

ANDROGYNY: THE PAGAN SEXUAL IDEAL

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... being a gay man or lesbian entails far more than sexual behavior alone . . . [it entails] a whole mode of being-in-the-world.¹

Paiens unt tort e Chrestianes unt dreit
Chanson de Roland²

I. INTRODUCTION

Like the ancient pagan Sodomites pounding on the door of Lot's house millennia ago, the modern gay movement is gathering at the doors of our churches, our academies, and our once traditionally "Christian" culture, demanding entrance and full recognition. Notable scholar David A. J. Clines, professor of OT at Sheffield University, for one, appears ready to lay down the welcome mat. He wrote in 1998: ". . . [though] queer theory has yet to show its face at the SBL [Society of Biblical Literature],³ gayness is challenging . . . all that we hold dear. When we begin to redraw the alterity map, the boundaries between same and different . . . we find ourselves having to think through everything, and not just sexuality, from scratch."⁴ Clines, who not long ago was known for his conservative theological position, illustrates how far acceptance of the gay movement has come in recent years, even among those from strongly Biblical backgrounds.

This movement has come a long way fast. It will not go away soon, I believe, because it is so intimately tied to deep changes in modern society, in particular those associated with philosophical postmodernism.⁵ Because

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¹ J. Michael Clark, "Gay Spirituality," in *Spirituality and the Secular Quest* (ed. Peter H. Van Ness; New York: Crossroads/Herder, 1996) 335.

² Translation: "Pagans are wrong, Christians are right." The classical theological notion of the antithesis can thus be dated at least to eleventh-century France.

³ Since it is already ubiquitous in the sister organization, the American Academy of Religion, the appearance of "Queer theory" amongst the Bible scholars of SBL is surely only a matter of time, as Clines suggests.

⁴ D. J. A. Clines, "From Salamanca to Cracow: SBL International Meetings," in *On the Way to the Postmodern*, Volume 1 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 169.

⁵ Significantly, one of the original theorists of postmodernism, Michel Foucault—see his *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, "An Introduction" (trans. Robert Hurley; New York: Vintage, 1978); Vol. 2, "The Use of Pleasure" (trans. Robert Hurley; New York: Vintage, 1985); and Vol. 3, "The Care of the Self" (trans. Robert Hurley; New York: Vintage, 1978–86)—was self-consciously and ideologically gay.

in the postmodern hermeneutic all meaning is socially generated, queer commentary has little methodological difficulty finding a place in the contemporary religious and theological debate.⁶ In cooperation with feminist Biblical interpretation, which has “destabilized normative heterosexuality” by alleging “sexist” bias,⁷ queer readings merely seek to take one more step in the hermeneutics of suspicion and expose the “heterosexist bias” of the Bible and Bible interpreters. Identifying exegesis as an exercise in social power, queer theorists reject the oppressive narrowness of the Bible’s male/female binary vision and boldly generate textual meaning on the basis of the “inner erotic power” of the gay interpreter.⁸ What could be more post-modern? Employing such a widely accepted methodology, and with “straight” Bible scholars now ready “to redraw the alterity map,”⁹ gay theology appears to have a bright future everywhere.

The theoretical progress is mirrored in popular society, where resistance to the gay life-style is more and more impugned as anti-democratic and un-American.¹⁰ But the urgency of the situation for Bible-believing scholars is not merely the pressing need for a scholarly ethical response to an unfortunate moral aberration. The contemporary appearance of a homosexual movement says something about the particular times in which we live, granted both that pagan spirituality is enjoying a popular revival and that throughout the Bible Sodom and Gomorrah have always served as the symbol for end-time pagan idolatry, ultimate moral disintegration, and eschatological divine

⁶ Ken Stone, “Homosexuality and the Bible or Queer Readings?” a paper read to the *Gay Men’s Issues Group* at the AAR/SBL Annual Meeting (November 21, 1999). See the blending of homosexuality and postmodern hermeneutics in the work of Michel Foucault cited above.

⁷ *Ibid.* Stone makes the point with insistence.

⁸ The term comes from another paper read at the same AAR group by Timothy R. Kochs, “Cruising as Methodology: Homoeroticism and the Scriptures.” Kochs mentioned his indebtedness to Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection* (ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 75–79.

⁹ See Clines above.

¹⁰ A simple search on the internet reveals that the web sites of many leading colleges feature student gay and lesbian groups while there is no mention of Christian groups. The example of present-day Holland shows where the gay movement is going in western society. Rev. Alan Morrison, *Diakrisis International* (March 28, 2000) describes his pastoral experiences working in a parish in Holland with the following story: “The official policy in schools—whether in Biology, Social Studies or Sex Education, is that a homosexual lifestyle is equally as valid as a heterosexual one. I recently had a meeting with a teenager, at her request, who is really searching, and she wanted answers to many spiritual matters. It was most interesting to speak with her about homosexuality. Although this particular girl is a welcome exception, these kids have been completely brainwashed to believe that anyone who believes that homosexuality is wrong is an undesirable person. Billboard advertisements over here are just as likely to show a male couple engaged in deep kissing as a male-female couple. Sodomy is perfectly legitimate and normal. In fact, one finds these days the not-so-subtle implication that there is almost something more noble and pure about being in a homosexual relationship. I wonder how long it will be before the refusal to accept homosexual relationships as a normal alternative to heterosexuality becomes outlawed, so that people like you and me will be treated at best as suffering from a ‘personality disorder,’ at worst as being criminal deviants?”

judgment.¹¹ The subject, in its spiritual, religious, and even eschatological dimensions, needs to be treated and debated among us, not simply as an unfortunate social deviation or ephemeral social fad, but as a cutting-edge component of a rising, all-encompassing religious world view that is diametrically opposed to the world view of Christian theism. One fruitful way to approach this pressing issue is to consider the religious roots of homosexuality.¹² The recent radical changes in our society, include, simultaneously, both the liberation of sex and the rediscovery of pagan mystical spirituality. Is such a pairing pure coincidence or is it the result of a necessary organic relationship? Has there always existed an ineluctable connection between pagan religion and pagan sex? For instance, while radical pagan feminists speak of the need of a “change of [religious] consciousness,” such spiritual transformation is always proposed by way of a radical recalibration of our perceptions of sexuality. In other words, sexuality appears central, not peripheral, to the spiritual quest. This, I believe, will become more and more evident in the homosexual movement, namely, that this particular sexual life-style will be the promoter of a particular kind of religion. Thus, while sexual liberation in its popular, successful, government-financed versions strategically associates itself with “civil rights,” pro-choice civic values, and politically-correct tolerance, often studiously avoiding any obvious religious dimension, its ultimate legitimization—since all human beings are religious—proceeds from the age-old dogmas of paganism, which, unlike their modern equivalent, never tried to hid behind a thin veil of temple-state separation. If everything is indeed political, as the radicals often proclaim, everything is also spiritual, and thus the spiritual is also sexual. Charles Pickstone, a pagan believer in Anglican orders, affirms this in his recent book *The Divinity of Sex*: “. . . sex is the spirituality that reveals the sacramental richness of matter.”¹³

The thesis of this paper is that to understand the contemporary sexual revolution, we need to see the “new sexuality”—particularly in this paper in its homosexual expression—as an integral expression of age-old religious

¹¹ See the paper given by Eriks Galenieks at the November 1999 meeting of ETS entitled, “Sodom and Gomorrah from an eschatological Perspective.” Galenieks stresses the use of the imagery of “fire and brimstone” as a cipher of judgment in Deut 29:23; Ps 11:6; Luke 17:29 (where the judgment on Sodom anticipates “the day when the Son of Man is revealed”); and especially in Revelation (9:17–18; 14:10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8). He also rightly sees the connection with the rise of idolatry (see Deut 29:20–28). However, homosexuality in this eschatological complex of ideas ought surely to be given a place, since, according to Paul (Romans 1:23–27), homosexual perversion always flows *directly* and logically from idolatry.

¹² Obviously there are issues of biology, psychology, and sociology that need to be part of a full-scale discussion that cannot be raised within the scope of this paper. A helpful book from a medical and psychological perspective is Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). I am not suggesting that every homosexual is aware of this deep religious connection.

¹³ Charles Pickstone, *The Divinity of Sex: The Search for Ecstasy in a Secular Age* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), reviewed by John Attarian in *Culture Wars* (March 1998) 46ff. In the words of Attarian, Pickstone “forsakes Christianity's transcendent God for a neopagan pantheism, with the distinction between Creator and Creation collapsed, and sex the religious experience of choice.”

paganism.¹⁴ In our response, we cannot follow Lot, who would have sacrificed his daughters to placate the aggressors. Nor can we claim personal moral superiority. In the clamor for acceptance and recognition, we must always hear the cry of divine image-bearers, however marred and broken. However, we must not shrink back from seeking to do justice to the whole Christian, Biblical dimension of the problem. In a time of moral confusion and politically correct intimidating “tolerance,” we owe such clarity to our culture, to our sons and daughters, and to God, Creator and Redeemer, for whom all things exist.

II. THE MODERN REVIVAL OF PAGANISM

In order to make this connection, some attempt must be made to define paganism. The Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten defines the contemporary revival of paganism—what he calls “neopaganism”—as the belief in “a divine spark or seed [which] is innate in the individual human soul. Salvation consists in liberating the divine essence from all that prevents true self-expression. The way of salvation is to turn inward and ‘get in touch with oneself.’”¹⁵ In a different but complimentary way, I would suggest that the essence of paganism can be usefully described as monism, the belief that one principle defines and unites all of reality. Thus all is one, humanity is one divine reality, and all religions are ultimately many expressions of the one monistic truth. At the heart of this theoretical religious paganism lies a particular and powerful mystical experience of oneness. Indeed, it is often claimed in today’s syncretistic age that at the core of all religions, beyond and behind their distinctive doctrines, is the same mystical encounter.

Louis Dupré, T. L. Riggs Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Yale University, does indeed make such a claim. After noting the universality of the “mystical drive” to union with the divine, Dupré wonders whether “all religions, which meet in this drive, are, at least in their mystical expression, identical.”¹⁶ He seems to have little doubt about the answer: “If different traditions share a state *in which distinctions disappear* [emphasis mine],

Pickstone is retracing the steps of Ezra Pound who left the theism of Presbyterianism to seek spiritual freedom in Paris in the 1920s. He believed that sex, creativity, and mysticism were part of the spiritual quest, that “one comes to the divine through the senses,” and was engaged in a life of debauchery in order to test his theory—yet his “quest” ended in failure. See E. Fuller Torrey, *The Roots of Reason, Ezra Pound, and the Secret of St. Elizabeth’s* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984) 115, cited in Peter C. Moore, *Disarming the Secular Gods: How to Talk So Skeptics Will Listen* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989) 45.

¹⁴ In my book *Spirit Wars: Pagan Revival in Christian America* (Mukilteo, WA: Wine, 1997) 177–196, I argue that radical feminism has deconstructed formative heterosexuality and sexual roles, but that homosexuality provides the reconstructive model, or the pure form of pagan sexuality. I am developing this latter point much further in this present article.

¹⁵ Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Either/Or: The Gospel or Neo-Paganism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 7.

¹⁶ Louis Dupré, “*Unio Mystica: The State and the Experience*,” in *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue* (ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn; New York: Continuum, 1996) 7.

should we not conclude that in its highest form all mysticism is identical." This conclusion is affirmed in spite of major outward "doctrinal differences," since beyond the level of doctrine is the spiritual *unio mystica*. Dupré determines that "... to the extent that the state of union is held to consist of an ecstatic, intrinsically transient experience, [then] the conclusion that mysticism is identical in all religions is *indeed inescapable*."¹⁷ A leading history-of-religions "Christian" scholar, Huston Smith, believes that the present work of the Spirit is producing an "invisible geometry to shape the religions of the world into a single truth."¹⁸ In a similar vein, the late Joseph Campbell combined Jungian psychology and New Age spirituality in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* to express the notion that all human civilizations have the same monomyth with only minor differences in details.¹⁹

According to pagan esoterism, spiritual understanding through intuition and meditation is the only way to salvation. This comes through a nonrational, mystical experience of seeing oneself as the center of a circle that has no boundaries, where all distinctions are eliminated. As the great modern gnostic C. G. Jung said, "The self is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."²⁰ From the center of one's own limitless universe, the self is sovereign. The unitive experience, essential to this worldview, is engendered through drugs, time-honored (Hindu) meditation or otherwise induced trance. Meditation, rightly practiced, enables the mind-soul to be disconnected from the limitations of the body and to be in direct contact with cosmic spiritual unity. In the words of a leading neo-pagan mystic, "The ultimate metaphysical secret, if we dare to state it so simply, is that there are no boundaries in the universe. Boundaries are illusions, products not of reality but of the way we map and edit reality. And while it is fine to map out the territory, it is fatal to confuse the two [illusion and reality]."²¹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, emphasis mine. Jennifer Woodhull, "Meditation, Prayer and the Still Point Within," in *The Meditation and Prayer Catalog* (1999) 2, states that the 12 major religions and more than five hundred movements and sects are all born of the "same spark." She describes this experience of *unio mystica* as "the soundless still point of the sacred." The Theosophical Society pronounces valid the ideas about God in all the world's religions—all but one, Biblical/Christian monotheism. As the Society's brochure states: "Esoteric Philosophy [read proto-New Age thinking] reconciles all nations, strips every one of its outward human garments, and shows the root of each to be identical with that of every other great religion. It proves the necessity of a Divine Absolute Principle in Nature. It denies Deity no more than it does the sun. Esoteric Philosophy has never rejected God in Nature, nor Deity as the absolute and abstract *End*. It only refuses to accept any of the gods of the so-called monotheistic religions, gods created by man in his own image and likeness, a blasphemous and sorry caricature of the Ever Unknowable."

¹⁸ Alan Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross: Religious Corruption in an Evil Age* (Birmingham, UK: K&M, 1994) 568.

¹⁹ Pamela Johnson, "The Dark Side of the Force: Joseph Campbell, Star Wars and Hollywood's New Religion," *World* (May 3/10, 1997) 23–24.

²⁰ See Miguel Serrano, *C. G. Jung and Hermann Hesse: A Record of Two Friendships* (trans. Frank MacShane; New York: Schocken, 1968) 50, 55, cited in David L. Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974) 10.

²¹ Ken Wilbur, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, cited in Tony Schwartz, *What Really Matters: Searching for Wisdom in America* (New York: Bantam, 1995) 339.

This Eastern monism with a Western spin is in direct and total contradiction with Christian theism and the civilization it has engendered.²² There is no neutral ground. This is true of sexuality as well. Both monism and theism have their particular views of sexuality, and here, too, there is no neutral ground. As one homosexual activist recently said, "Traditional family values suck."²³

The vehemence of the above statement indicates how closely theology and sexuality are held, as well as the determination on the part of some to deconstruct heterosexuality as the norm of human society. Not surprisingly, this element of deconstruction, indeed, destruction of "traditional" sexuality, has accompanied the recent appearance of paganism and deconstructive postmodernism in the West. This can be illustrated by the vertiginous increase in divorce, the phenomenal growth of pornography, the "liberation" of sex from monogamy, and the rising practice and public acceptance of homosexuality. This is all known and well documented. However, within the specific limits of this paper, I wish to describe the religious pagan sexual ideal as androgyny—which seems to be more and more proposed as the reconstructive model for our deconstructed world.

In what follows I will first provide a certain documentation and description of a phenomenon that consistently marks pagan spiritual practice: the association of the androgynous priest with the pagan cultus throughout time and space. I will present this evidence without any claim to complete or exhaustive systemization. In the second place, I will attempt a theological explanation.

III. THE ANDROGYNOUS PRIEST/SHAMAN AS THE EMBODIMENT OF PAGAN SPIRITUALITY

Throughout time and across space, the pagan cultus consistently, though not exclusively, holds out as its sexual representative the emasculated, androgynous priest. Mircea Eliade, a respected expert in comparative religions,

²² For the neo-pagan version, see the seven defining points enumerated by Ken Wilbur, outlined in Schwarz, *What Really Matters* 354:

First, Spirit, or God, or a Supreme Reality exists. Second, it is found within one's self.

Third, most of us don't recognize this Spirit because we live with an illusory sense of separateness from others and from the universal ground of all being.

Fourth, the path to liberation requires building a broader identity in which the wholly separate sense of self is surrendered.

Fifth, if this path is followed to its conclusion, it leads finally to rebirth, or enlightenment—in the form of either a direct experience Spirit within or oneness with God.

Sixth, this experience marks the end of suffering.

And seventh, the natural outgrowth of such enlightenment is a life grounded in compassion and directed toward selfless service.

²³ This was one of the epithets hurled by homosexual rights demonstrators at Gary Bauer of Family Research Council when he gave a talk in Livonia, Michigan, on October 22, 1998, according to *World* (December 19, 1998) 15.

argues that androgyny as a religious universal or archetype appears virtually everywhere and at all times in the world's religions. Much evidence exists to support his judgment.²⁴

The clearest textual testimony in ancient times comes from nineteenth-century BC Mesopotamia. Androgynous priests were associated with the worship of the goddess Istar from the Sumerian age (1800 BC).²⁵ Their condition was due to their "devotion to Istar who herself had 'transformed their masculinity into femininity.'"²⁶ They functioned as occult shamans, who released the sick from the power of the demons just as, according to the cult myth, they had saved Istar from the devil's lair. ". . . as human beings," says a contemporary scholar, ". . . they seem to have engendered demonic abhorrence in others; . . . the fearful respect they provoked is to be sought in their otherness, their position between myth and reality, and their divine-demonic ability to transgress boundaries."²⁷

The pagan religions of ancient Canaan appear to maintain a similar view of spirituality and sexuality. The goddess Anat preserves many of the characteristics of Istar.²⁸ Like the Syrian goddess Cybele, Anat is headstrong and submits to no one.²⁹ She is both young and nubile but also a bearded soldier, so that many commentators conclude that she is either androgynous or bi-sexual.³⁰ She thus symbolizes the mystical union, which was celebrated by her worshipers as a ritual enactment of the *hieros gamos* [sacred spiritual marriage].³¹ The OT gives some indication that Canaanite religion included homosexual androgyny, against which Israel was constantly put on guard.³²

Livy describes initiation into the Bacchanalia of 186 BC as involving homosexual rape, *simillimi feminis mares*. Walter Burkhardt, professor of Classical

²⁴ Besides the seminal work of Eliade in a number of publications referenced below, see the more recent work of Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality and World Religions* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993).

²⁵ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 28. For what follows of this older period, I am greatly indebted to this study. Nissinen's work is supported by Helmer Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (trans. John Sturdy; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973) 25, who speaks of naked "eunuchs" associated with the cult to the Sumerian goddess Inanna (another name for Istar) that includes a *hieros gamos* rite. These priests dressed up and wore make-up like a woman, and expressed their "otherness" via their androgyny. Physically they were men but their appearance either was feminine or had both male and female characteristics.

²⁶ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism* 30.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 32.

²⁸ Neal H. Walls, *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth* (SBLDS 135; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1992) 83.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 107. On Cybele, see below.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 86.

³¹ Nicholas Wyatt, "The c Anat Stela from Ugarit and Its Ramifications," *Ugarit Forschungen* 16 (1984) 331.

³² This is developed by Nissinen, *Homoeroticism* 37–44. I find his arguments persuasive. Leviticus (18:3, 30; 20:23) presents sexual activity between two men as an example of the repulsive ways of the Canaanites, which the people of Yahweh should avoid. Also, in Deuteronomy there are a few gender-related commandments that can readily be seen against the background of ancient Near Eastern worship. These would include the exclusion of eunuchs [emasculated priests?]

Philology at the University of Zurich, comments upon this testimony: "Scholars at one time gave advice not to believe in slander of this sort, but we can hardly be sure. Parallels from initiations elsewhere are not difficult to find."³³ In other words, Burkhardt recognizes that there was something going on related to the cultic nature of the event, not simply a frenzied lack of control.³⁴

Examples of "religious" androgyny can be found in various forms in Syria and Asia Minor in the third century BC,³⁵ but its clearest and closest expression in that area comes from the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era. It is well documented that the Great Mother under the names of Atargatis or Cybele had androgynous priests, called *Galli*, who castrated themselves as a permanent act of devotion to the goddess.³⁶ A particular version of the goddess is worshipped under the name of Artemis

from the people of Yahweh (Deut 23:2; cf. cf. Isa 56:3-5) and the command against cross-dressing [equally a pagan cultic common place, as we noted above] (Deut 22:5). Since the context refers to pagan worship activities like child sacrifice to Moloch (18:21; 20:1-5) and the calling of ghosts and spirits (20:6, 27), "religious" homosexual androgyny may well be implied. Further proof is (a) the use of the term *tô'ebâ*, translated "abomination" or "detestable custom," which evokes the notion of pure and impure worship; (b) the reference to both male and female "shrine" prostitution in Deut 23:18; (c) the mention of the "quarters of male shrine prostitutes in the temple of the Lord and where women did weaving for [the goddess] Asherah." According to Richard J. Pettey, *Asherah: Goddess of Israel* (American University Studies VII, Vol. 74; New York: Peter Lang, 1990) 25ff., Asherah shows similarities to Anat. For other work on Asherah, see Tilde Binger, "Asherah in Israel [New Translation of Khirbet el-Kom Inscription]," *JSOT* 9 (1994) 3-18; John Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," *JBL* 105 (1986) 385-408; William G. Dever, "Asherah, consort of Jahweh: New Evidence from Kuntilett Arjrûd," *ASORB* 255 (1984) 21-37; Judith M. J. Hadley, "The Fertility of the Flock: The Depersonalization of Astarte in the Old Testament," in *On Reading Prophetic Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 115-133; Othmar Keel, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Saul M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Jahweh in Israel* (SBLM 34; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988); Mark S. Smith, "God Male and Female in the Old Testament: Yahweh and His Asherah," *TS* 48 (1987) 333-340.

Since the Hebrew term, *qedeshim*, "sacred ones," parallels the way the Syrian priests (*galli*) were described as "holy" (*hieroi*), there does seem to be reason to conclude, with Nissinen, that "the *qedeshim* were thought of as men who had assumed an unusual gender role and thereby expressed their life-long dedication to the deity" (*Homoeroticism*). Ringgren, *Religions* 167, mistakenly says that this was the only kind of homoeroticism prohibited by Scripture, for he fails to see the "theological" connection between androgynous homosexuality, "religious" or not, and pagan monism. In other words, there does seem to be some similarity between the *assinnu* of Mesopotamia and the *qedeshim* of Canaan. Egyptian goddess worship (Ishtar, Astarte, Isis or Anat) is also evident in Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:17-25—see Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OT Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 213 and 734-735.

³³ Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (London: Harvard University Press, 1987) 105.

³⁴ Richard Seaford, "In the Mirror of Dionysus," in *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* (ed. Sue Blundell and Margaret Williamson; London/New York: Routledge, 1998) 133, shows that transvestism functions as a right of passage into the cult of Dionysus. In the cult "females may be like males and males like females" (131). This is because "liminal inversion of identity [is] required for mystic initiation." Such "confusion" is also seen not merely between male and female but also between "human (or god) and animal, and between living and dead" (132).

³⁵ *Ibid.* 31. See Nissinen, *Homoeroticism* 149, n. 73.

³⁶ See Lucian, *De Syria Dea* 50-51.

at Ephesus where Paul established a church (Acts 19).³⁷ In Syria, Cybele is called Rhea,³⁸ whose effeminized itinerant priests imitated the deeds of the mythological Attis³⁹ in trance-like ecstasies.⁴⁰ The rites of initiation into the Cybele or Rhea cults included baptism in the blood of a slaughtered bull or ram. This took place in a pit or *taurobolium*. At the end of the ceremony sometimes certain “powers” of the sacrificial bull, no doubt the animals’s genitals, were offered to the Mother of the gods, again a powerful symbol of male emasculation before the female divinity.⁴¹ The obvious intentions and results of such cultic mythology and practice were the feminization and emasculation of men under the occultic power of the goddess.⁴² In other words, even in death the ideal male is emasculated, like the *Galli* in life. Though there is no evidence of a specifically emasculated Isaic priesthood, the yearly festival to Isis included men dressing in women’s clothing.⁴³ In this period, another example can be found in the worshipers of Aphrodite in

³⁷ According to Livy, *Natural History* 35:132, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus was controlled by castrated male priests called *Megabizes*—see “Artemis,” *ISBE* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982–87) 1:306–308. Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in the Light of its Historical Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 20–27, shows some deep connections with Cybele and powerful personifications of the Magna Mater of magic. A different view of Artemis, based on epigraphical evidence, sees her as “Artemis the pure,” a virgin huntress, quite different from the Magna Mater, who spurned marriage and relations with men, and whose devotees maintained perfect chastity—see S. M. Baugh, “A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century,” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15* (ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 29–30. However, the rejection of marriage and normal heterosexuality may not be as far removed from Cybele and the *Galloi* as first meets the eye, even if the epigraphical evidence does not go into much detail on this score.

Monica Sjoö and Barbara Moor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Discovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987) 126, argue that sexual perversion and perverse spirituality [of which they approve] go back a long way. They claim that Artemis was a lesbian, and thus only worshipped by women (208).

³⁸ See the account of Lucian of Samosata (second century AD), cited in Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 134.

³⁹ *Metamorphoses* 26, cited in Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries* 143.

⁴⁰ A verse from Erucius, a Roman poet just before the time of Christ confirms this practice:

“I, the priest of Rhea, long-haired
 castrato, Tmolian dancer, whose
 High shriek is famed for carrying power,
 Now, at last, rest from my throes
 And give the Great Dark Mother on
 The banks of the Sangarius all:
 My tambourines, my bone-linked scourge,
 My brazen cymbals, and a curl
 Of my long-haired heavy perfumed hair

In dedication, Holy Rhea.” Translated by Robin Skelton, *The Greek Anthology and Other Ancient Epigrams* (London: Penguin, 1981) 186–187.

⁴¹ See Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries* 128–130, for a fourth-century AD description of this rite.

⁴² Doubtless, the Cybele myth is reproducing the cult myth of Isis: see Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 78–79.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 115.

Scythia. The *ennares* were hermaphrodite shamans who wore women's clothes and received the gift of divination from the Goddess.⁴⁴

At the beginning of the fifth century AD the cult of the goddess Cybele continued to have success. Augustine in his *City of God*⁴⁵ vividly describes the "games" offered in honor of Tanit, the celestial "virgin" and mother of the gods, where obscene actors role-played disgusting acts "in the presence of an immense throng of spectators and listeners of both sexes." He also describes the public display of homosexual priests (*galloi*).⁴⁶

I have taken the time to include some of the more unsavory details of pagan worship in order to show the similarity of the sexual practices common to them. Even though separated by many centuries, a historical and "theological" connection between the Mesopotamian *assinnus*, the Canaanite *qedeshim*, the Scythian *ennares*, and the Syrian *galloi* is not difficult to imagine. They took on the same androgynous appearance, engaging in the same ecstatic behavior, including self-mutilation, were associated with occultic spirituality, and so in many ways occupied a similar liminal relationship to "normal" society. Such parallels suggest a profound and necessary connection growing out of the same ideological pagan root.⁴⁷

Later in the second and third centuries of the Christian church, the gnostics were credited by their adversaries with mystery celebrations involving carnal knowledge. The charge is credible because "Christian" Gnosticism was the attempt to Christianize pagan spirituality, even to the point of adopting some form of androgyny. Hippolytus (AD 170–236) reports that one particular gnostic sect, the Naasenes, who worshipped the Serpent (*Naas* in Hebrew) of Genesis, attended the secret ceremonies of the mysteries of the Great Mother in order "to understand the 'universal mystery.'"⁴⁸ Like modern syncretists who are encouraged to cross over into other religions,⁴⁹ the gnostics believed religious truth was one, to be found everywhere, and so they crossed over into pagan spirituality as a matter of religious principle. The most explicit testimony is from Irenaeus who says: "They prepare a bridal chamber and celebrate mysteries."⁵⁰ A homosexual encounter is perhaps insinuated in the "Secret Gospel of Mark."⁵¹ At the very least, the final logion 114 of the *Gospel of Thomas* appears to be an invitation to spiritual andro-

⁴⁴ Monica Sjoo and Barbara Moor, *The Great Cosmic Mother* 126.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *City of God* vii: 26.

⁴⁶ "They were seen yesterday, their hair moist, their faces covered in make-up, their limbs flaccid, their walk effeminate, wandering through the squares and streets of Carthage, demanding from the public the means to subsidize their shameful life." Ibid., cited in Robert Turcan, *The Cults* 58.

⁴⁷ Joscelyn Godwin, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), dismisses these *galloi* as "fanatics," "a parody of continence," failing to note both the widespread character of this phenomenon and its deep theological pagan significance, which the Gnostic Naasenes and Julian the Apostate had no difficulty seeing—see below.

⁴⁸ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5:9:10.

⁴⁹ Paul Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987) 226.

⁵⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.21.3. Clement repeatedly says the gnostics celebrate sexual intercourse as mysteries, see *Stromateis* 3.27.1, 5; cf. 3.10.1; 3.30.1.

⁵¹ Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) 115–117, 185, 452. See also R. M. Grant, "The Mysteries of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip," *VC* 15 (1961) 129–140.

gyny.⁵² All this would justify the judgment of Burkert that “certain Gnostic sects seem to have practiced mystery initiations, imitating or rather outdoing the pagans . . .”⁵³

There is good reason to believe that a form of ancient Gnosticism, namely Hermeticism, survived and influenced the Medieval West through the mystical spirituality of alchemy.⁵⁴ This variant Egyptian version of gnosis saw in Hermes the divine interpreter whose secrets enable Man to pass through various levels of reality, thus making esoteric transmutations possible. The spiritual alchemist became an initiate, one “who knows,” as the ancient gnostics “knew.”⁵⁵ Like Hermes, the alchemical Mercurius was understood as a kind of divine “other” who would intervene by affecting the resolution of opposites.⁵⁶ While no explicit sexual perversion is promoted, joining of the opposites or union was frequently imaged as a *hieros gamos*, a holy marriage, the fruit of which is called “the Philosopher’s Stone.”⁵⁷ This “fruit” is sometimes called “the child of the work” which is presented as the Hermetic Androgyne, under the rubric “Two-in-One.”⁵⁸ At the very least we have to reckon here with a spiritualized form of what Eliade calls “ritual androgyneisation.”⁵⁹

In the same “illuminist” tradition, Jacob Böhme (1575–1624), a great mystic and proto-theosophist, believed Adam was androgynous and that the sexes appeared as a result of the fall. For this monistic mystic, the ideal human state was androgyne. According to Eliade, Böhme delivered these notions not from the Qaballah but from alchemy, for he makes use of alchemical terms.⁶⁰ One of his spiritual successors, Franz von Baader (1765–1841), postulated that the androgyne had existed at the beginning (Adam) and would appear again at the end of time.⁶¹

One notable inheritor of the esoteric movements of alchemy and hermeticism in the modern world is Theosophy. It is not without interest that Madame Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society towards the end of the nineteenth century, may well have had a dominatrix lesbian relationship with her successor Annie Besant. Besant began public life as the wife of an Anglican minister, became first a birth-control propagandist, and then an occultist.⁶² Her possible lesbianism is suggested by the great authority on

⁵² See below.

⁵³ Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* 3.

⁵⁴ Antoine Favre, “Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism,” in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* (New York: SUNY, 1998) 109–122.

⁵⁵ Karen-Claire Voss, “Spiritual Alchemy,” in *Gnosis and Hermeticism* 150.

⁵⁶ “‘Transmutation’ is the key word,” says the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on “Alchemy” (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1980): 432.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 157.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 160.

⁵⁹ Eliade, *The Two and the One* (New York: Harper, 1969) 112.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 279. In particular he calls the “philosopher’s stone” Rebis, literally “two things,” which Eliade understands as “the ‘double-being’ or the Hermetic androgyne.” Eliade goes on, “Rebis was born as the result of the union of Sol and Luna.”

⁶¹ Eliade, “Androgynes,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 1 (ed. Mircea Eliade; New York: Macmillan, 1987) 279.

⁶² James Webb, *The Occult Underground* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974/1990) 94.

modern esotericism, James Webb, who cites Besant's "irreplaceable and fully authoritative biographer Arthur Nethercot."⁶³ Later theosophists such as Aleister Crowley, promoter of the occultist pagan Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, as well as Charles Leadbeater, whom Blavatsky called her "bishop," were noted homosexual pederasts.⁶⁴ There is good reason to think that such activity was not the expression of personal weakness, but the consistent expression of pagan spirituality.⁶⁵

In 1923 Feder Mühle, a businessman who became involved in Spiritualism, founded the *Gottesbund Tanatra* in Görlitz, Silesia—home of Jacob Böhme. Members wore the God's Eye badge and believed that homosexuals "were vocationally mediums."⁶⁶ They also, with a certain logical consistency, held that heterosexual intercourse impaired the mediumistic talent. This small detail of Germanic occultic history is significant. Since leading contemporary homosexuals make the same claims,⁶⁷ without any apparent dependence on the theories of Mühle, such parallel thinking would suggest an organic connection between homosexuality and shamanistic religious activity.⁶⁸

We do see such an organic connection in ancient religions that persist today. The Siberian shamans, known as *Chukchi*, and the shamans of Central Asia engage in ecstatic rituals and dress as androgynes.⁶⁹ Among the Ngadju Dyak, a pagan people-group lost in the dense bush of southern Borneo, the *basir*, "asexual priest-shamans . . . true hermaphrodites, dressing and behaving like women," have a priestly function.⁷⁰ This behavior also characterizes Amazonian shamans, Celtic priests [ancient and modern], and Indian *hijras*. The *hijras*, who go back into the mists of Hinduism, are a religious community of men who "dress and act like women and whose culture centers on the worship of Bahuchara Mata, one of the many versions of the Mother Goddess worshipped throughout India."⁷¹ In another

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Scott Lively and Kevin Abrahams, *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party* (Keizer, OR: Founders Publishing Corporation, 1995) 3. On Crowley, see Eliade, "Androgynes" 280. E. Michael Jones, *Dionysus Rising: The Birth of Cultural Revolution Out of the Spirit of Music Revolution* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994) 165, reports that Crowley, the son of Plymouth Brethren Christians, was bi-sexual and a serious user of cocaine. During a session with cocaine, says Jones, Crowley came to a mystical awareness of himself as the Beast of Revelation.

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 42–43, argues that homosexuality changed in the nineteenth century. "The sodomite was considered a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species . . . homosexuality appeared as . . . a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul." Whatever the merits of this historical judgment, in this passage Foucault does clearly associate homosexuality with spirituality.

⁶⁶ James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1976) 32.

⁶⁷ See below.

⁶⁸ It is true that gays are now tracing their spiritual connections through history, but I have not noticed this particular connection being made.

⁶⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) 125. See also Nissinen, *Homoeroticism* 34.

⁷⁰ Eliade, *Shamanism* 352.

⁷¹ See Serena Nanda, *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont, CA: 1990) xv; cited in Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*. According to Tal Brooke, *Avatar of Night* (Berkeley, CA: End Run Publishing, 1999) 331, Sai Baba, a leading Hindu guru and Goddess-worshipper (see pp. 193 and 200), with whom Brooke was closely associated before his Christian conversion, was androgynous, and practiced homosexuality with a number of disciples in his inner circle.

form of Hindu spirituality, Tantric Yoga, androgyny is also the goal, where the two contrary principles of Shiva and Shakti are jointed. Eliade explains: "When Shakti, who sleeps in the shape of a serpent (*kundalini*), at the base of his body, is awoken by certain yogic techniques, she moves . . . by way of the *chakras* up to the top of the skull, where Shiva dwells, and unites with him."⁷² The yogin, through powerful techniques of sexual-spiritual meditation, is thus transformed "into a kind of 'androgynous.'"⁷³ In Buddhism also the true human, the archetype, is androgynous.⁷⁴ These yogic practices and mystical teachings concerning androgyny are doubtless as old as the Mesopotamian and Syrian examples discussed above.

In American Indian religious practice homosexual transvestite males—*berdaches*—have always functioned as shamans.⁷⁵ Amongst the Navajo, the *nadle*, a feminized male, serves as reconciler of conflict. According to Navajo myth, the original hermaphrodite went to the underworld to be associated with the dead and the devils of the lower world.⁷⁶ Among the Zuñi, Awonawilona ("he-she") is a powerful, positive mythological figure.⁷⁷ Similar figures are to be found in African and Australian Aboriginal cultic practice.⁷⁸ "Some African societies," observes an ethnographer, "have developed intermediary genders of men-women and women-men who, like their Native American counterparts, are seen as sacred and as spiritually powerful individuals."⁷⁹ Other examples of spiritual/physical androgyny include the homosexual priests of the Yoruba religion in Cuba and "young gay witches in Manhattan."⁸⁰ In light of the above, one would surely have to agree with the argument of a recent book tracing the history of gay male spirituality: "gender-variant men have fulfilled a sacred role throughout the millennia."⁸¹

Emily Culpepper, an ex-Southern Baptist, now a lesbian pagan witch teaching at the University of Redlands in Southern California, agrees. She

⁷² Eliade, *The Two and the One* 118.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Lama Surya Das, *Awakening the Buddha Within: Tibetan Wisdom for the Western World* (New York: Broadway, 1997) 140, cf. 384. Regarding homosexuality, Das notes that in the past, Buddhism "looked askance at . . . homosexual sex. Yet most contemporary Dharma teachers feel [such] behavior . . . within bounds and karmically workable" (209).

⁷⁵ Robert M. Baum, "The Traditional Religions of the Americas and Africa," in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality and World Religions* 1–46, which provides a systematic and well-documented discussion of this phenomenon plus a very useful specialized bibliography.

⁷⁶ Eliade, "Androgynes" 277.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980) 285–289. See also Robert M. Baum, "The Traditional Religions of the Americas and Africa" 19–32. Though the data for Africa is less abundant, Baum looked at fifty different African societies.

⁷⁹ Baum, "Traditional Religions" 21.

⁸⁰ See Randy P. O'Connor, *Blossom of Bone: Reclaiming the Connections Between Homoeroticism and the Sacred* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994).

⁸¹ Baum, "Traditional Religions" 15. See also Edward Carpenter, "On the Connection between Homosexuality and Divination, and the Importance of the Intermediate Sexes Generally in Early Civilizations," *Revue d'ethnographie et de sociologie* 11/12 (1910) 310–316, and *Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folk* (London, 1914); Walter Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1986).

sees gays and lesbians, in her words, as “shamans for a future age.”⁸² She reserves a spiritual role for homosexuals, for a shaman is “. . . a charged, potent, awe-inspiring, and even fear-inspiring person who takes true risks by crossing over into other worlds.”⁸³ A fuller definition leaves little to the imagination: “The power and effectiveness of shamans—witches, sibyls, Druids—emerges from their ability to communicate with the *non-human*: extra-terrestrial and subterranean forces, and the spirit-world of the dead.”⁸⁴ This, the reader will recall, is exactly the claim of the Mesopotamian *assinnu/kurgarru* and the Syrian *galli*—that they had contact with the spirit realm of the Underworld and of the Dead.

Culpepper left the Church and repudiated Christianity. Others stay in and say essentially the same thing. In more familiar but strangely comparable terms, Virginia Mollenkott, calling herself “an evangelical lesbian feminist,” speaks for gays and lesbians when she says, “We are God’s Ambassadors.”⁸⁵ Indeed, Mollenkott claims she “was told” by her “guardian angel, a Spirit Guide, the Holy Spirit or Jesus [she is not sure]”: “A great shift is occurring in the world, and you are a part of that shift.”⁸⁶ For Rosemary Radford Ruether, a leading “Christian” feminist theologian, “Androgyny is her model for a human species liberated from ‘dualistic’ gender into ‘psychic wholeness.’”⁸⁷ Similarly, Judy Westerdorf, a United Methodist clergy woman, triumphantly declared to the delegates at the pagano-“Christian” feminist Re-Imagining Conference in Minneapolis (1993) that “the Church has always been blessed by gays and lesbians, . . . witches . . . [and] shamans.”⁸⁸

No doubt without much awareness of these elitist theories and the deep, spiritual stakes involved, the media has shaped the sexual fantasy-world of America’s youth. The “gay” and mainstream presses are now documenting a disturbing trend. Young people are declaring themselves “homosexual” at

⁸² Emily Culpepper, “The Spiritual, Political Journey of a Feminist Freethinker,” in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 164.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Sjoog and Moor, *The Great Cosmic Mother* 131.

⁸⁵ Virginia Mollenkott, *Sensuous Spirituality: Out From Fundamentalism* (New York: Crossroads, 1992) 42, 166.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 19, 24. This “shift” includes her “shift” from biblical heterosexuality to pagan homosexuality, and from Biblical to monist spirituality, which now includes such techniques as meditation, on the New Age *A Course in Miracles*, and the use of Tarot Cards and *I Ching* (a form of Chinese divination—see *ibid.* 16). And again the bond between a particular spirituality with a particular sexuality is suggested. A sign of the times is the portrait of Jesus painted for the *National Catholic Reporter*. Artist Janet McKenzie used a black woman as a model, saying: “My goal was to be as inclusive as possible,” according to *The Daily Record* (London, December 11, 1999). This inclusiveness was not only sexual. Jesus is presented against a pale pink background [the homosexual motif is strongly suggested] whose details include a yin-yang circle representing perfect balance, and a feather symbolizing American Indian spirituality. Describing herself as a “devout atheist,” with an interest in many faiths, McKenzie has devoted much of her work to images of strong, spiritual women. The new, iconic Jesus for many Roman Catholics turns out to be an ambiguous male whose deep essence derives from a strong woman of pagan spirituality.

⁸⁷ Steichen, *Ungodly Rage: The Hidden Face of Catholic Feminism* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991) 302.

⁸⁸ “A Report,” *Good News* (January, 1994) 2. For a recent, scholarly sympathetic evaluation of modern witchcraft, see Helen A. Berger, *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

earlier and earlier ages. Others are embracing bi-sexuality, as an expression of personal freedom and autonomy. Observers note "a growing trend [in contemporary youth culture] . . . to refuse to define their sexuality. . . . Youth today want more representations of a fluid sexuality that rejects definitions of 'gay' or 'straight.'"⁸⁹ The popular press documents the success of what it calls the "gender blur."⁹⁰

Though promoted as an issue of civil rights, the homosexual/androgynous revival is not merely contemporary civics or chic theory. The close connection between pagan esoteric spirituality and androgynous sexuality, evident across time and space,⁹¹ demands that we not ignore the spiritual dimensions underlying the contemporary scene. In the light of the above evidence, it should not be surprising to note that the revival of pagan religion in our day is accompanied by a powerful reappearance of pagan sexuality. In other words, homosexuality may be less a modern question of biological destiny or civil rights than a necessary practical outworking of age-old pagan spirituality.⁹² It is becoming more and more manifest that a particular religious commitment is always accompanied by a particular sexual theory and practice. But this is not to suggest some scarlet, conspiratorial thread connecting the dots. The connection is logical, theological, and inevitable. A monistic view of existence will work itself out in all the domains of human life, and especially in the domain of sexuality.⁹³

What, then, is the relationship?

IV. THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF ANDROGYNY

As we have noted, at the heart of pagan monism is a mystical, unitive experience, a state in which distinctions disappear and opposites are joined. Androgyny, on the sexual level, reflects and confirms such an experience. Not everyone engaging in such activity thinks about the ultimate spiritual

⁸⁹ *Lambda Report* (January-February, 1998) 5. See an article on Kate Bornstein's *My Gender Workbook* in *The Washington Blade* (February 13, 1998), where sexual fluidity is the subject.

⁹⁰ Deborah Blum, "The Gender Blur," *Utne Reader* (September-October 1998) 45.

⁹¹ In 1576 the European explorer Pedro de Magalhaes de Gandavo noted the presence of transgendered warriors among the Tupinanmba Indians (see Baum, "Traditional Religions" 14), and the Roman Catholic missionary, Father Marquette, gave a well-informed description of the Illinois *berdache* in 1673 (see Baum, p. 15).

⁹² This can be seen in the apparently innocuous statement of a contemporary homosexual academic who affirms "the fact that human sex is not a strictly binary category"—see Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism* 12. From the fact of physical and sexual perversions, Nissinen actually argues for moral and spiritual relativism.

⁹³ C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy* (Bollingen Series XX; trans. R. F. C. Hull; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) 244–245, identifies this same phenomenon, though not directly associated with sexuality. He states: "Anyone familiar with the spirit of alchemy and the views of the Gnostics in [the writings of the church father] Hippolytus will be struck again and again by their inner affinity." But he notes that the alchemists "could have known nothing of Hippolytus, as his *Philosophumena*, long believed lost, was discovered only in the middle of the nineteenth century in a monastery on Mount Athos." It is interesting that in this same context, Jung states his indebtedness to the alchemists as those "who first put me on the track of a psychological interpretation" (*ibid.* 249).

stakes.⁹⁴ However, the link is explicitly established by influential pagan theorists in both the ancient and the modern world. Their explanations, though separated by vast distances and great periods of time, are strikingly similar and consistent, and thus independently testify to the coherent connection this paper seeks to clarify.

In the ancient gnostic texts such connections can be detected. The Church Father Hippolytus documents how and why the “spiritual” gnostics did not hesitate to imitate pagan spirituality and sexuality in one form or another. He explains the gnostic Naasene participation in the cult of the Goddess. “Because they claimed that everything is spiritual,” the Naasenes did not become *Galli* physically but rather spiritually: “they only perform the functions of those who are castrated” by abstaining from sexual intercourse.⁹⁵ So, concludes Hippolytus, the Naasene gnostics imitate the *Galli*, the castrated priests of Cybele. “For they urge most severely and carefully that one should abstain, as those men (the *Galli*) do, from intercourse with women; their behavior otherwise . . . is like that of the castrated.”⁹⁶ The mythological story of a castration of Attis thus led the Naasenes to conclude that the image of emasculation was a symbol of salvation.⁹⁷ Attis cut off his testicles in order “break with the baser and material world and gain access to immortal life, where there is no longer either male or female.”⁹⁸ These “Christian” gnostics sought, through a deep form of spiritual androgyny, a close association with paganism’s understanding of salvation.

Of what does such “salvation” consist? The gnostic *Gospel of Truth* enunciates the theory: “It is within Unity that each one will attain himself; within knowledge he will purify himself from multiplicity into Unity. . . .”⁹⁹ The *Gospel of Thomas* develops the practical consequences: “Simon Peter said to them: ‘Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life.’ Jesus said: Lo, I shall lead her, so that I may make her a male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁰⁰

Though on the surface less radical, and thus promoted as a Gospel on a par with the four canonical Gospels,¹⁰¹ the *Gospel of Thomas* is similarly

⁹⁴ After a lecture on this theme, a homosexual thanked me for showing him [for the first time] where his sexual drive was taking him spiritually and religiously.

⁹⁵ *Refutation of All Heresies* 5:2, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 57.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Some modern, apparently innocuous, arguments for the ordination of women come perilously close to this form of gnostic reasoning, when it is argued, for instance, that the headship of the husband over the wife is not carried over into church life, so that in the church a wife could be the pastor of her husband. Comments C. P. Venema, “. . . does a married member of the church become a spiritual ‘eunuch’ when it comes to the life and fellowship of the church, the married relationship no longer relevant to relationships within the church?” in “Gathering Or Scrounging for Grounds?” *The Outlook* (March 1992) 15.

⁹⁷ *Refutation of All Heresies* 5:4. This clearly helps explain logion 114 of the *Gospel of Thomas*, which Hippolytus cites as one of the Naasene sources a few lines earlier (5:2).

⁹⁸ Hippolytus, 5:2.

⁹⁹ *Gospel of Truth* 25:10–16.

¹⁰⁰ *Gospel of Thomas* 1.

¹⁰¹ Robert Funk, Roy Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

driven by the androgynous pagan ideal. This Saying 114, being the last, doubtless represents the goal of the gospel, which is promised in the first—to “not experience death.”¹⁰² Here, apparently, is the road to salvation—the mystical attainment of an androgynous or sexless state. Saying 114 should be understood in the light of Saying 22: “And when you make the male and the female into a single one so that the male shall not be male and the female shall not be female . . . then you shall enter the kingdom.” Both these sayings suggest the “neutralization” of sexuality so that the ideal for gnostics is to become, in this life, spiritually and ritually androgynous.¹⁰³ *Thomas* is not a macho attack on women.¹⁰⁴ It is a rejection of creational sexuality, a radical refusal of sexual differentiation, as presented in the Genesis account.¹⁰⁵

To become a true disciple, Mary must become a liberated gnostic, untrammelled by the sexual distinctions of the original creation. She must become autonomous, and move beyond the bondage of her sex. As a spiritual androgyne, she attains mystical union with the All. Having already noted the alchemical goal of a mystical/unitive *hieros gamos*, it is not difficult to follow the logic of a professor at a well-respected Catholic university¹⁰⁶ who lends to the mystical pursuit of the alchemists a sexual twist. Professor Frederica Halligan perceives in the alchemists’ quest for “gold” a blueprint for the planet’s future. Halligan notes that the second of the seven stages of alchemical meditation, called *solutio*, involves both a transformation of sexual energy and the destruction of the individual ego [the self]. This is a powerful mystical experience of pure monistic spirituality. For this Roman Catholic scholar, monism seems to present no problem. But the process is far from over.

The seventh stage, *conjunctio* [“joining”], is a “new reality,” the final bringing together of all the opposites, producing “gold,” i.e. spiritual gold, “a tremendously deepened sense of the oneness of all. . . . Unitive consciousness is awareness of the essential oneness with the Divine, that is, mystic consciousness. . . . the unification of all the opposites within oneself.”¹⁰⁷ Halligan’s final definition of the *conjunctio* is clear: “Beyond gender differences now, the mystics of both Eastern and Western traditions describe the bliss of abiding love.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² *Gospel of Thomas* 1.

¹⁰³ B. Gaertner, *The Theology of the Gospel According to Thomas* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) 256. Bertil Gaertner was an early authority on this gospel, teaching at Princeton Theological Seminary for a number of years.

¹⁰⁴ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979) 66.

¹⁰⁵ For a careful exegesis of Genesis 1–3, see Raymond C. Ortland, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Gen 1:3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (ed. J. Piper and W. Grudem; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991) 95–112.

¹⁰⁶ Frederica R. Halligan, “Keeping Faith With the Future: Toward Final Conscious Unity,” in *The Fires of Desire* (New York: Crossroads, 1992) 171–194. Halligan is clinical psychologist and Assistant Director of the counseling Center at the Roman Catholic Fordham University.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 188–189. That Halligan’s interpretation is correct is shown by the comment of Eliade, *The Two and The One* 103: “It would be purposeless to insist, after the fundamental labors of C. J. Jung, on the importance of the androgyne in the *opus alchemicum*.”

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 192. Karen-Clair Voss, “Spiritual Alchemy” 160–161, also connects the notion of androgyny with alchemical spirituality. She says: “If we think of the Stone as the fruit of two elements

Mircea Eliade, both a remarkable researcher of the phenomena of pagan spirituality as well as one of the architects of the new spirituality,¹⁰⁹ explains the spiritual meaning of androgyny as “a symbolic restoration of Chaos, of the undifferentiated unity that preceded the Creation.”¹¹⁰ The androgynous being thus sums up the very goal of the mystical, monistic quest, whether ancient or modern: “in mystical love and at death one completely integrates the spirit world: all contraries are collapsed. The distinctions between the sexes are erased: the two merge into an androgynous whole. In short, at the center one knows oneself, is known, and knows the nature of reality.”¹¹¹ Or again, according to Eliade, androgyny in many traditional religions functions as “an archaic and universal formula for the expression of wholeness, the co-existence of the contraries, or *coincidentia oppositorum* . . . symboliz[ing] . . . perfection . . . [and] ultimate being. . . .”¹¹²

The androgyne is thus the physical symbol of the pagan spiritual goal, which is the merging of two seemingly distinct entities, the self and God, and a mystical return to the state of godhead prior to creation. The joining of the opposites is the dissolution of creational distinctions and thus the destruction of creation’s hold upon human identity. Such joining brings a “liberating” recognition that the real self is “uncreated.” The solution to our

extracted from out of the chaos of the beginning of the work, which subsequently underwent processes that resulted in their becoming whole again, this is certainly one explanation for the meaning of the ‘Child of the Work,’ as it appears under the image of Hermetic Androgyne and the rubric ‘Two-in- One’. . . . Ultimately the alchemist discovers that the Child is his or her true Self.” C. G. Jung had this same view of alchemy which he expressed in his *Mysterium Coniunctionis* 153–154: “[T]he artificers . . . in the symbolical realm are *Sol* and *Luna*, in the human the adept and his *soror mystica*, and in the psychological realm the masculine consciousness and the feminine unconscious. . . . The two vessels are again *Sol* and *Luna*.” Voss, “Spiritual Alchemy” 174, sees a connection between this observation and the statement of Mircea Eliade in his study of tantric texts: “The Sun and the Moon must be made one . . . we are dealing with the *coincidentia oppositorum* achieved on every level of Life and Consciousness”—see *Forge and Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 118.

¹⁰⁹ See David Cave, *Mircea Eliade’s Vision for a New Humanism* (New York: Oxford, 1993) 3, who shows that the visionary impulse behind Eliade’s work was his “hope for a new humanism.” Eliade emphasized “mystical” experience and believed that religion was not a matter of knowledge but experience (8), and just as Goethe wished to go to India, so did Eliade, who spent 1928–31 there and wrote his doctoral dissertation of yoga and Indian spirituality (9). According to Cave, Eliade left India with a “cultural mission . . . persuaded of the viability of archaic and Oriental spirituality for the Western world.”

¹¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, “Androgynes,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 277. This understanding is reproduced on a popular level, in the contemporary vision of a new age of “Aquarian” spirituality, which includes the transformation of male/female distinctions into unitive androgyny. Shirley MacLaine’s “higher self” is androgynous. MacLaine wonders aloud if “the point of life itself” is to “balance both the masculine and feminine in ourselves. . . . Then we will have spiritualized the material and materialized the spiritual” to express ourselves “for what we truly are—androgyne, a perfect balance.” Barbara Marx Hubbard, a leading New Age mystic, assures her readers that in the coming “planetary awakening . . . you will be androgynous.” See Barbara Marx Hubbard, *The Revelation: A Message of Hope for the New Millennium* (Novato, CA: Nataraj, 1995) 165.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 154.

¹¹² Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 174–175, and *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (New York: New American Library, 1974) 420–421.

angst, according to a feminist author, is healing through the sacred marriage, the *hieros gamos*. This is the marriage of the ego and the self, which gives birth to “a divine child.” “A woman gives birth to herself as a divine androgynous being, autonomous, and in a state of perfection in the unity of the opposites. She is whole.”¹¹³

This sacred marriage expresses what occurs, in particular, on the moral plane. The pagan monist assumes guiltless responsibility for all his actions, whether “good” or “evil,” and thus, in an exercise of personal, autonomous power, joins the opposites of good and evil. The early American monist Ralph Waldo Emerson welcomed this spiritual option with enthusiasm. “If I am the Devil’s child, I will live then from the Devil.’ No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to this or that.”¹¹⁴ The deliberate act of power which defiantly declares evil good and good evil flies in the face of the Creator’s designs and in so doing jumps into the waiting arms of the Tempter. One may well wonder if this joining of the opposites is a possible implication of the Serpent’s word, “. . . knowing good and evil.”¹¹⁵

The psychoanalyst C. G. Jung proposed a similar interpretation. Under the influence of Philemon, a familiar spirit, Jung wrote his famous “Seven Sermons to the Dead.”¹¹⁶ Using colorful imagery, Jung disavows Christianity and endorses pagan spirituality. Employing the pseudonym of Basilides, a famous second century gnostic heretic, Jung addresses the spirits of dead Crusaders who had failed to find salvation in “Jerusalem.” He succeeds in converting them to the gnostic god, Abraxas, who is “both good and evil, . . . a terrible hidden god that humans cannot perceive. Abraxas is behind the sun and night, . . . the creator and destroyer of the world, truth and evil, light and darkness, . . . the ‘hermaphrodite of the earliest beginning,’ . . . the operation of all the gods and devils, and is ‘the world, its becoming and

¹¹³ Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine’s Journey: Woman’s Quest for Wholeness* (Boston & London: Shambala, 1990) 160.

¹¹⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self Reliance* (1847), cited in Eugene Narrett, “‘Proud Ephemerals’: Signs of Self Made Men,” *Culture Wars* (December 1999) 4. Apparently Paul Tillich attempted to do this and failed. After a life of sexual infidelity, he declared to his wife Hannah at the beginning of his stay at the hospital at the onset of death: “My poor Hannachen, I was very base to you, forgive me.” Much earlier in his life a Japanese Zen master, sitting with him in earnest confrontation, described him as “not one of the enlightened yet.” He was not yet enlightened because he still made the distinction between “good” and “evil.” Said Hannah Tillich: “The Zen master had banned good and evil in his world, acquiring physical immobility and perfect quietude. He listened with the inner ear and would not permit demons to enter his five orifices. He was not tortured by nightmarish dreams. He had found the dissolution of his ‘koan.’ Paulus lived in fear. His nervous body was tense; his desires—many. His fingers would fiddle with a pebble from the beach, a silver coin, or a paper clip. He breathed unevenly and sighed heavily, an ever guilttridden Christian in distress.” See Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973) 24 and 223.

¹¹⁵ Genesis 3:5—see E. Michael Jones, *Degenerate Modern Modernity As Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993) 121, for the documentation of this principle working itself out in modern thought.

¹¹⁶ Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life of Carl Jung* (New York: Random House, 1997) 161.

passing.’”¹¹⁷ Jung ends his sermon with a call to look to the god within rather than to the Christian God of the Bible. Later, he would represent this experience as a series of concentric circles within a larger circle, and for the rest of his life he “pointed to the Indian *mandala* (circle) as the best symbolic representation of wholeness or completeness in an individual, or as the supreme God in which all opposites are contained.”¹¹⁸ In this regard, it is appropriate to recall the definition of the mystical goal believed to be in all religions, given by Yale professor, Louis Dupré, “a state in which all distinctions disappear.”¹¹⁹

On the sexual plane, the homosexual androgyne, according to Jung, affirms his power by willingly assuming his physical proclivities and thus joining what God has put asunder. Indeed, for Jung, spiritual androgyny symbolizes “the integration of the opposites or the state of the individuation of the autonomous individual.”¹²⁰ Therefore homosexuals are—though some unconsciously or only partially—true pagan monists, who have succeeded in translating spiritual theory into physical reality.¹²¹

Jung himself suggested that homosexuality preserved an archetype of the androgynous original person.¹²² That is why homosexuals can propose themselves to society as “shamans.” In the monistic tradition, the same religious claim is made for homosexuality as is made for androgyny.¹²³ Since both androgyny and homosexuality function religiously in traditional paganism, they are clearly related.¹²⁴ The same emphasis is found in Karl Heinrichs (1825–1895), often considered the “grandfather” of the modern “gay rights” movement. Ulrichs rejected all psychological and behavioral explanations of homosexuality and adopted a psycho-spiritual one. He believed a homosexual was a man’s body inhabited by a woman’s soul (vice versa for a

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Within the larger quote, taken from Noll, are shorter quotes he takes from Jung’s original sources.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 162.

¹¹⁹ Louis Dupré, “*Unio Mystica*” 7.

¹²⁰ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts* 294.

¹²¹ This is why the Christian attempt to “love the sinner and hate the sin” (as Augustine put it) is so often rebuffed. Pagan spirituality demands that one *love* one’s sin, for there is no such thing as “sin.” For personal integration/individuation, one must embrace one’s antinomies and contradictions in a powerful mystical experience of oneness.

¹²² See Mollenkott, *Sensuous Spirituality* 165, who is not sure whether Jung’s educated guess is accurate, but she is “certain that healthy les-bi-gay people have a lot to teach society about sex roles. . . .”

¹²³ Judy Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds* (Boston: Beacon, 1984) 44, cited in Culpepper, “The Spiritual, Political Journey of a Feminist Freethinker,” in *After Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) 158. Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988) 232, gives special spiritual functions to homosexuals. The image of an androgynous/feminized sixteen year-old adolescent Christ looks a lot like a Greek *kouros*. See also Sjoo and Moor, *The Cosmic Mother* 67–68. These feminist writers argue that the further back one goes the Great Mother is gynandrous—so the present-day lesbian is the closest to ancient women, often in homosexual relationships.

¹²⁴ The Wiccan scholars, Sjoo and Moor, *The Cosmic Mother* 67, affirm the spirituality of lesbianism: “the further back one goes the Great Mother is gynandrous—so the present day lesbian is the closest to ancient women.” See also Lively and Abrams, *The Pink Swastika* 10.

lesbian). Notice the “spiritual” terminology. He called homosexuality a “third sex,” that is, a true expression of androgyny.

The more theoretical explanation of the phenomenon finds popular expression in our contemporary culture. Recently a gay leader at a Pagan Spirit Gathering in 1985 made the spiritual claim: “We feel there is a power in our sexuality . . . [a] queer energy that most cultures consider magical. It is practically a requirement for certain kinds of medicine and magic.”¹²⁵ Another gay pagan confirms the spiritual dynamic: “It is simply easier to blend with a nature spirit, or the spirit of a plant or an animal, if you are not concerned with a gender-specific role.”¹²⁶ One is clearly not concerned with *any* of the other creational distinctions either. The separation between humans, animals, and plants has been eliminated and at that point full-blown, monistic union ensues. “Blending” is another way of speaking of spiritual union with the All.

Eliade, in explaining the religious function of the asexual priest-shaman—true hermaphrodites, who dress and behave like women—notes that is precisely because “they combine the two cosmological planes—earth and sky—and also from the fact that they combine in their own person the feminine element (earth) and the masculine element (sky). We here have ritual androgyny, a well-known archaic formula for the . . . *coincidentia oppositorum*.”¹²⁷ This interpretation is confirmed via different terminology and conceptuality in the massive work on the Goddess by the Wiccan scholars, Monica Sjoo and Barbara Moor:

Creative women and men in all ages have found rigid heterosexuality in conflict with being fully alive and aware on all levels—sexual, psychic and *spiritual* [emphasis mine] . . . It is as if, on all levels of our being, we are split into one half, and forbidden the other. We are split against ourselves, and against the “self” in the other, by this moralistic opposition of natural polarities in the very depth of our souls.¹²⁸

The physico-theological mechanism seems to function as follows: androgynous persons, whether homosexual or bi-sexual, are able to express within themselves both sexual roles and identities. In the sex act they engage *both* as male and female, equally as penetrator and penetrated, the “hard” and the “soft”¹²⁹—and thus taste in some form or other both physical and spiritual androgyny.¹³⁰ As in classic monistic spirituality, they have, on the physical plane, joined the opposites, proving and experiencing that there are no distinctions. Just as the distinctions inherent in heterosexuality point to the

¹²⁵ Cited in George Otis, *The Twilight Labyrinth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 180.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Eliade, *Shamanism* 352.

¹²⁸ Sjoo and Moor, *The Great Cosmic Mother* 67–68.

¹²⁹ The term “soft,” μαλακός, is the Greek word used for “homosexual” in 1 Corinthians 6:9—see Dale B. Martin, “Arsenokoiēs and Malakos: Meaning and Consequences,” in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture* (ed. Robert L. Brawley; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1996) 117–136.

¹³⁰ Eliade, *The Two and the One* 112, mentions homosexual practice in ritual androgynous initiation.

fundamental theistic notion of the Creator/creature distinction, so androgyny in its various forms eradicates distinction and elevates the spiritual blending of all things, including the idolatrous confusion of the human and the divine.¹³¹ This seems to be the very same logic that brings Paul to a similar conclusion already in Romans 1:18–27.¹³²

Not only does this make sense theologically and theoretically, it is confirmed also by contemporary gay thinkers. “Something in our gay/lesbian being as an all-encompassing existential standpoint,” says J. Michael Clark, professor at Emory University and Georgia State University, and a gay spokesman, “. . . appears to heighten our spiritual capacities.”¹³³ Clark claims gays share the same sentiments as radical feminist theologians whose “religious impulses are being killed by [traditional] Judeo-Christianity . . .”¹³⁴ Clark seems to be saying that the problem lies not with “mean-spirited” or “hateful” Christians, failing to be true, loving Christians. For gays, the problem lies rather with the whole Biblical worldview and theological paradigm. For this reason, Clark turns to Native American animism for an acceptable spiritual model. As Janie Spahr, the Presbyterian lesbian activist, stated with great candor: “Maybe we’re talking about a different God.”

Specifically, for Clark, the *berdache*, an androgynous American Indian shaman, born as a male, but as an adult choosing to live as a female, constitutes a desirable gay spiritual model, for the *berdache* achieves “the reunion of the cosmic, sexual and moral polarities,”¹³⁵ or the “joining of the opposites.” How interesting that the *Berdaches* were known as “sacred Balancers,” unifying the polarities to “nurture wholeness.”¹³⁶ This powerful spirituality involves the denial of distinctions, and the conscious assumption of all one’s contradictions and perversions. It turns out that one reigns divinely supreme over creational distortions.¹³⁷

We surely must conclude that sexual perversion, and in particular the elimination of sexual distinctions, is not an incidental footnote of pagan religious history, of mere passing interest, but represents one of its fundamental ideological commitments. That the pagan priesthood would be so identified, across space and time, with the blurring of sexual identity via homosexual androgyny indicates, beyond a doubt, the enormous priority paganism has given, and continues to give, to the undermining of God-ordained monoga-

¹³¹ Evidence for this theme in pagan thought goes back a long way. Plato in the *Symposium*, 192E, has one of his speech-makers, Aristophanes, say: “. . . the desire for all is to be one, not two . . . not to be divided by night or by day . . . formerly . . . we were one; but now, for our sins, we are all dispensed. . . .”

¹³² Much could be said about this, but it must wait for another article.

¹³³ Clark, “Gay spirituality” 337.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 338.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 342.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* This, the reader will remember, is very similar to the feminized Navajo *nadle*, who is known as the “reconciler”—see above.

¹³⁷ Though Islam, a Christian heresy, maintains the structure of theism and disavows homosexuality, the monist variant, *Sufism*, is certainly growing in popularity in the West. A pro-gay Muslim makes this interesting observation: “Religious gays in the realm of Islam . . . would have to take recourse in the antinomian Sufism (mysticism) . . . (where) all that counts is union with the divine

mous heterosexuality, and the enthusiastic promotion of androgyny in its varied forms.

V. CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS

When, during the Sixties, theologians triumphantly declared the “death of God,” they fostered a rejection of the theism of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, as well as an abandonment of Biblical sexuality. Theologian David Miller¹³⁸ declared in 1974:

. . . the announcement of the death of God was the obituary of a useless single-minded and one-dimensional norm of a civilization that has been predominantly monotheistic, not only in its religion, but also in its politics, its history, its social order, its ethics, and its psychology. When released from the tyrannical imperialism of monotheism by the death of God, man has the opportunity of discovering new dimensions hidden in the depths of reality’s history.¹³⁹

In this liberating list, Miller did not mention sexuality, but it is implicitly there—in the announcement, at the funeral of God, of the rebirth of the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece and Rome.¹⁴⁰ At the time, this connection was not always obvious. The “Death of God” theologians were perceived as super-rationalist liberals intent on demonstrating that twentieth-century man had “come of age,” having outgrown the need of the “God hypothesis.” It took a generation for the implications of this to dawn. Mark C. Taylor, the postmodern philosopher, sees the implications with disarming clarity: “. . . the death of God [is] the disappearance of self [no predetermined norms] and end of history [no meaningful events] . . . [it] unleashes the aberrant levity of free play . . . purposelessness.”¹⁴¹ He develops the implications of this new freedom: “The lawless land of erring, which is forever beyond good and evil, is the world of Dionysus, the Antichrist, who calls every wander[er] to carnival, comedy and carnality.”¹⁴²

through mystic exaltation. On that level it becomes immaterial whether a believer is hetero- or homosexual” (Khalid Duran, “Homosexuality and Islam,” in *Homosexuality and World Religions* 196).

¹³⁸ David Miller is the Watson-Ledden Professor of Religion at Syracuse University and chairman of the Joseph Campbell Foundation, Advisory Committee on Myth in Higher Education. Joseph Campbell promoted mystical theosophical beliefs and was the great inspirer of George Lucas’s space trilogy, *Star Wars*. I was present at one of the plenary sessions of the Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1993, which celebrated with readings “the deepest wisdom of the world’s religious traditions.” During the evening David Miller read a passage from a gnostic text that vilified Yahweh, the God of the Bible, as “a lion-faced serpent with glittering eyes of fire.” When David Stendl-Rast read from the Bible, he chose a passage that neither mentioned God the Father, in order not to offend the women in the audience, nor the name Christ, in order not to offend those of other religions. No one seemed to find this double standard offensive, impolite or out of place.

¹³⁹ *The New Polytheism* vii.

¹⁴⁰ Miller, *ibid.* vii–x.

¹⁴¹ Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 158–159.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 157–158.

During this same post-death-of-God generation, radical feminism, in an incredible show of power, made sure God would die. In 1979 Naomi Goldenberg, a leading feminist, declared (with no apparent conscious reference to the Death of God theology, as far as I can tell): “The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Jahweh.”¹⁴³ Carol P. Christ announced one death-dealing method to bring about the undoing of God: “. . . using the titles Goddess and God the Mother is probably the only way to shatter the hold of [the] idolatrous male God on the psyche.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, God and sex were inextricably linked even in death. Of course, in the same way, the resurrection of the pagan gods would give new life to sexual options. Radical feminist theology was read by many unsuspecting Church pluralists as a relatively innocuous religious version of the contemporary agenda of civil rights. On the contrary, it turns out that these theologians were proponents of a deep, pagan spirituality, which had nothing to do with rationalism, and very little to do with civil rights. *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World's Religions* looks both like the “lawless land of [pansexual] erring” and like one more element in the progress of global syncretism.¹⁴⁵ The agenda is captured in the title of a recent book on theology by a Roman Catholic scholar—*When God Becomes Goddess: The Transformation of American Religion*.¹⁴⁶ God does not have to die: he simply had to undergo a sex change. Unfortunately, he also had to change religion, and take up abode in the pagan pantheon.¹⁴⁷

At the beginning of a new millennium, we can begin to sense that such apostasy from God and from the Biblical notions of gender is pagan to the

¹⁴³ Naomi R. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon, 1979) 13. In a seminar at the AAR meeting in 1999, Goldenberg declared, with a straight face, that there was no culture war, she who had announced the revolutionary event of the “changing of the gods.” In 1995 she also wrote “The Return of the Goddess: Psychoanalytical Reflections on the Shift from Theology to Theology,” in *Religion and Gender* (ed. Ursula King; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 145–164. Though the changes are massive, the winners of this war now wish to normalize their gains with the pretense that nothing of any deep cultural significance has happened.

¹⁴⁴ Carol P. Christ, “Symbols of Goddess and God in Feminist Theology,” in *The Book of the Goddess Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion* (ed. Carl Olson; New York: Crossroad, 1983) 231, 248, citing with agreement Nelle Morton, “Beloved Image,” published as “Deo/Dea imagine dilletta” in *La sfida dek femminismo all teologia* (ed. Mary E. Hunt and Rosino Gibellini; Brescia: Queriniana, 1981).

¹⁴⁵ Paula M. Coe, William R. Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel, *After Patriarch: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) x, state their agenda: “The authors . . . share the view that there is some hope for one or several of the world religions . . . if this hope can be realized, it must involve critique, reconstruction and active engagement with other traditions . . . we must internalize insights from a Hindu-feminist reconstruction of Kali, . . . a Christian feminist reinterpretation of the meaning of Christ, [and] a Buddhist-feminist reappropriation of the ideal of community.” While no one should reject self-criticism, nor the evils perpetuated in the name of biblical patriarchy—the source of which may come from the most surprising of places—syncretism, on the other hand, is the end of biblical truth and the beginning of moral and social chaos.

¹⁴⁶ Richard Grigg, *When God Becomes Goddess: The Transformation of American Religion* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

¹⁴⁷ The religion is pagan monism.

core and has produced in one generation, in “Christian” America, a torrential flood of the same spirituality and sexuality that has always characterized occult paganism. Understanding where such radical theology has always taken a society in its sexual practice will help us to see the necessarily close association between theology and sexuality, and the manner in which the one affects the other. In the last thirty years America has abandoned theism and embraced the spirituality of Eastern paganism. These same years have produced the most radical social engineering in America’s history—the deconstruction of normative Biblical heterosexuality¹⁴⁸ and the revival and pagan idealization of homosexual androgyny.

There is a spiritual-sexual agenda in our Jungian, post-theistic, post-modern, pro-choice, non-judgmental culture. As we naively crossed the bridge into the third millennium to the tune of Lennon’s “Imagine,”¹⁴⁹ full of hope for a new world “order” of unity and love, respect and democracy, we have brought across that bridge the agenda of the ideal, androgynous, sexually unfettered New Man of pagan spirituality. At the very moment when the New Age gurus declare the imminent arrival of the Age of Aquarius, the eighteenth-century theosophist Baader’s prophecy seems to be appearing—the return of the original androgyne. Might we be on the verge of witnessing the construction of an eschatological Sodom and Gomorrah, as the title of a recent pro-gay book, *Reclaiming Sodom*, suggests?¹⁵⁰ The masses are rendered insensate with a constant diet of sexual degradation, while, at the same time, reassured by the spiritual and moral liberation that paganism offers. Although only the radicals may understand and believe monistic theory in its purest form, the entire society is inevitably affected. While the elites sometimes fail in their success, as Julian the Apostate did in the fourth century AD, they can wreak havoc on a culture. The deconstruction of the Biblical God and Biblical sexuality as a philosophical and ideological programme is already deeply embedded in our collective unconscious. Some powerful leaders see the future as the brave new global world of sexual and spiritual pluralism, where liberty of self-expression in these areas is the essence of human progress.¹⁵¹ One could even imagine a society of pagan religious syncretism where bi-sexuality and homosexual androgyny would be

¹⁴⁸ I do not wish to suggest that everything in America was biblical—but that is another story.

¹⁴⁹ Significantly, this was the music played at the official ceremonies marking the arrival of the new millennium presided over by President and Mrs. Clinton—no heaven, no hell, no religions, just oneness. We have been warned.

¹⁵⁰ This book appeared in Routledge’s homosexual offerings in the early Nineties—see Stephen D. Moore, “Que(e)rying Paul: Preliminary Questions,” in *Auguries: the Jubilee Volume of the Sheffield Department of Biblical Studies* (ed. David J. A. Clines and Stephen D. Moore; JSOTSS 269 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 253.

¹⁵¹ Just what this “shamanistic function” could prove to be is perhaps indicated by the contemporary actions of the gay community. Gary L. Bauer, “In Front of the Children,” *Family Research Council Washington Watch* (May 1993) reports that in April 23–25 of that year, during the Homosexual March on Washington, the marchers called for the persecution of Christians by chanting, “Bring on the lions.” According to the *Washington Post*, says the same article, “10,000 hand-clapping, war-whooping lesbians erupted out of Dupont Circle shouting, ‘We’re dykes, we’re out, we’re out for power!’”

the spiritual and social ideal, the sexuality of choice for those in power, while heterosexuality would be tolerated, considered inferior, and strictly controlled—for it has happened before.¹⁵²

Clearly God is interested in sex, or Satan would not be so passionately committed to its deconstruction. To destroy God's created structures, the Evil One rips from the body politic the sexual distinctions hard-wired into creation to recall the deep truth about existence—the absolute distinction between the Creator and creation. The attack on these structures succeeds in convincing many that they, in themselves, are a detestable oppression, the very cause of social and human dislocation. This is relatively easy to do because such structures are necessarily marred by sin. The result is dramatic. As in ancient Gnosticism, the patriarchal God of Scripture is eliminated from respectable “cutting-edge” theology, and from polite campus speech even in some evangelical schools, all in the name of Christ. Such a trade-off prevents many well-meaning Christians from seeing the essential goal of the sexual revolution as the subtle destruction of a theistic worldview. In the place of sexual differentiation, we are offered monistic, egalitarian androgyny as a physical, social, and spiritual ideal. Thus many, espousing gender liberation in the name of Christ and the gospel, only too late discover a culture “liberated” from the God who, in Christ, both created and redeemed the world.¹⁵³ What is often not seen in the debate on sexuality is that we are also in the presence of two “gospels”: the one, pagan, preaches redemption as liberation from the Creator and repudiation of creation's structures; the other, Christian, proclaims redemption as reconciliation with the Creator, and the proclamation of creation's goodness.¹⁵⁴ In a pagan world, a truncated gospel of personal salvation will no longer do. Sexuality within the context of creation must be announced as an essential part of the Christian message of reconciliation with God and glad submission to his good will.

VI. CONCLUSION

Firmly engaged on a wild path of sexual deconstruction and androgynous experimentation, our self-liberating culture is like a little child alone in a small boat on a big lake. As it giddily strikes out into the uncharted waters of the twenty-first century, lured by irrational hopes of human progress and ignorant of the costly experiments of the pasts, our youth-obsessed

¹⁵² As in ancient Greece. Plato in his *Symposium* characterizes heterosexual relationships as “vulgar” and homosexual relationships as “heavenly,” and a whole elitist society was built around homosexual pederasty. See K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978) and David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

¹⁵³ John 1:1; Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:2.

¹⁵⁴ 2 Cor 5:20 and 1 Tim 4:4. In these two texts the old and the new creations are given their rightful place, for in Paul the God who redeems is the God who creates, and these two divine works are equally integral parts of the divine plan—see 1 Cor 15:46 and my forthcoming book *Return of the Rabbi: Pauline Gospel for a Pagan Planet*.

culture is tragically adrift from its Christian roots and cut off from its life-sustaining creational moorings.¹⁵⁵

The theosophist Eliade, one of the most doughty proponents of the “new humanism,”¹⁵⁶ nevertheless felt obliged to give a serious warning before he died in 1986. In speaking about “ritual androgyny” as both a “source of power” but also as a fearsome possibility of great loss, Eliade offered this sobering admonition:

Every attempt to transcend the opposites carries with it a certain danger. This is why the ideas of a *coincidentia oppositorum* always arouse ambivalent feelings: on the one side, man is haunted by the desire to escape from his particular situation and regain a transpersonal mode of life; on the other, he is paralyzed by the fear of losing his “identity” and “forgetting” himself.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ *The State of the World Forum*, the brainchild of Mikhail Gorbachev, reflects similar utopian thinking. In a panel on “Cosmology, Culture and Social Change,” a new “integral culture” was proposed where “all roles and relationships will be redefined” along the paradigm of the “integration of masculine and feminine archetypes”—see “1997 State of the World Forum: Cosmology, Culture and Change—Final Report,” <http://www.worldforum.org/1997/forum/CosmologyandCulture.html>, 2.

¹⁵⁶ See David Cave, *Mircea Eliade's Vision* 3.

¹⁵⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One* 123, n. 1.