv.26-27 as part of the original argument by Paul. Stowers would do so. But he never considers the question of interpolation.

Let us now turn to the passage on which our investigation focuses. As it stands in the text, these verses reiterate (cf. v.24) the consequences of God handing them over to the fate of their decisions. Vv.26b-27 provide the explanation (for / γαρ) for the statement in v. 24a. They would be seen as effective examples in proving the argument of what happens when humans are left subject to “disgraceful passions.” The first example concerns how “their”⁴⁷ women has changed “natural relations” for what goes beyond the “natural” (παρα φύσιν). As noted above, this phrase can be found in the philosophical discussions of the Stoics.⁴⁸ The notion of nature / φύσις underlies this discussion. It is crucial to point out that what is considered “natural” has been defined not just by philosophical discourse but more importantly by social convention. The term is not a scientific description as modern readers would assume. Rather, the entire social realm of the ancient world, with its distinctions and hierarchical dominance, reinforced and maintained the notion of what is natural.⁴⁹ To go beyond nature then was to threaten social bounds and hierarchical demands. Thus, to say that women would change their natural condition and go beyond it would send shock waves through an ancient audience. Simply put, if women actively transformed the situation in which they were being “used,” the reaction by society would be predictably severe. What could it mean that women would change the way they are being “used”?

Some scholars have argued that what we find here is a euphemistic way of saying that women engaged in sexual activity that went beyond the procreative sexual

⁴⁷ The possessive “their” is quite telling. Even when “outing” women for actively changing their condition, the lingering “possessive” exposes the dominating male aspect of the current culture.

⁴⁸ Jewett 175.

⁴⁹ H. Koester, *op. cit.*

engagement.⁵⁰ This could mean that lesbian activity was not in the purview. However, the fact that “women” is the subject of an active verb suggests there is more in this sentence than just a variation of sexual positions with male partners. B. Brooten⁵¹ has argued that that this shameful behavior refers to one of the deepest fears of the ancient Greco-Roman psyche – the free and egalitarian actions of women.⁵²

If we couple Brooten’s point with Stowers’ contention that sacrificial system engenders the lines of dominance and subjection, that worship and gender are intrinsically linked in the ancient imagination, then we can see that such activity by women would be an outrage to the religious and moral order of the world. The fact that this behavior is mentioned before the male “contribution” to this social implosion would only serve to heighten the rhetorical shock. Effectively Paul goes beyond the milder trope of the Wis Sol linking idolatry to perversion. He graphically spells out activity that Greco-Roman literature uniformly condemns.⁵³ The action of the women threatens not only the domination of the patriarchal empire but also the delimiting of sexuality to the social

⁵⁰ See Jewett’s critique of this position. Jewett 176 and 176n.127. It is unlikely that this refers to oral and anal sexual activity. Both of these “solutions” would still reinforce the pattern of male penetration and maintain the dominant culture.

⁵¹ B. Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 1996.

⁵² A lingering fear was the Amazon. The Greek mind could not handle the possibility of what the Amazons displayed. Recent research and archeological discoveries have demonstrated that they were not simply mythic figures but warrior women from tribes outlying Mediterranean cities. Achilles can be fascinated by Penthesilea momentarily but then he plunges the sword. The Greeks and Romans could not abide a woman that refused to subject herself to being “naturally used.” See the remarkable encyclopedic volume by Adrienne Mayor, *The Amazons* (2014).

⁵³ Brooten, *op. cit.* 31-186.

task of procreation. Women are imagined usurping what only males can do, namely, to act as free agents.⁵⁴

The second example of being ensnared in “disgraceful passions” is found in v.27. There is no question that male homosexual behavior is described. Indeed, there is a reiteration that the “natural use” of heterosexual behavior has been abandoned. Instead men are “inflamed with desire” for each other. It should be noted that this example of shameless behavior would not have been as shocking as the active insurgence of women since male homoeroticism was positively valued by some Greco-Roman writers and was popular among the Roman ruling class, including a number of Emperors.

Nevertheless, this example has an edgy thrust. Jewett brings out the shocking aspect of this verse by detecting the graphic sense of the Greek. Instead of translating v.27b something like: “men engaging in shameless acts with men and paying the price personally for the error of their ways,” Jewett points out that the singular form of την ασχημοσυνην could well be translated as “male member.” Moreover, the participle κατεργαζομενοι in this context can be translated as “work up.” Thus, he recommends the translation “males who work up their shameful member in (other) males.” And for their effort they are left feeling sore, the evidence of the divine wrath on their action.⁵⁵ There is no distinction regarding active and passive partners, no distinguishing

⁵⁴ It should be pointed out that in 1 Cor 7:3-4 Paul argues for an interdependent relation between husband and wife; a mutual situation that would be rather shocking in the first century. Of course, we cannot overlook Gal 3:28 which provides a hymn to an egalitarian vision. Such indicators would argue that Paul in Rom 1:26-27 (if he is the composer) would be using someone else’s social script for a particular purpose.

⁵⁵ Jewett, *op. cit.*, 179.

pederasty from consenting adult males. Paul follows the simple line of Jewish cultural tradition here.

There is a further social association that can be considered regarding v.27. The right of masters to demand sexual services was a given in the first century.⁵⁶ Jewett offers that Paul’s rhetoric may touch some of the experience of the Roman community, slave and former slaves who had experienced sexual exploitation “in a culture marked by aggressive bisexuality.”⁵⁷

If one listens again to these verses one is struck by their concentrated force. The intended rhetorical effect was to stun the audience by delivering two examples of shameful perversions. In fact, each seems to brazenly transgress cultural norms. The former plays to the unspoken fears of powerful and active women while the later paints in rather crude terms those, who having left “natural heterosexual activity,” end up in pain. This is the fate for those God has delivered to a “world of hurt.” This reiterates and intensifies the outcome already indicated in v.24.

2.6.0 Rom 1:28-32

<p>28^{And since they did not see fit to recognize God, God handed them over to an unfit mind, to do what is not fitting.}</p>	<p>και καθως ουκ εδοκιμασαν τον θεον εχειν εν επιγνωσει, παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εις αδοκιμον νουν, ποιειν τα μη καθηκοντα,</p>
<p>29^{They became preoccupied with every kind of injustice, immorality, greediness, and depravity; they are consumed by jealousy, murder, strife, deceit, and spite. They have become gossips,³⁰ slanderers, and despisers}</p>	<p>πεπληρωμενους παση αδικια πονηρια πλεονεξια κακια, μεστους φθονου φονου εριδος δολου κακοηθειας, ψιθυριστας, καταλαλους, θεοστυγεις, υβριστας, υπερηφανους, αλαζονας, εφευρετας κακων, γονευσιν απειθεις,</p>

⁵⁶ Seneca the Elder tersely put the situation: *inpudicitia in ingenuo crime nest, in servo necessitas, in liberto officium.* “Sexual servicing is a crime for the freeborn, a necessity for the slave, and a duty for the freeman.” *Con 4. Pref. 10.*

⁵⁷ Jewett, *op. cit.*, 181. See also V. Furnish 70-4.

<p>of God. They are haughty, arrogant, and pretentious. They invent evil schemes and rebel against their parents. ³¹They are senseless, faithless, heartless, and merciless.</p> <p>³²Although they know full well God's judgment that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do these evil deeds themselves, but even support those who do them.</p>	<p>ασυνετους, ασυνθετους, αστοργους, ανελεημονας</p> <p>οιτινες το δικαιωμα του θεου επιγνοντες, οτι οι τα τοιαυτα πρασσοντες αξιοι θανατου εισιν, ου μονον αυτα ποιουσιν αλλα και συνευδοκουσιν τοις πρασσουσιν.</p>
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The concluding section of this argument begin with a reiteration of human rejection of acknowledging the God that they know. The word play *ουκ εδοκιμασαν τον θεον/ ο θεος εις αδοκιμον νουν* speaks volumes: “Because they did not find God worthy...God left them with a worthless mind.” The rejection of the truth of God entraps all in the fated coverup. The fracturing of this primordial relationship entails a constant concatenation of social catastrophe. Humans in this fated conditions do what is “not fitting.” As such they fall short of what humans hoped to live up to in ancient society. Vv. 29-31 spin out a list of vices, that could be culled from any of the Greco-Roman or Hellenistic Jewish catalogue. Such a spewing of evil actions presents a final rhetorical tour de force. The sound play in Greek would have been appreciated by the audience. Both staccato harshness⁵⁸ and the lisping assonance⁵⁹ mark these lines. There can be no other conclusion at the end of all these vices that an ever-enlarging social pathology⁶⁰ has been unleashed on the world. The only thing the cover-up has succeeded in doing is

⁵⁸ E.g. *πεπληρωμενους παση αδικια πονηρια πλεονεξια κακια*,

⁵⁹ *ασυνετους, ασυνθετους, αστοργους, ανελεημονας*

⁶⁰ Jewett rightly points out that many of these terms have political resonance.

to make matters infinitely worse. The dirty laundry of the Empire has been hung up for all to notice.

Or so it seems. V.32 delivers the conclusive blow: “Those who do such things deserve to die.” But that is not the end. Paul adds: “They not only do these evil deeds themselves but even support those who do them.” A realm of complicity deepens this tragic assessment.

2.6.1 “Reviewing the Situation”⁶¹

A reprise of Rom 1:16-32.

Paul uses his apocalyptic lens to throw Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions of virtue and vice upside down. Understanding how his contemporaries see and determine who is honorable, etc., Paul utilizes a number of cultural threads – from Greco-Roman thinkers to synagogue critique – to expose in rhetorical construction those who refuse relationship with the Creator and, in so doing, deny the truth of that situation. Paul’s perspective allows him to argue that this attempt to hijack the truth backfires. The rejection of the true God leads to consequences. For Paul argues that the so-called world that dominates reality is in fact a world wrapped in its own catastrophe. The dominating patterns are exposed and seen for what they are. The maintenance of distinction and privilege does not lead to life but ensnares people in their own entanglements.

⁶¹ The association with Fagin’s song in the musical *Oliver* is quite intentional. “I think I’d better think it out again!” voices the character’s retreat from moving out of his life of vice and crime. His song details how ensnared he is in his benighted condition. Here this phrase suggests a recognition of the rhetorical intent and social echoes of the passage from Romans.

This vision stands in stark contrast to the *euaggelion* of the empire. What was featured in the propaganda throughout the empire was the pregnant promise of Rome. All associated with the Roman enterprise would benefit and thrive. This meant that true piety rested on the cult of the Roman gods from which all blessings flow. In contrast, Paul declares that the genuine regime arrives with the God of Israel's acceptance of the Anointed one. What would appear to be the disgraceful propaganda of a fledgling foreign sect becomes revealed as the true foundation of life and hope. Right from the beginning of this letter Paul sets the regime of the Anointed One against the regime centered in that imperial city. The hopes universally placed upon the Roman empire are now detected as truly coming from the generous justice of the living God. God's trustworthiness is attested in the divine acceptance of the one who had no advantages. Trusting in this God discloses the true nature of life's interrelationship.

Paul uses tropes from the synagogue complaint against the nations. At the same time he radicalizes this critique. Paul is not accommodating the world transforming message with the claims of the Empire. His vision of God's trustworthiness allows a reimagination of what life under the empire is all about. Instead of attaining the pinnacle of piety, virtue and wisdom, those not recognizing the true God become ensnared in the logic of their rejection. This extended exposure of those impious and unjust whose fated condition is riddled with catastrophe and socio-pathology. If the primordial relationship is faulty, then shock waves of disaster reverberate in every level and corner of human life. *This point must be underscored: it is the loss of that primary relationship that occasions the concatenation of catastrophes and fractured behavior. The resulting disastrous actions are not the cause of the situation; the cause is the rejection of the living God.*

If Rom 1:26-28 is part of the original argument of Paul then it has to be seen in light of Rom 1:16-3:30, that is, in the entirety of Paul's first section⁶². For a rhetorical analysis of the entire section shows that Paul wants to get at the very assumptions of his audience. While his listeners might well have been quite disposed to hear his opening remarks, his declaration of what has been revealed already begins to substantiate that his message is for all (Greek and Barbarian, Jew and Greek). This contrasts with what the members of the Jesus communities in Rom would have expected.

To those listening to this letter's performance in the communities in Rome there would have been some familiarity with this critique. As noted, the various tropes come from the Jewish synagogue's bill of particulars against the nations. In fact, for the non-Jewish followers in Rome, they may well have agreed with this critique of the nations. For they entered into the Jewish orbit and now stood on the Jewish side, looking back at the former life and over against those still benighted outside of the community. As such they would be standing off and away from those found wanting by the apocalyptic situation.

What is usually lost in this analysis is that Paul is not siding with one group over another. In this section Paul is arguing that all who reject the truth are liable to their fate. People overlook the fact that Paul is dramatically critiquing the entire world that runs on the tracks of domination over others.

2.7 There is No Innocent Bystander: Rom 2:2-6

[[The bottom line is: all you who judge, you have no defense, for when	[[Διο αναπολογητος ει, ω ανθρωπε πας ο κρινων εν ω γαρ κρινεις τον ετερον,
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⁶² Of course, if it is an interpolation it could well come from a perspective that misses Paul's apocalyptic angle of interpretation and merely speak for the resumption of the dominant status quo.

<p>you judge others you condemn yourselves, for you do the very things you condemn.]]</p> <p>²Now, we all know that “God judges rightly those who do such evil deeds.”</p> <p>³Do you suppose, any of you who judge those who do such things even while you are doing the same things, that you will escape God’s judgment?</p> <p>⁴Do you so belittle the wealth of God’s generosity, restraint, and patience that you are unaware that the point of God’s goodness is to get you to turn your life around?</p> <p>⁵But actually because of your stony and stubborn hearts you’re compounding the consequences for yourselves that come due on the day of God’s just indignation, when divine judgment will be made clear ⁶and when God will pay back each person according to what each person has done.</p>	<p>σεαυτον κατακρινεις, τα γαρ αυτα πρασσεις ο κρινων.]]</p> <p>οιδαμεν δε οτι το κριμα του θεου εστιν κατα αληθειαν επι τους τα τοιαυτα πρασσοντας.</p> <p>λογιζη δε τουτο, ω ανθρωπε ο κρινων τους τα τοιαυτα πρασσοντας και ποιων αυτα, οτι συ εκφευξη το κριμα του θεου; η του πλουτου της χρηστοτητος αυτου και της ανοχης και της μακροθυμιας καταφρονεις, αγνων οτι το χρηστον του θεου εις μετανοιαν σε αγει;</p> <p>κατα δε την σκληροτητα σου και αμετανοητον καρδιαν θησαυριζεις σεαυτω οργην εν ημερα οργης και αποκαλυψεως δικαιοκρισιας του θεου, ος αποδωσει εκαστω κατα τα εργα αυτου,</p>
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The argument in Rom 1:16-32 does not end with v.32. In fact, v.32 already intimates that the issue of complicity is at stake. It is not the task of this investigation to undertake a thorough analysis of the second chapter of Romans.⁶³ Rather, it is to see that the rhetorical strategy of Paul continues to catch up the listener in recognizing how one can be ensnared by this insidious situation.

⁶³ For that analysis see: Dewey, *Letter and Spirit in Paul*, 149-164.

Rom 2:2ff⁶⁴ begins to make clear that no one is an innocent bystander. The rhetoric is designed to remove the possibility for those listening to the argument to think that they can stand outside of the line of fire. Even the follower of Jesus who has left the fractured nations behind and agrees with their condemnation, cannot escape the scope of this apocalyptic vision.

2.7.1 A Brief Rhetorical Analysis

The accusing language of 1:18-32 is abruptly broken by 2.2. A change in focus is brought about by this sudden interruption:

Now, we all know that 'God judges rightly those who do such evil deeds.'"

The use of the first person plural with a verb of knowing is quite characteristic of a diatribal form presenting what seems to be a generally agreed upon assumption. This, in fact, reaches back to 1:32a and reinforces the position of those who assent to the claim that the judgment of God falls upon those who do "such things." The effect of this verse is to distance momentarily the "we" from those objectified under God's wrath in 1:18ff. It also continues the theme of knowledge established in 1:19, 20, 21, 28, 32. There seems to be an assumption that those knowing all this can distance themselves from the sphere of judgment.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Some scholars, including this writer, consider 2:1 a gloss on the Pauline text. This brings out the basis of judgment underneath the passage. It may have been originally a marginal note, exposing the basis of judgment and then was incorporated into a later manuscript. For an extended analysis and critique of the position to maintain 2:1 in the Pauline text, see Dewey, *Letter and Spirit*, pp.149-150 n.21. There is a failure to see that common diatribe usage would have an expression of common ground ("we all know") before an apostrophe ("you who judge"). More, 2:1 is missing the apocalyptic focus of the argument.

⁶⁵ This would not be unlike that found in apocalyptic literature, e.g., 2 Bar 84:7ff; 85:9; 4 Ezra 7:34ff; also Wis Sol 15:1-2.

The assurance of v.2 is broken completely by v.3. An indicting rhetorical question, directly addressing (ω $\alpha\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\epsilon$ / “any of you”), turns the language around with this sudden interruption. A sarcastic, ironical question exposes the inconsistency of the one who does what he has condemned.

³Do you suppose, any of you who judge those who do such things even while you are doing the same things, that you will escape God’s judgment?

Moreover, this self-contradiction is brought together with the apocalyptic note of God’s judgment. It is not simply a matter of inspecting the inconsistency of the judge but of bringing out the impossibility of that judge to remain aloof from the judgment established from 1:18ff. In using this diatribal speech Paul brings his apocalyptic vision into the listener’s time and place. The assumption that one can distance oneself from the fateful circumstances outlined in 1:18-32 breaks down. Such a move to place the judgment of God before the listener is quite in line with the Jewish prophetic tradition.⁶⁶ The incoming judgment of God becomes embedded in this communication with the Roman audience.

A second rhetorical question:

⁴“Do you so belittle the wealth of God’s generosity, restraint, and patience that you are unaware that the point of God’s goodness is to get you to turn your life around?”

continues the heavy-handed irony and uses a verb that indicates a lack of perception (“you are unaware”). While the language here is reminiscent of the Wis Sol,⁶⁷ the point

⁶⁶ See 2 Sam 12:7; Isa 3:13-15.

⁶⁷ Wis Sol 11:23; 15:1-3.

is quite opposite. The listener is charged with scorning the patience of God because of his ignorance that all this was meant for him to turn his life around. Knowledge alone is not enough to keep from being included under the scope of judgment. A warning then follows in v.5.⁶⁸ The future judgment is tied directly to the fundamental condition of the human. The self-contradiction brought out in v.3 is now seen as a symptom of the unrepentant heart. To this warning is added a quotation, adapted for the argument.⁶⁹ This continues to emphasize the inclusion of incoming judgment within the listeners sphere of existence.

It now becomes evident that Paul intends his apocalyptic perspective to be taken in by his listening audience. Moreover, we cannot forget that what we have investigated is only a portion of his overall argument in Romans. Paul does not leave his listeners in shambles, although he does continue his penetrating discourse to flesh out what is mean to live out a life in trust with a trustworthy God.⁷⁰ But Paul has already disclosed that basis of hope for his audience:

God's character is shown by this news to be trustworthy and that leads to having confidence in God, just as scripture says: "The one who decides to live on the basis of confidence in God is the one who gets it right." 1:17

The foundation of genuine life comes through this trusting relationship. It is presently available and accessible to all (1:14). However, the attempt to distance oneself from the insight coming from this kind of relationship, from the vision that can see that the world of dominance and taking advantage falls apart before the surprising justice of

⁶⁸ Such a warning is characteristic not only of the prophetic tradition but also of the diatribe. Cf. Epictetus 2.8.11-14.

⁶⁹ Paul is using either Ps 62:13 or Prov 24:12. In either case, Paul has changed the person from second to third and the tense from present to future.

⁷⁰ See chs. 3, 8.

God, does not permit an uninvolved bystander. To condemn others without realizing the sad irony of that action, without understanding that this entails complicity, without noticing that such condemnation from a “secure place” is easily exposed, means that one still is enthralled to that fractured social existence. Thus, to apply any of the particular elements of this universal condemnation to others, while maintaining a “proper” and righteously distant stance, manifests a complete failure to understand Paul’s communication.

3.0 Final Considerations

An investigation into the meaning of Rom 1:26-27 cannot be critically accomplished without an appreciation of its rhetorical and historical context. One cannot overlook the rhetorical strategy of Paul. At the same time one cannot avoid noticing his apocalyptic angle of vision. Paul is combining rhetorical tropes to demonstrate the universality of the situation. He uses the notion of apocalyptic breakthrough to give his listeners a way to re-imagine the political, social and religious situation in which find themselves.

Unless one recognizes this rhetorical strategy the passage will be read in a flat and wooden fashion. The ultimate irony: those who use it in that fashion do not see that Paul is conveying the point that all those in conversation are in some way deniers of the truth, suppressors of the reality of God. Thus, those who would speak in God’s name, condemning others, reveal themselves to be ignorant of their own involvement in the power plays of the old epoch. They are still playing the domination game of the Empire.

At the same time we can learn from Paul and use his visionary strategy to bring him also into review. Apocalyptic vision presents us with the possibility that one can pierce the confinements and blindness of the situation in which we find ourselves. Paul flipped what constituted the perceived reality of power and dominance of his day. He

introduced what we would call a critical and anticipatory consciousness into the current social-historical situation. In this light, any regime, social configuration, or norm can be questioned and seen in a deeper light. Opened up by the trauma of the death of a nobody, dominance was exposed for what it is, as that which prevents a flourishing of the ones without advantage, without a voice.

This means that Paul's own historical assumptions can be subject to this apocalyptic re-view.

His assumption of what constitutes the nature of human beings and the question of sexuality and gender becomes riddled with questions. The Stoic view of nature and use, sex and function, must be seen for what they really were: the fixity of nature and use comes within the world view of the hierarchical dominance pattern. Such philosophical language comes out of and supports the dominant status quo. Modern considerations of society and gender call all of that into question. The functional definition of gender and sexuality does not adequately enable us to understand what constitutes being human. Sexuality is no longer experienced simply as a function for procreation or even for pleasure but as a way in which humans reveal and relate to one another. The ancient functional definition of gender and sexuality suffered from the constraints and determinations of the dominant social order. Unthinkable was the possibility of people revealing and relating in unknown and surprising ways. An apocalyptic perspective throws all such "givens" in their historical limits.

We should also not overlook that Paul addressed a community of Jesus followers and his speech was an attempt to work with them. Paul was not engendering a modern, individualistic approach to life. In making clear the fateful conditions of domination, he put a stunning critique before the ears and eyes of his audience (cf. Rom 8 where he offers this vision of all of creation co-laboring to produce a new creation.). Rom 1:16-

3:30 runs through all the ways in which individuals attempt to live on their own terms apart from the relation of trust fail.

Finally, if we focus obsessively on Rom 1:26-28 to see if Paul condemns homosexuality, we are missing much. Many would make a conclusion, a damning judgment on the basis on whom they would exclude. But Paul could no longer work in that way. Rather he would have us focus on a deeper issue: without the acknowledgement of God everything else implodes. Now this acknowledgement is not a propositional affair. It is a response to discovering the kind of God who accepts the godless one, the ultimate loser, the one with no social advantage or distinction. It is discovering that this is a trustworthy God who goes into death with the lost. Judgment and wrath fall ironically back on those who would keep this truth from getting out. The consequence of missing this is a life cribbed, cabined and confined. The rejection of the life of trust does not take place in isolation. As social creatures humans produce a shattering effect. We infect the situation with our lack of trust. Without trust there is fear. And with fear comes the need to dominate. When does this breakdown end? When does this trauma break open? For Paul the world broke open when he realized that a nobody truly counted.⁷¹

⁷¹ Even as I conclude this paper, people are taking to the streets in America in protest. Cornel West has declared: "What we're seeing here is the ways in which the vicious legacy of white supremacy manifests in organized hatred, greed and corruption. We're witnessing the collapse of the legitimacy of leadership, the political class, the economic class, the professional class, that's the deeper crisis." He added: "The beautiful thing is we're seeing citizens who are caring and concerned hitting the streets. The problem is we have a system that's not responding and seems to be unable to respond." ... "I don't measure black progress in terms of black elites ... I'm concerned about the least of these," he added. "That's the tradition of Martin Luther King." Once more the death of a black man traumatically laid bare the collapsing stranglehold of power and opened up the possibility of other ways of being human to one another. <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/500325-cornel-west-were-witnessing-the-collapse-of-the-legitimacy-of-leadership>

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