

outcome of the story, in that Jesus fell in love with me as completely as I fell in love with him. It is the completeness of that love that, I believe, led him to Jerusalem and his cross. I suspect that there are many gay Christians who share similar feelings about Jesus.

To be loved as much as we love is an inherently human characteristic. While we understand that within the human family there are many ways to love and to be loved, those of us from the queer nation deserve to have a sense of dignity restored to our own diverse hopes and dreams and experiences of love. Jesus is the one who can restore that dignity, for ultimately it is Jesus who is the lover of all our souls.

## 21

**"To Cut or Not to Cut"****Is Compulsory Heterosexuality  
a Prerequisite for Christianity?**

THOMAS BOHACHE

*Many denominations remain welcoming but not affirming of queer Christians. The price for inclusion is celibacy. That queers live and practice Christianity shocks homophobic churches. Thomas Bohache reads Paul's letter to the Galatians as a contemporary manifesto of sexual inclusion. The early Jesus movement was shaken to its foundation over the inclusion of the Gentiles into their assemblies, for it did not conceive of including Gentiles within its communities without compelling them to undergo circumcision and observe the Jewish precepts. Much to the shock of the Jerusalem community of Peter and James, God poured the Spirit upon Gentiles as Gentiles, not as converted observing Jewish members (Acts 10:45-46; Gal. 3:1-5). Bohache reads Galatians as a proclamation of the good news that "we're queer, we're Christians, and we're church."*



At first glance, the letter of Paul to the Galatians might seem an odd choice for an essay in an anthology of queer biblical interpretation.<sup>1</sup> However, if we look at this letter anew through questioning, queer eyes and if we are able to put aside our preconceived notions of what this text has always meant and how it has always been interpreted, I believe that we will be pleasantly surprised. There are several reasons for looking anew at Galatians.

First, I believe that the Pauline corpus needs to be redeemed for queer Christians. For too long the mention of the name "Paul" has caused a knee-jerk reaction in the homosexual community because so many of his works have been used as texts of terror by fundamentalist Christians in their campaign of gay bashing and sex negativity.<sup>2</sup> This reaction is one of fear, anger, and/or outright dismissal. However, there is much in Paul's letters that can speak to the sexually disenfranchised if we are willing to read the silence and to apply a feminist critical hermeneutic of suspicion,<sup>3</sup> knowing and ac-

knowledging that we are not necessarily getting the full story because of millennia of heterosexist and patriarchal interpretation. Second, I believe that it is *fun* to “play” with the Scriptures to see what they might hold for us if we are willing to use our imaginations. Every Sunday preachers of various denominations, faith traditions, and theologies feel free to bring whimsy and wonderment into their sermons on scriptural texts. Why should we not do so in the field of biblical interpretation as well? If the normal everyday person were shown that readers and hearers do not have to approach the Bible only with seriousness and morbidity, I believe the result would be that more and more people would regard the Bible as a living, breathing book with questions and answers for today’s world.<sup>4</sup> Third, and most important, Paul’s letter to the Galatian churches has a particular message of liberation for queers who are seeking to reconcile their sexuality and their spirituality, just as it did for those original readers who were wondering what they had to do as Gentile outsiders to embrace the new Christian faith.

Now, let us look at Galatians, first examining the situation leading up to Paul’s letter, then what Paul has to say to his readers, and, finally, what Paul might say to us in a queer context.

### Background

Much has been written about the letter to the Galatians, probably because it is believed to be one of Paul’s earliest extant letters and because it lays out a rudimentary version of Paul’s theology supporting his ministry to the Gentiles.<sup>5</sup> However, as E. P. Sanders cautions in his work on Pauline thought, if one seeks a systematic theology or “theoretical thought” in Paul, one will look in vain.<sup>6</sup> The two letters of Paul that discuss in detail the Gentile mission and how Christianity relates to Judaism are Galatians and Romans. As Sanders points out, the occasion of these two letters is different. In Romans, the later work, Paul is giving an overview of his beliefs to a church he has not previously visited, whereas in Galatians Paul is addressing in a polemical fashion a specific situation being faced by churches with whom he had a long-standing relationship.

What was that situation? No one knows for certain because there is no independent witness to describe the situation that moved Paul to write this letter.<sup>7</sup> A satisfactory reconstruction might go like this:<sup>8</sup> Christianity began as a small sect within Judaism. Eventually Christians were expelled from the synagogues and began to be regarded as heretics by the Jewish officials because the Christians believed that their founder Jesus, called Christ, was God, which was seen as contradicting the Torah’s command of monotheism. After this break with Judaism, Christianity began to spread outward from Palestine all over the Mediterranean world. Many “Gentiles” (a Latinization

of the Septuagint Greek *ta ethne*, “the nations,” referring to all non-Jews) were converted to the new Christian faith, leaving behind their pagan cultic practices. This introduction of Gentiles into Christianity caused some initial confusion because heretofore all Christians had been Jews and therefore subject to the Law, or Torah; now the question began to be asked whether Gentiles should convert to Judaism prior to converting to Christianity.

Around this same time Paul was converted to the Christian faith by a direct experience of the risen Christ.<sup>9</sup> Paul began ministering to the Gentiles, founding churches all over the Mediterranean. His view of the “Gentile question” was that Gentiles need not become Jews in order to be Christians. He apparently founded churches in the region of Galatia and considered himself in a parental position vis-à-vis these congregations. Sometime after he left the area, however, a group referred to as “Judaizers” began preaching to the Galatian churches. These Judaizers were Jewish Christians who had remained faithful to the Torah and its various laws, including dietary restrictions and the necessity of circumcision. Their message to the Galatians was that if they wanted to remain Christians, they must begin adhering to the Torah and be circumcised. Obviously this contradicted the “gospel” that Paul had preached to the Galatians.<sup>10</sup>

To rebut the position of the Jewish Christian missionaries, Paul writes his letter to the Galatians. In this letter he must both defend his own status as an apostle and explain, biblically, his reasons for not requiring Gentile converts to be circumcised and accept the Law.

### The Letter to the Galatians

Paul begins by clearly stating that he was made an apostle by direct apprehension of a message from Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> Thus he preaches not by human authority but from divine mandate. The preaching the Galatians have been receiving from the Judaizers is contrary to the very gospel that they received from Paul, which he himself had received from Christ. For Paul, Christ is everything, and to Christ is due all human loyalty.

Paul tells the Galatian Christians that if they have accepted God through faith in Jesus Christ, then they need not take upon themselves any other regulations. He explains that the Law (the Hebrew Torah) had been given to the Jews as a caretaker or guardian (*paidogogos*) until the sending of the Messiah (Greek *Christos*, Christ). With the coming of Christ, the Law was abrogated. Therefore, to become Jews in order to become Christians made nonsense of the Christian message, for to do so would be to take on an unnecessary burden. When one is “in” Christ, one does not need the Law.<sup>12</sup> Thus, to undergo circumcision is redundant, Paul states. One need

not change the way one is born in order to come to God through Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Paul encourages the Galatians to embrace the freedom that they possess in Christ, rather than the bondage being forced upon them by the Judaizers, even going so far as to say that if the Law is still valid, then Jesus died for nothing. Paul utilizes proof-texts from the Hebrew Bible (particularly from Gen. 12–21) to show that Christians inherit the promise given directly to Abraham and Sarah from God, generations before the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Abraham (uncircumcised himself) was judged righteous by God because of his faith, not through any rules he followed. Christ, as a descendant of Abraham through Sarah, is a child of the promise and fulfills for Christians the Abrahamic covenant. On the other hand, the Jews, according to Paul, in continuing to keep the Law and in not accepting Christ, are heirs, not of the promise, but of Hagar the slave woman, who was cast out.<sup>14</sup>

Paul urges them not to be slaves to other gods, cautioning them that to undergo circumcision is to turn away from their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul uses the practice of circumcision to represent everything that has been superseded in the Law by Christ's coming. Indeed, so angry is he at those who would confuse the Galatian Christians by demanding circumcision that he says he wishes they would go one step further and castrate themselves!

Paul concludes his advice to the Galatians by reminding them that in Christ's own words true fulfillment of the Law is to love one's neighbor as oneself. He reminds them that Christianity carries with it the duty to practice ethical behavior but reiterates that what is called for is not bodily observance but rather spiritual observance. All that matters is that the Christian has been created anew; to be pleasing to God, one need do nothing else than accept God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

### An Interpretation

In biblical times, circumcision was foundational to Jewish identity, while noncircumcision was a sign that one was not in covenant with the Hebrew God.<sup>15</sup> For the first (Jewish) Christians, the mark of circumcision was proof that they were good, observant Jews and that Christianity was a continuation and fulfillment of Judaism. But other peoples, non-Jewish, also practiced the custom. As Christianity became a religion of its own, separate and apart from Judaism, circumcision began to lose its importance as a religious sign. As it has today, the issue of circumcision became more and more a medical debate rather than a religious one.<sup>16</sup>

At the time that Paul wrote his letter to the struggling Christians in Galatia, however, there were differing opinions among the various groupings

of Christians as to whether circumcision was mandatory for Gentiles who were embracing the Christian faith. Galatians and Acts both describe, in different ways, the institutional procedures that resulted in Gentiles not being required to be circumcised as a requirement for entry into Christianity. Paul, when he left Galatia, had believed that the whole matter was settled, but then, as now, churches were "magnets" for those who wished to cause problems and to rehash issues in less-than-healthy ways!<sup>17</sup> Outsiders began to criticize Paul and preach another gospel—a gospel of circumcision for those who would seek to know Christ.

This is where the letter to the Galatians has incredible impact for queer Christians. Today the debate rages as to whether gays and lesbians should be welcomed "just as we are" in the churches of Christianity.<sup>18</sup> Some have taken the attitude of "love the sinner, hate the sin";<sup>19</sup> they require, not that one give up one's homosexual orientation, but rather that the homosexual practice celibacy.<sup>20</sup> Others insist that homosexuality is unnatural and sinful; a minority of these individuals even believe that it is the result of demon possession.<sup>21</sup> The requirement of these "good Christian believers" is that gay and lesbian people pray and take other steps (including exorcism!) toward changing our sexuality. We even read about and see and hear stories of "conversion" from homosexual to heterosexual orientation; the so-called ex-gay movement continues to influence adherents.<sup>22</sup>

For queer Christians facing this debate and seeking to know God in the midst of it, I contend that Galatians is directly relevant; it is, as it were, "manna from heaven" sent by our loving God, who would not have us perish in the desert of denial, confrontation, and rejection, for the issues seem remarkably the same. Must one "cut away" a basic part of oneself in order to approach God?<sup>23</sup> It is my thesis that noncircumcision, as a symbol for nonacceptance of the entire Hebrew Law, is directly comparable to homosexuality because both challenge long-accepted standards of religious entry requirements. Paul's opponents believed that circumcision, regarded as foundational to Jewish and therefore Christian identity, must be required for salvation through Christ. In like manner, those who would seek to exclude "unrepentant" homosexuals from churches today are demanding compulsory heterosexuality as a requirement for a relationship with God in Christ.

So how would one read Galatians from a queer perspective? Most importantly, we need to remember that for generations the letter to the Galatians has been regarded as Paul's great declaration of freedom in Christ Jesus.<sup>24</sup> Hebrew Bible and Talmudic scholar Daniel Boyarin states:

[I]t is productive to read Paul as a Jewish cultural critic. My suggestion is that there is a great deal in his letters that suggests [his] primary motivation . . . was a passionate desire that humanity be One under

the sign of the One God—a universalism, I have claimed, born of the union of Hebraic monotheism and Greek desire for univocity.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, for Paul, the Christian message, indeed the very integrity of the gospel, depended upon universality and inclusivity—the welcoming into God's realm of all people through Jesus Christ. To him “the Christian Event [was] the vehicle of this transformation of humanity” itself,<sup>26</sup> the reversal of prior religious systems of insiders and outsiders.<sup>27</sup>

In his role as a cultural critic trying to grapple with the issues disturbing the peace of the Galatian churches, Paul comes to the conclusion that uniquely Jewish customs are not going to save Gentiles.<sup>28</sup> Circumcision as an entry requirement is now replaced by faith and baptism (Gal. 2:15–21). Righteousness (*dikaïosune*, literally “being adjudicated blameless”) comes through God's grace alone, not through anything human beings might do or refrain from doing. Therefore, Paul's logic suggests, if people have faith in God's grace, it does not matter whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, whether they practice their sexuality or not. What may have been regarded as an entry requirement is no more, for we are free in Christ. No one is made righteous (or “justified,” a translation of the Greek verb *dikaioo*, from the same root as *dikaïosune*, above) by the works of the Law.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, Paul tells queer readers that one does not have to change what is intrinsically a part of the self in order to come to God. Is this not a corollary to what Paul says in Romans 1:26–28, a standard “text of terror” for queers? His entire point in talking about people acting contrary to nature (*para phusin*) is that men and women are not doing sexually what they were created to do. That is, men are betraying their nature as penetrators, becoming passive like women, while women were abandoning their passiveness to become active penetrators.<sup>30</sup> As children of God's promise, we need not fall back on what human beings tell us we must do or not do to inherit the realm of God: “If I were still pleasing others, I would not be Christ's follower” (Gal. 1:10). We, like the Galatians, should concentrate instead on living a moral, ethical life, loving our neighbors as ourselves, and displaying the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). I wonder what the world would be like if homophobic Christians concentrated on this Pauline list rather than the one contained in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10!

Beyond the specific topic of circumcision, there is another aspect of freedom that is addressed in Galatians and that is essential to a queer reading of the letter. This is the elimination of distinctions in Christ, which has been an important area of research in feminist reconstruction of early Christian history.<sup>31</sup> In Galatians 3:26–28, Paul quotes what most scholars believe to be a primitive Christian baptismal formula:<sup>32</sup>

All of you are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on the mantle of Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no more male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The importance of these three verses cannot be underestimated, for Paul's repetition of the formula has “momentous implications,”<sup>33</sup> not only for gender roles and status but also for sexuality in general, including sexual orientation. Scholars of both genders have emphasized that in the communal experience of the earliest Christians—at baptismal services—these words were spoken to “act out” tangibly the earliest Christian belief that in being baptized the new Christian entered into a new creation in which social distinctions of gender, race, and class had no meaning.<sup>34</sup> When baptized persons went under the water, they left behind in that water the former person, and in emerging from the water and putting on a fresh garment, they were literally “putting on” Christ, which meant embracing radical freedom (cf. Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24).<sup>35</sup> One must also bear in mind that the first Christian baptisms were mostly likely performed nude,<sup>36</sup> which points toward an elimination of the sexual shame and alienation elicited by the fall of humanity.

Much has been made of the wording of the third phrase in verse 28. Instead of paralleling the previous two phrases (“Jew or Greek . . . slave or free”), the third phrase uses the construction “male *and* female,” instead of what one might have expected—“man and woman.” Using “male” and “female” emphasizes sexuality. Though one can think of “men” and “women” as “desexed” creatures, it is the maleness and femaleness of the human creature that is the wellspring of our sexuality. It has been suggested that the use of these particular words is to recall the words of Genesis 1:27, “male *and* female [God] created them,” in which sexuality is created and the human creature is now differentiated by gender and sexuality.<sup>37</sup>

A feminist interpretation would point out that in this baptismal formula one sees expressed a return to the divine plan of mutuality.<sup>38</sup> A queer interpretation, however, can go further and say that not only are we able to see a return to the divine plan of mutuality and reciprocity between creatures, but moreover we are also able to see the blending and merging of the sex roles into one harmonious vision of “male and female” together. No longer must we have the macho male and the fragile female relegated to different spheres or even different genders: We can have all of it right here and right now by virtue of our freedom from God! This, in my view, is tantamount to a dissolving of sexual orientation in favor of neither homosexual nor heterosexual beings but just sexual beings, however that sexuality might manifest itself.

As previously stated, Paul begs the Galatians not to give up their freedom by returning to the ways of the Law, including the physical cutting of circumcision. To illustrate this point, he introduces the famous and puzzling allegory of Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4:21–31. Paul makes the descendants of Abraham through his chief wife Sarah (including Jesus) stand for those who participate in freedom (i.e., the Gentile Christians), while the descendants of Abraham through the slave woman Hagar represent those who remain under the burden of slavery (i.e., the Jews who follow the Law). Paul reminds his readers that Sarah, originally childless, was blessed by God through the fulfilled promise of free children. The proof-text he employs is a fitting one with which to end our queer reading of Galatians, for it is from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

“Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children,  
burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs;  
for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous . . .”  
(Gal. 4:27, quoting Isa. 54:1)<sup>39</sup>

The reason that this proof-text can speak as powerfully to queer Christians today as it did to the Gentile Christians of Paul’s day is as follows. This portion of Isaiah is sandwiched between two famous passages that involve eunuchs, the sexually disenfranchised of the biblical world.<sup>40</sup> Just a few verses previously, Isaiah has described one who “was oppressed, and . . . afflicted, yet . . . did not open his mouth. . . . By a perversion of justice [this one] was taken away. . . . [and] cut off from the land of the living” (Isa. 53:7–8). This is the passage of scripture that the first Gentile convert to Christianity—the Ethiopian eunuch—was reading when he had his salvation experience (Acts 8:26–40). And just two chapters after the verses quoted by Paul comes the important declaration of God’s providential loving care for the sexually disenfranchised:

Do not let the foreigner joined to [God] say,  
“[God] will surely separate me from the people”;  
and do not let the eunuch say,  
“I am just a dry tree.”  
For thus says [God]:  
To the eunuchs . . .  
I will give, in my house and within my walls,  
a monument and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that shall not be cut off. (Isa. 56:3–5)<sup>41</sup>

May we not see this as a clue for the queer community encoded in the pages of scripture? Now certainly I am not suggesting that Paul himself meant to give such a clue. However, if we are going to play with the Scripture, as I proposed at the outset of this essay, then why should we not consider these “coincidences” as fodder for such play in the setting of a queer biblical interpretation? Other marginalized groups have certainly seen words meant for them within the pages of scripture,<sup>42</sup> so why not the faith community that reads from the social location of sexual orientation?

### Conclusion

To cut or not to cut? The conclusion that I reach is the conclusion that Paul reached almost two thousand years ago. No! To be pleasing to God, one need do *nothing* except believe. For Christians, that belief is manifested through our confession that Jesus of Nazareth became Christ and offers salvation to all through the good news of his life, the tragedy of his death, and the power and mystery of his resurrection.

What this means for queer Christians is this: We do not have to circumcise the foreskins of our sexual orientation in order to be acceptable to Almighty God. Our status as children of God is not dependent upon outside forces or rules or lists of sins created by human beings. Like the Galatians, we need not submit to a yoke of slavery, for we are free heirs of the promise.

Over and over again, Paul urges the Galatians to accept their freedom (Gal. 5:1, 13). Should we not do so as well? I believe that God urges us to turn our backs on modern-day “Judaizers” who, as a requirement for entry into the reign of God, would have us submit to a standard—heterosexuality—which was not meant for us.

As he nears the end of his letter, Paul offers some pastoral advice: “Live by the Spirit, I say” (Gal. 5:16); and that bit of advice is ours today. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the words of Jesus remind us that the restless Spirit “blows where it chooses” (John 3:8). That Spirit—the part of the Divine that each of us breathes in and breathes out—has chosen to blow through and reside in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people, whether others approve of it or not. In Paul’s words, human distinctions are cast aside: “A new creation is everything!” (Gal. 6:15). May we as queer interpreters of God’s Word recognize that new creation in our midst and share it with the rest of our world.

We are assured in Genesis 1:26–27 that each one of us is created in “the image and likeness” of God. That means that wherever we see humanness, we encounter God. When we see lesbian mothers and gay fathers, we are seeing God! When we see leathermen and leatherwomen, we are seeing God! When we see the transgendered coming home to their bodies, we

are seeing God! When we see young “gender-bending” queers who don’t label themselves either gay or lesbian, we are seeing God! We must never destroy that divine image by ignoring or stifling that piece of our human “god-ness”—sexuality—with which we have been gifted by a loving God of amazing diversity.

I believe that queer people of faith have been given a tremendous responsibility. Through our struggles, we are empowered to heal the rupture that traditional religion has created between sexuality and spirituality. Perhaps we are better equipped to do this than others because society is so preoccupied with our sexual expression that we have often been relegated to society’s periphery as sexual and spiritual outlaws.<sup>43</sup> Now is the time to claim our power—the validity that comes from being daughters and sons of God. Sexual theologian James Nelson tells us that incarnation, a foundational tenet of Christianity, is all about embodying God and welcoming the Divine into our humanity. Many Christians are unable to do that, however, because they have been alienated from their sexuality. “But,” James Nelson asserts, “if we do not know the gospel in our bodies, we do not know the gospel. We either experience God’s presence in our bodies or not at all.”<sup>44</sup> Queer folks are fortunate in that we are deeply in touch with our sexual natures. In order to claim our rightful inheritance as children of God, we must own our experiences as sexual and spiritual beings. Only we know the ways in which God speaks to us in our divine humanness. Outsiders cannot tell us, as they couldn’t tell the Galatians, what we are to do with our bodies and how we are to experience the incarnation of Christ. Our very ability to make love is our power to “be Christ-ed,” and our right to experience sexual diversity without interference is our very capacity to embrace the many faces of the Divine, whose image we bear in our bodies and in our sexualities.

## Notes

1. I use the term “queer” to include gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, the transgendered, seeking and questioning folk, people who are nonsexual or differently sexual, as well as those accepting and supportive heterosexuals, who, like my own father, are “queer” in a homophobic society. I am indebted to Robert Goss for introducing me (in a series of conversations in July 1995) to the concept of “queer” as a verb, standing for the proposition of shaking up the status quo. See his seminal work *Jesus ACTED UP: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

2. The term “texts of terror” was originally used by feminist biblical scholar Phyllis Trible in her book of that title (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) as a way of describing biblical texts that have been used to silence and oppress women. The term was adopted for a queer milieu by Robert Goss in *Jesus ACTED UP*, 88–89.

The traditional texts of terror for queers from the Pauline corpus are Romans 1:26–28 and 1 Corinthians 6:9, as well as 1 Timothy 1:18 in the Deutero-Pauline corpus.

3. The terms “reading the silence” and “hermeneutic of suspicion” are tools of feminist biblical interpretation used and explained most notably by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

4. For an example of such “bringing to life” of scripture, see Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* (New York: William Morrow, 1996).

5. The following commentaries were consulted in preparation of this essay: Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997); Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina 9 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 1992); and John J. Pilch, *Galatians and Romans*, Collegeville Bible Commentary 6 NT (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1983).

6. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), passim but esp. 3–15; *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 433–34.

7. The book of Acts cannot be considered an independent authority with which to compare Galatians for accuracy. See Betz, *Galatians*, 10–11; Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 432.

8. See the explanation of Christian origins contained in W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), chaps. 3–4; and Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), chap. 6. On the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogues, see J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968; 2d ed., 1979).

9. Galatians 1:11–16; for a different version, see Acts 9.

10. There has been much discussion as to the identity of these “Judaizers.” Traditionally they have been referred to as “opponents” (Betz, *Galatians*, 90ff.); more recently, however, it has been suggested that the term “agitators” (Matera, *Galatians*, 7ff.) or “teachers” (Martyn, *Galatians*, 117ff.) be used to indicate that they had some solidarity with the Christian movement.

11. I have used my own translation for the discussion contained in this essay.

12. I choose not to discuss in this essay the issue of whether this attitude of Paul’s is anti-Semitic (which in itself is an anachronistic term when applied to Paul). As stated previously, Paul’s thought on this entire subject is far from systematic. See Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); and W. D. Davies, “Paul and the People of Israel,” *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977): 4–39, reprinted in idem, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

13. Peter was taught this same lesson in his vision of clean and unclean foods in Acts 10.

14. In his allegory of Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4, Paul appears to be saying that the Jews were never intended to be inheritors of God’s promise, which is at odds with what he says elsewhere in this same letter and in the letter to the Romans.

15. Unfortunately, when one speaks of circumcision, the discussion takes a decidedly androcentric slant because of Judaism’s origin as a patriarchal religion. While women were of course Jews, they did not carry on their bodies the sign of the covenant as men did; their ties to Judaism were through their fathers and their husbands. For a feminist discussion of women’s inclusion in the covenant, see Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from*

a *Feminist Perspective* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991). For an excellent recent discussion of circumcision in Judaism, see Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 26–38.

16. See Billy Ray Boyd, *Circumcision Exposed—Rethinking a Medical and Cultural Tradition* (Freedom, Calif.: Crossing Press, 1998), as well as frequent debates in the letters to the editor of *Machismo* magazine (New York: Princeton Publishing). Women and feminist-identified men have also begun to discuss (and condemn) the practice of so-called female circumcision in African and Islamic countries. See Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar, *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (London: Jonathan Cape/Random House, 1993); and Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), chap. 5.

17. For a modern discussion of this problem, see Kenneth C. Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988).

18. In 1998 the Anglican communion rejected the validity of homosexuality as a recognized and acceptable lifestyle at the historic "Lambeth Conference." See, e.g., *The Washington Post* throughout July and August 1998; and most recently, a response by Bishop John Shelby Spong, "Christianity Caught in a Timewarp," in *The Voice* (September 1998): 2.

19. This pithy slogan goes all the way back to Anita Bryant's crusade to "save the children" in Dade County in the 1970s and is still alive and well in statements by various Christian denominations.

20. John J. McNeill, *Freedom, Glorious Freedom: The Spiritual Journey to the Fullness of Life for Gays, Lesbians, and Everybody Else* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

21. As recently as August 1998, I myself while on America Online received an "instant message" from a woman who had seen in my profile that I was a gay clergyman. One of her first and most persistent questions was, "But don't you believe that homosexuality is caused by a demon?"

22. Advertisements have been placed in major American newspapers (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*, July–August 1998) declaring that homosexuality can and must be cured. Alleged "ex-gays" are frequent visitors to daytime television talk shows.

23. See Chandler Burr, *A Separate Creation: The Search for the Biological Origins of Sexual Orientation* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1996); Simon LeVay, *The Sexual Brain* (New York: MIT Press, 1993); and idem, *Queer Science: The Use and Abuse of Research on Homosexuality* (New York: MIT Press, 1996).

24. "It is the Magna Carta of Christian freedom and the charter of evangelical faith." Edward P. Blair, *The Abingdon Bible Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 277, paraphrasing Martin Luther.

25. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 106.

26. *Ibid.*

27. See Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

28. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 117.

29. One might even go so far as to say that the "texts of terror" for queers in Leviticus no longer have force and effect, for they have been abrogated in Christ!

30. See Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Brooten's thesis is that *paraphusis* is used by Paul to refer to human beings performing acts contrary to that for which

their bodies, in a heterosexist, patriarchal culture, were thought to have been created (i.e., men being penetrated and women penetrating).

31. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), esp. chap. 6.

32. Betz, *Galatians*, 181–85.

33. Sheila Briggs, "Galatians," in *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2, *A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 219.

34. Betz, *Galatians*, 189–200; Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 218; Briggs, "Galatians," 218–19; and, especially, Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13 (1974): 165–208.

35. Schüssler Fiorenza has pointed out that it was in response to such freedom that the subsequent Deutero-Pauline letters included the "household codes" (*haustafeln*) ordering wives to be subservient to their husbands (Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22; 1 Pet. 3:1) and slaves to obey their masters (Eph. 6:5; 1 Pet. 2:18), as part of what she calls the "patriarchalization" of the church. In *Memory of Her*, chap. 7.

36. Lawrence Hull Stookey, *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 103.

37. Betz, *Galatians*, 195; Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), chap. 1.

38. E.g., Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), chap. 9. Meeks has pointed out that many cultures have a myth of the "original androgyne" who existed before sexual differentiation. "The Imagine of the Androgyne." 197. See also Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 (1972): 283–303.

39. This is the NRSV translation of Galatians 4:27. The quotations from Isaiah that follow are also from the NRSV, unincorporated.

40. For the connection between eunuchs and gays and lesbians, see Nancy L. Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). Left unexplored is the obvious connection between eunuchs and transgendered folk.

41. It is significant to a queer reading that the word translated "cut off" would have appeared in the Greek Septuagint version of both Isaiah 52 and 56 as a form of the Greek *temno* (verb *temno*), which is the root of the word for circumcision *peritome*, employed by Paul.

42. For example, African Americans since slavery times have seen in the Exodus story a clue for them of what God had in store for them as a people. This reality is reflected in the recent essays regarding reading the Bible from various social locations (but not sexual orientation!) contained in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

43. See Christian de la Huerta, *Coming Out Spiritually: The Next Step* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), esp. chap. 1.

44. James B. Nelson, *Between Two Gardens: Reflections on Sexuality and Religious Experience* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), 17–18.