I would find a review of the progress of arguments surrounding this passage. Instead, I find another writer putting forward arguments as though he has invented the wheel.

While I am pleased to know that he agrees with me, your readers might want to know that in 1987 I first advanced precisely this argument about the Matthean and Lukan passages Robinson deals with (in my article, "The Entimos Pais of Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10"). While the original article was published in an obscure European journal, in 1992, it was reprinted in Dynes and Donaldson's Studies in Homosexuality: Homosexuality and Religion and Philosophy, Vol. XII, where your readers can find a more thorough treatment of the issue.

I am not suggesting plagiarism; rather, it would appear that your author has been guilty of sloppy research. He has also missed the excellent discussion of the Matthean passage by Theodore Jennings, Jr., and Tat-Siong Benny Liew, "Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: Rereading the Centurion, the Chap and the Christ in Matthew 8:5-13," and in the Journal of Biblical Literature 123:3 (2004). Of the several sources over the years that have deigned to discuss my arguments (and attribute them to me), Jennings and Liew are among the few to give full credit to my article, accepting that I arrived at the right conclusion, albeit, in their eyes, by an outdated exegetical approach. Your readers are also referred to their article for a more modern—though, to my mind, still complementary—reading.

Donald Mader, Rotterdam, Netherlands

To the Editor

In attempting to discuss Jesus and homosexuality, Friar John Robinson could have greatly improved his insufficiently referenced article, "Jesus, the Centurion and His Lover," (Nov.-Dec. 2007) by citing Donald Mader's closely argued "The Entimos Pais of Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10," first printed in the now-defunct Patidika (1, 1987), and then reprinted in Wayne Dynes and Stephen Donaldson's Homosexuality and Religion and Philosophy (XII of their thirteen-volume Studies in Homosexuality, Garland, 1992, now available at williamanercy.com). He would also have benefited from awareness of Theodore Jennings Jr. and Tat-Siong Benny Liew's meticulously sourced "Mistaken Identities But Model Faith: Rereading the Centurion, the Chap and the Christ" in The Journal of Biblical Literature (123:3, 2004).

Or, for that matter, Robinson could have noted Tom Horner's Jonathan L. David (1978), written at the height of the gay liberation movement. Both Mader and Liew credit Horner with being a theologian (at least in their attempt to suggest that the Centurion, whom Jesus cured from pederasty, although J. M. McNell by Charles Ortleb, Christopher Street, October, 1976), McNell says: The four gospels are totally silent on the issue of homosexuality. There is no explicit reference to it whatsoever. There is one curious story of the Roman centurion whose boy servant is ill. Jesus is asked to cure him. It is said that the centurion loved the boy very deeply; one could read into it a homosexual relationship.

In 1987, Mader argued that the texts of Matthew and Luke, whose gospels present the story of Jesus healing the centurion's pais or doulos, both obtaining it from the common source "Q," demonstrate a pederastic relationship between the centurion and his sick companion. In 2004, Theodore Jennings Jr. and Tat-Siong Benny Liew, both at the Chicago Theological Seminary, endorsed Mader's conclusion but argued that the method of comparative exegesis by which he arrived at it was not sound. Mader had argued that Luke cleaned up Matthew's language, replacing the word used by Matthew, pais, meaning "boy" or "child," with another Greek word which specifically meant slave, doulos, in an attempt to tone down the pederastic relationship between the centurion and his esteemed slave boy that was suggested by pais—a connotation that revealed too much about both the sexual connection between the centurion and the boy and Jesus' attitude about pederasts. Matthew, more at home in Aramaic, was, Mader claims, less attuned to the pederastic connotations of pais than was Luke. Jennings and Liew maintain that because the order in which Luke and Matthew were written cannot be ascertained with certainty, such an argument is invalid, and base their case on an analysis of the key words in Matthew alone—ending, however, with the same conclusion regarding the centurion, his boy, and Jesus' attitudes.
Fr. Robinson discusses another converted centurion, Cornelius, from the Acts of the Apostles 10:1-38, centurions being something of a trope in the New Testament for gentiles who were nevertheless people of faith. He does not take up, however, Morton Smith, as did W. V. Harris recently in "The Case of the Fake Gay Gospel" (Times Literary Supplement, Oct. 19, 2007), who claimed his Secret Gospel of Mark (the text of which has Jesus spending the night with a naked, newly converted youth) may be early and authentic. Smith’s argument is summarized in Dynes, vol. XII. Nor does Robinson deal with Warren Johansson’s masterly article, “...whoever shall say to his brother, racha” (also in volume XII of the Dynes/Donaldson collection, reprinted from the Cabrion and Gay Books Bulletin, No. 10, 1984). There, citing a German source, Johansson loosely explains that racha is an Aramaic word meaning something like queer or faggot today. This puzzling word was never translated by St. Jerome, Martin Luther, the translators of the King James Version, or the French Roman Catholic Douai. If it had been, Jesus would be on record as having said, “Don’t put down fags.”

In short, Robinson’s piece lacks the serious scholarship required to make a strong case about Jesus’ attitude toward homosexuality. Had this foundation been there, it would have been clear that Jesus opposed the homophobic condemnations of St. Paul and St. Clement. Nearly two centuries ago, in 1814, Jeremy Bentham wrote that “Jesus has on the whole field of sexual irregularity preserved an uninterrupted silence” (cited in Louis Crompton, Byron and Greek Love, 1985); scholarship today gives plenty of reason to believe that far from being silent about homosexual relations, including age-differentiated relationships, Jesus viewed them at least with toleration, if not approval, so long as they were conducted ethically. Jesus, most scholars believe, was literate in Hebrew and/or Aramaic, though not in Greek. The Septuagint, however, was in Greek. According to legend, the Septuagint was the product of a “seminar” in Alexandria, circa 250 BCE, when King Ptolemy had the Hebrew scriptures translated into Greek by seventy rabbis in seventy separate cubicles. All seventy rabbis came up with identical renderings, word for word—a feat of divine inspiration. Like St. Paul, Josephus (Contra Aphonem, 2) and Philo Judeaus (De specialibus legibus, 3), all of whom used the Septuagint, other Jews who used the Hebrew text interpreted the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, as shown in the Mishnah, as a transgression of lust and not of inhospitality. The case that Jehovah destroyed Sodom because of inhospitality can indeed be plausibly deduced from the Hebrew scriptures, but that interpretation was certainly abandoned during the intertestamental period (that is, between the canonization of the Old Testament around 200 BCE and that of the New Testament, around 200 CE), in such texts as the Book of Jubilees, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Secrets of Enoch. Warren Johansson convinced me that Canon Dezrick Sherwin Bailey was instructed by higher-ups in the Church of England to minimize the Jewish argument that God destroyed Sodom for sexual acts rather than for inhospitality, in order to reduce hostility to the Wölfenden Commission’s recommendation to decriminalize consensual sex between males over 21 in England. Accepting Bailey’s claims without question, John Boswell went so far as to claim that the medieval Orthodox Church developed rituals for same-sex unions, which his admirers assumed to be same-sex marriages.

Many of these arguments are summarized in the Encyclopedia of Homosexuality, edited by Wayne Dynes with Associate Editors Warren Johansson and William A. Percy (two volumes, Garland, 1990). But Johansson’s book-length manuscript, published posthumously just this year on my website, gives a more profound and original interpretation. Along with many other authorities, Johansson maintains that a group of scholars under Ezra created the Hebrew Bible in the 5th Century BCE under Persian rule, condemning “males who lie with males” as the Zoroastrians did. When Alexander conquered Palestine in 330 BCE, bringing with him the Greek pederastic tradition, apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphical writings registered Jewish condemnation and reinterpreted the Sodom legend to make it divine retribution not for inhospitality but for homosexual lust. In the first century CE, Josephus (Contra Aphonem, 2) “categorically condemned sexual relations between males,” so that on this subject nothing remained for Christian theologians to do. Christians did add an elaboration for unnatural behaviors, that is to say all sexual activity not leading to procreation, as “the sin of the sodomite,” fusing the Greek philosophical concept with the Jewish legend. Mainstream Judaism proper, however, never fully abandoned the old notion that the Sodomites violated inhospitality and justice, as the Talmud had recorded.

William A. Percy, Boston

Poetry and the Small Presses
Dear Poetry Editor:
We were delighted by your warm and enthusiastic review of Joan Larkin’s “My Body.” I’d been hoping for years to get a