

THE ENTIMOS PAIS OF MATTHEW 8:5-13 AND LUKE 7:1-10

Donald Mader

That the gospels are silent about homosexuality has almost become a truism. At least one writer on homosexuality and scripture has even sought to construct arguments for tolerance upon this supposed silence.¹ Certainly there are no direct references to the practices we today term homosexuality anywhere in the teachings of Jesus, as there are in the Pauline letters.²

It has been suggested that there may be an indirect reference to homosexuality in Matthew 19:10-12, one of the "hard sayings" of Jesus, regarding eunuchs, on the ground of the popular belief that classed eunuchs with those who practised sodomy.³ The argument runs that, because of this popular identification, for Jesus to speak highly of eunuchs would at least imply toleration for homosexuals. Two problems severely limit this possibility. The first arises when we note that it was on the ground of physical imperfection that eunuchs were excluded from the covenant community, not their actions; whatever the popular mind may have thought, we are dealing with two different categories, and to reason from the one to the other is not sound. Second, the meaning of Matthew 19:10-12 is sufficiently obscure on its face that it seems unwise to build much upon it. It is probably best taken merely as an admonition to chastity.⁴

Beyond Jesus' silence on the subject, it is also widely accepted that the very subject of homosexuality is unmentioned in the gospels. Since at least the time of Christopher Marlowe, one of whose "damnable opinions" held that Jesus and John were bedfellows, there have been more or less poetical flights based upon the "beloved disciple", and even the young man who "ran away naked", but these cannot withstand serious exegetical examination.⁵ However, while none of the standard gospel commentaries which I have been

able to examine nor any of the major texts on homosexuality in the Bible have noted the possibility (aside from a brief mention in Horner's *Jonathan Loved David*), the suggestion has been made in foreign sources and in non-exegetical literature in English that the account of the healing of the centurion's servant, in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10 (with a parallel in John 4:46-53), may contain a reference to homosexuality in its classical form of paederasty.⁶ It is the intent of this paper to examine whether or not this suggestion can be exegetically supported. The issue will center primarily around the understanding of several words, *pais* (boy/servant) and *entimos* (dear, precious, valued), as found in these passages, against the background of other Biblical and secular usage, and the question of whether a person could reasonably be involved in a paederastic relationship and yet have been a "God-fearer" as the centurion is portrayed by Luke.

The Passages

In both Matthew and Luke the account of Jesus' healing of the centurion's servant at Capernaum is part of a collection of healing stories which directly follow a major section of Jesus' teaching—the Sermon on the Mount in the case of Matthew; the Sermon on the Plain in the case of Luke. Matthew sets it as the second of three healings, Luke as the first of two. Luke has previously used, in his fifth chapter, the healing of the leper with which Matthew precedes the Capernaum story, and in his fourth chapter the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, with which Matthew follows it; in their place, Luke follows the centurion's story with an account of a resurrection which is peculiar to his gospel.⁷

The setting of the account of the healing of the centurion's boy makes it clear that the gospel writers intended it to be a miracle story, which is to say that they intended its primary focus to be a revelation of the nature and power of Jesus. This equally means that, just as the parable of Lazarus and the rich man is not to be looked to for authoritative teaching about the afterlife, as its primary purpose lies elsewhere, we must here recognize that, even if it is established that it contains a reference to pederasty, we cannot look to this healing story for authoritative moral teaching on homosexuality, carrying the same force as, for instance, Jesus' teachings on marriage in Matthew 5:31-2. At the same time, just as other healing stories, although they are not intended to be authoritative teaching about disease, give us information about Jesus' attitudes toward disease and its causation (or at least the attitudes imputed to Jesus by the early Christian community which framed the stories—an issue which we will examine later), so too, if pederasty is present, this account will necessarily reveal attitudes about it.

Because of the prominence in its structure of the saying of Jesus regarding faith (Matthew 8:10; Luke 7:9), the account certainly does have a secondary focus in teaching about the nature and importance of faith. Indeed, it is a common observation among commentators that structurally the real point of the story comes in these words and not the miracle of healing itself, which comes almost as an afterthought. Perhaps the strong demonstration of faith and trust on the part of the centurion played a role in the placement of the account directly following sections of teaching dealing with faith and life (Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46-49), to serve, in effect, as a "bridge" between sections.

It is in relation to the strength of the saying of Jesus in the structure of the story that we may briefly examine the source from which this account enters the gospels. The story is almost universally agreed to have been an element in "Q", the hypothetical source of materials used in common by Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark.⁶ As such, it would be the only (or perhaps, if Matthew 9:32-3 is admitted to be from "Q", the only major) miracle story to have stood in that

source.⁹ As "Q" is commonly regarded to have been a collection of the sayings and discourses of Jesus, and not of stories about him, the fact that this account should have been included supports the supposition that Jesus' words to the centurion regarding faith are an important—and were perhaps originally its primary—focus.

Having briefly surveyed the context and source, let us look at the texts themselves, in the Revised Standard translation:

Matthew 8:5-13:

'As he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, 'Go', and he goes, and to another, 'Come', and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this', and he does it." When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.'" And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

Luke 7:1-10:

'After he had ended all his sayings in the hearing of the people he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a slave who was dear to him, who was sick and at the point of death. When he heard of Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his slave. And when they came to Jesus they besought him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue." And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word and my servant will be healed. For I am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go', and he goes; and to another, 'Come', and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this', and he does it." When Jesus heard his, he marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude that followed him, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave well.

A comparison of the two versions shows key points in common as well as key differences. Matthew and Luke agree in placing the incident at Capernaum, in Galilee, a large and prosperous commercial and fishing center with a Roman military presence. While Capernaum, unlike Galilee in general, was primarily Jewish, the city was strongly influenced by the Hellenism of the surrounding Gentile majority. It is famed in Biblical archaeology for its well preserved third-century synagogue, noted for the figural decorations not in accord with Jewish law regarding images—perhaps a replacement to the one claimed by Luke to be the centurion's gift. While it would be dangerous to reason from a third century building to first century social conditions, this is at least suggestive of a certain heterodoxy that might have prevailed there.¹⁰ The two versions are also in agreement about the wording of the centurion's message (Matthew 8:8-9 and Luke 7:6b-8) and Jesus' response (Matthew 8:10, Luke 7:9).

On the other hand there are significant differences. The most obvious is the structure of the story, for while both versions agree that the healing took place at a distance because the centurion felt unworthy to have Jesus under his roof, Matthew has the centurion himself approach Jesus, while Luke has a complicated account of two embassies sent by the centurion, the first of Jewish elders and the second of friends. Contained within this is the further identification of the centurion as a "God-fearer", who had donated a synagogue for the local congregation. Matthew includes an Old Testament quotation from Psalm 107:3 in verse 11 as part of a section which Luke reworks as an independent teaching (Luke 13:28-30).

The other significant difference is somewhat muted by the translation, though still traceable in the Revised Standard Version's use of "servant" and "slave". In identifying the relation of the sick individual to the centurion, Matthew (in verses 6, 8 and 13) consistently uses the Greek term *pais*, a word of multiple meanings which include "son", "boy", "child" (of either sex), and "servant" (either an adult or minor), and here rendered by the RSV as "servant". In verses 2, 3 and 10, parallel to Matthew's verses 6 and 13, Luke instead uses the Greek *doulos*, "born slave", rendered by the

RSV as "slave". Significantly, each writer uses the opposite term once in his account: Matthew uses *doulos* in verse 9b, seemingly to emphasize the distinction between the request and the hypothetical, less important slave being ordered about; Luke, while consistent with verse 9 of Matthew by using *doulos* in the centurion's speech (vs. 8), also breaks his pattern of using *doulos* and agrees with verse 8 of Matthew by using *pais* in verse 7b, perhaps to stress the more personal relationship this servant enjoyed. On his part, in identifying the relationship between the centurion and the sick individual, Luke does introduce the Greek adjective *entimos*, meaning "honored" or "valued" in verse 2 to describe the slave. It is a word which appears in the Gospels only in the writings of Luke.

With these differences between the passages firmly in mind, we may move to the question of precedence. The question is not which of these passages is primary in the sense of one being a reworking of the other, for it is accepted that Matthew and Luke had no contact with one another's work. Rather the question is which of the passages is probably closer to the hypothetical original source, the "Q" document, from which both authors drew. Obviously, no final answer can be given, without an original with which to make comparisons. However, the preponderance of scholarly opinion favors Matthew as better representing the hypothetical source. Most of the arguments involve the structure of the story, noting the artificiality of Luke's narrative, with its complications of having the centurion invite Jesus by the first embassy, then withdraw the invitation by the second. The unsuitability of the first-person message delivered by Luke's second embassy, which fits perfectly in the mouth of the centurion himself in Matthew's version, is also noted. This unsuitability seems to suggest that the message has been preserved by Luke from another source but used in an incongruous setting. Other scholars, however, also extend their claims for precedence to the text of Matthew's version with particular comment on Matthew's use of *pais*.

Among those who have argued, on one ground or another, for Matthew being closer to a hypothetical original are Loisy, Klostermann, Wend-

and, Dibelius and Bultmann.¹¹ Plummer clearly states his opinion that in the use of *pais* Matthew preserved the text of his source while Luke has substituted *doulos*.¹² John Chapman refers to Luke as a "borrower", and also suggests Luke changed *pais* to *doulos*; at the same time he judges Luke "longer and more complete" and more "beautiful" for the addition of the intervention of friends.¹³ Vincent Taylor plainly states his opinion that "in its Lucan form the story has received later additions", and appears to consider the first embassy one of them.¹⁴ A. R. C. Leaney says that it is "likely that Luke himself invented the detail of the sending of the elders".¹⁵ In the Anchor Bible Jos. Fitzmyer opts for Matthew being truer to the source in both structure and text, except for the addition of the free-standing saying of Jesus now in verse 11. He states that any argument for Matthean "omission is more difficult to explain than Lucan additions", and offers his opinion that Luke has shifted from *pais* in the original source to *doulos*, though he says it is "not clear why".¹⁶ Among current commentators only those of evangelical slant seem to disagree. Geldenhuys, after citing authorities in favor of Matthean primacy, baldly asks "Why?" and actually suggests that both Matthew and Luke are correct and must be combined to make a full story with two embassies and a personal visit!¹⁷ I. H. Marshall, after making such comments as "Luke's version is more complicated, if not actually improbable" still finds, in the balance, that Luke better represents the source, though "the possibility of Lucan expansion cannot be excluded."¹⁸ But perhaps the strongest statement of all—in favor of Matthew—comes from Montefiore, who declares "Luke makes diverse changes in the story of the centurion", that Luke's version is "weaker and less natural than in Matthew" and that it is "clearly secondary as compared with Matthew".¹⁹

Before leaving our examination of the texts themselves, we should also take notice of the parallel to these two passages in John 4:46-54. It is one of the few incidents recorded in the synoptic gospels which appears recognizably in John, where it stands as the second of the "signs" performed by the Christ. While it is recognizable, it is by no means identical: the points of similarity

include the location, Capernaum; the personal request by the man for the healing of a child (parallel at least to Matthew), answered by a healing at a distance effected by Jesus' word alone; and the faith of the petitioner as a key element of the account. The differences, however, are also considerable: the man is not a centurion, but rather is identified as *basilikos*, or "king's official", though it is the considered opinion of W. F. Howard that this title would suit the position of a Roman centurion in the service of Herod the tetrarch.²⁰ It is not clear in John whether the man is Jew or Gentile, though the assumption would seem to be that he is Jewish, where it is implicit in Matthew and explicit in Luke that he is non-Jewish; and the relationship of the man and the sick individual is specifically that of father and son, as John uses *huios*, or "son" in verses 46, 47, 50 and 53. However, curiously, in verse 51, John does use *pais* (here obviously by the context, in the sense of "son"), the only appearance of that word in the Johannine writings.²¹

Given these similarities and differences, the relationship of John's version to that of the synoptics has been hotly debated. Among the Fathers, Irenaeus, in his *Against Heresies*, ii 22:3, treats all three accounts as variants of one incident. Though again evangelical commentators argue otherwise, and Plummer denies any parallel, remarking that in view of the differences, to suggest such a relationship would imply a "startling carelessness" with his sources on the part of John, the majority of modern voices can be represented by Howard, Bernard, and Marsh who remarks that "the present story is unmistakably like that of the synoptics" and that the "assumption seems justified" that this is a parallel account.²² Streeter more cautiously suggests that this is an account of the same incident, though taken from a source that had early diverged from that used by the synoptic writers.²³ R. E. Brown, in the Anchor Bible series, affirms that all three accounts are versions of the same incident, but then stands alone in proposing that it is John who best represents the original source, which he believes used *huios*, which Matthew for some reason altered to *pais*, and which Luke further changed to *doulos*.²⁴ If, on the other hand, we accept the opinion of the majority of

commentators that *pais* stood in the source used by Matthew and Luke, the unusual appearance of *pais* in John would seem to suggest a fairly direct connection.²⁵

The Meaning of *pais*

If it is accepted that *pais* stood in the original source from which Matthew, who retained the word, and Luke, who substituted another, both drew—and it does appear that this is a justified assumption—we may now move to inquire how the word would have been understood by contemporaries first encountering the narrative. As we have already noted, the word has multiple meanings, which often must be understood from the context: it can mean “boy”, “child” (of either sex), “son”, or “servant” (of any age). The word occurs 23 times in the New Testament, and is used with almost all of these senses. Five additional occurrences are in Matthew: 2:16, of the “male children” of Bethlehem; 12:18, in a quote from the LXX, “servant”; 14:2, of the “servants” of Herod; 17:18, of the “boy” cured of epilepsy; 21:15, of the “children” on Palm Sunday. Seven additional occurrences are in Luke: 1:54 and 1:69, in the Magnificat and Benedictus, respectively, of Israel and David as “servant”; 2:43, of the “boy” Jesus at the Temple; 8:51 and 8:54, of Jarius’ daughter, a female “child”; 9:42, of the “boy” cured of epilepsy; 15:26, of a “servant” in the parable of the prodigal son. Five more uses occur in Luke’s second volume, Acts: 3:13 and 26, in Peter’s sermon, of Jesus, as God’s “servant” or “son”; 4:24, of David as God’s “servant”; 4:27 and 30, of Jesus as God’s “servant” or “son”; and 20:12, of Eutychus, the “boy” who fell from the window. The final one is of course in John. Secular usage reflects the same spread of meanings. The lexicographer Hesychius, writing in late antiquity, defines *pais* as a descendant, particularly a son (*huios*), more mature than *neos*, and in contrast to a daughter (*parthenos*), and notes it can also be applied to a slave (*doulos*).²⁶ Liddell and Scott provide instances of use as “son” or “daughter”, “boy” or “girl”, and “servant” or “slave” of any age or sex.²⁷

There is, however, an additional specific usage

which one might not necessarily expect to find in the New Testament, but which should have fallen within Liddell and Scott’s field of view. Before launching into this discussion, it will be necessary to make a brief digression.

Perhaps the most difficult mental adjustment to make for anyone from a twentieth century western society who seeks an understanding of classical times involves the recognition of the pervasiveness of pederasty within ancient society. (A recognition of the total acceptance of slavery is perhaps a close second.) Intergenerational sexual relationships between males are today regarded by our society as so perverse and uncommon that we are totally unable to comprehend the centrality, and the widespread practise and acceptance, that pederasty enjoyed in the ancient world. Because this condemnation often arises from religious strictures, we are even less willing to consider the possibility that there might be non-judgemental references to such practises in scripture.

The ubiquity of pederasty, and its centrality to facets of ancient culture and society ranging from literature and the arts through philosophy, education and even into military training, was first treated in such pioneering works as J. A. Symonds’ *Problem in Greek Ethics* (the “problem” being precisely the importance of a practise so reviled as pederasty in a culture so revered as that of ancient Greece) and George Ives’ *Graeco-Roman View of Youth*.²⁸ Within the last decade the centrality and pervasiveness of pederasty has been formidably documented for Greek culture and society by K. J. Dover, and for Rome by John Boswell and Royston Lambert.²⁹ Lambert conveniently sums up the issue:

Pederasty was not a mere fashion or aberration in ancient Greece. Wherever and for whatever reasons it originated, by classical times it had clearly come to serve certain profound needs existing in society, at least of the leisured or citizen classes. It had matured into an esteemed social institution, fulfilling precise and vital functions, regulated by law and tradition, elaborated into a culture and

dignified with a philosophy. So important was its function that it flourished, weakened and adulterated perhaps, all over the Hellenic world under Roman rule... tenaciously surviving even the ineffective edicts of the Christian Emperors of the fourth century A.D., which had to be renewed by Justinian two hundred years later.³⁰

A further concise summary of the role of pederasty in ancient society, from the perspective of Biblical scholarship, will be found in Robin Scroggs' work on New Testament texts and homosexuality.³¹ While we may question his contention that it was pederasty, and not homosexuality as we know it today with more or less equal relationships between similarly aged persons, that is opposed in New Testament texts that explicitly condemn homosexuality, his review of the background material is most valuable, and his conclusions worth noting:

The practices of pederasty emerged out of the dominant social matrix of the day. In some quarters pederastic relations were extolled, in almost all quarters condoned... it is important to keep in mind that Greco-Roman pederasty was practised by a large number of people in part because it was socially acceptable, while by many other people actually idealized as a normal course in the process of maturation.³²

Any reader desiring further documentation regarding the importance and pervasiveness of pederasty in classical times may consult these sources in their entirety.

Bearing these facts in mind, we should now note that within the institution of pederasty, *pais* had a rather specific reference to the younger, passive partner in a pederastic relationship, or the desired object of pederastic affections, whether freeborn or slave. In the general overview at the beginning of his study, Dover observes, "In many contexts, and almost invariably in poetry, the passive partner is called *pais*", and Bernard Sergent, in a discussion of terminology in his study of pederastic myths in Greek religion,

comments on Strabo's use of the word *pais* in a description of Cretan pederastic customs, "the term was commonly used to refer to an adolescent, the *eromenos*, and that is the case here."³³ The usage remains remarkably consistent for close to a thousand years from the poems of Theogenis, through the epigrams collected in Book XII of the Greek Anthology, on through work dating to well after the time of the gospels' composition. The epigrams of Strato of Sardis (fl. 30 A.D.) and Meleager of Gadara (fl. 90 B.C.) are of particular interest, as the former was an almost exact contemporary of the date of the gospel events, and the latter, though slightly earlier than the date of the gospels, was a native of Gadara, about twenty miles from Capernaum across the sea of Galilee in the Decapolis, and site of the healing of a demoniac (Matthew 8:28), and thus they provide evidence on usage at the time and place of the gospels. Strabo of Amaseia, the Geographer, the subject of Sergent's comment, whose dates are roughly 63 B.C. to 24 A.D., provides from prose still another example of this contemporary, pederastic understanding of the word.

This is not to suggest that the word *pais* necessarily carried pederastic implications. In most common usage, it carried only the usual meanings. There were words, such as *eromenos*, or *paidika* when used as a masculine singular noun, which did carry such specific implications, and would have left the nature of any relationship for which they were used entirely beyond doubt.³⁴ It can, however, be said that *pais* is a word that contemporaries could well have expected in descriptions of pederastic relationships, and, moreover, a word which appearing in the proper context would have clearly conveyed that meaning.

The difficulty in determining the precise meaning of *pais* in any particular situation is clearly seen in the gospel passages here being examined. If we had only Matthew's version, it would be impossible to say whether the *pais* was the centurion's son or servant. If we had Luke alone, we would clearly understand from his use of *doulos* that the *pais* was a servant. Indeed, it is the strength of Luke's use of *doulos* that makes us also read Matthew as a reference to a servant. Yet if we had Matthew's and John's accounts only, and Luke's

version did not exist, we surely would read Matthew, with the indefinite *pais*, in light of John's more specific *huos*, and refer to Matthew's account of the healing of the centurion's son! But in the light of what has been said about the paederastic usage of *pais*, another uncertainty must be introduced: if we were to read through first-century eyes, accustomed to the institution of paederasty, and knowing its vocabulary, encountering a story like Matthew's might we not also read it in terms of a man's concern for his younger lover?

Luke's *entimos doulos*

Before answering that question, we should briefly examine Luke's use of *entimos*. The word occurs five times in the New Testament altogether, two of those appearances being in Luke, who is the only Gospel writer to use the term. It also is used once by Paul, in Philippians 2:29, and twice in I Peter 2:4 and 6. When applied to things, as in the two references in I Peter, the word means "valuable" or "precious"; when to persons, the sense is generally "honorable", as in Paul's injunction to the Philippian church to count Epaphroditus "honorable", and Luke's other use of the word, 14:8, where Jesus instructs his followers not to take seats of importance at a feast lest they have to make way for someone more "honorable" than they. For secular usage Liddell and Scott confirm these meanings; T. W. Manson notes also that the word was used as an honorific for soldiers with long or distinguished service.³⁵ Luke's use of the term in 7:2 then must be seen either as somewhat cold-blooded—a "valuable slave"—or as somewhat anomalous—though as a slave not "honorable" in the sense of reputation, at least valued for personal reasons. As the centurion's motives are portrayed as much warmer than merely protecting a valuable piece of property, the latter is undoubtedly the sense in which the word should be understood.³⁶ Thus, while the term does not usually imply an emotional attachment, at the least we can say that Luke, in introducing it, was recognizing that the centurion's actions displayed a depth of feeling which was over and above that of an ordinary master-slave relationship.³⁷

We can now summarize our findings and offer

an answer to the question of how a first century reader would have viewed this account. We have seen that the majority of commentators believe that Matthew's version of the story is closer to the hypothetical source from which both Matthew and Luke drew, and that many extend this to the assumption that *pais* stood in that source. We have also seen that *pais*—though it assuredly had other, and more primary, meanings—was a word that first century readers would have expected in references to paederastic relationships and one which, given the context of such a close, though non-parental, relationship between an adult male and a boy such as this account presents, might have implied a paederastic relationship. Though there is nothing which requires such a reading, given the nature of the story, with the concern shown for the boy, and the ubiquity of paederasty in the experience of first-century readers, I believe that we must answer that this account, as reflected in Matthew's version, certainly could have conveyed to its original audience the suggestion of paederasty. But did it?

I would propose not only that it could, but that it did suggest paederasty to an important early reader—Luke. If we need an answer to the question of why Luke changed terms from *pais* to *doulos*, this would appear to be the obvious reason. The author of Matthew, out of respect for his source, or from having a lesser experience with the Gentile world and its institutions, or for theological reasons, let the account stand, while the author of Luke, with a greater experience of the Gentile world and its institutions, and thus a greater sensitivity to the implications of the story, sought to mute them.³⁸ That Luke understood the relationship to be non-parental is indicated by his choice of another word expressing servitude, but while a *doulos* also could have been used for sexual purposes (and a reading of ancient literature indicates that many were), the term would not have been as provocative as *pais*.³⁹ Having made the change, Luke felt the need to acknowledge, by the use of *entimos*, that the centurion's actions on behalf of his servant indicated a remarkable emotional connection, the depth of which was comparable to (and for John, explicable in terms of) what a father would do for his child.

Paederasty and God-fearers

We are affirming, then, that the account of the healing of the centurion's boy not only might be read as a reference to paederasty, but that it was read that way by Luke, and further, that the changes made to the story by Luke support this interpretation not only in muting what Luke found in the original, but also by still affirming, in a less provocative way, that the relationship was unusual. At this point a new question arises: could a "God-fearer", as Luke portrays his centurion to be, also have engaged in paederasty?

It would be easy to dismiss this issue by arguing that the identification of the centurion as a "God-fearer" is a Lukan creation. Whatever the answer to the question of whether a "God-fearer" could practise paederasty, the primary argument that in the original and Matthean versions this account would be seen to have reference to a pederastic relationship will not be affected, and there is certainly evidence that could be adduced that this detail did originate with Luke. That the detail occurs in the course of the rather artificial structure of the embassy of elders, with all the evidence we have cited that this is secondary, and the fact that the 'pious centurion' is almost a 'type' in Luke-Acts—Cornelius (Acts 10) being another example, and perhaps the source upon which Luke drew to fill out his portrait of this anonymous centurion—all suggest this is from Luke's hand. However, if we wish to argue that Luke's account, though muted in comparison to Matthew's, still allows a paederastic reading, we must deal with the issue. Nor can we ignore the question of whether the centurion of the original story, by his openness to approach Jesus and his concern—perhaps more than just a sensitivity to Jewish culture—about having a rabbi enter his home, might not have shown himself a God-fearer, though the fact was not stated.

The term "God-fearer" (*phoboumenoi ton Theon*) was applied to a large group of Gentiles who responded positively to the theological and ethical teachings of Judaism, but who stopped short of full conversion. They are encountered fairly frequently in Acts; among the more notable are the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, and Titus Justus

(Acts 8, 10 and 18, respectively), and many of those that Paul and other apostles found receptive in the course of their preaching journeys probably fell into the group as well. It is obviously hard to categorize so broad a group, which ranged from individuals philosophically inclined toward monotheism through those who embraced some, but not all, Jewish ethical and cultic practices, through those who would strictly follow all these matters but held back from the rite of circumcision.⁴⁰

Quite apart from debates about the original meaning of Old Testament references to homosexuality, it is clear that first century Judaism found homosexuality, and its expression as paederasty, abhorrent. The wealth of rabbinic literature examined by Scroggs documents this for Palestinian Judaism; for Hellenistic Judaism our source material is narrower, as we see it almost entirely through the eyes of Philo Judeus, but his condemnation is no less thoroughgoing.⁴¹ While reliance on a unique source is always risky, and it is by no means clear how well Philo represents the thinking of other Hellenized Jews,⁴² we must assume that paederasty would not be an approved practise for a God-fearer. We must also assume that any God-fearer who was so close to the Jewish community as to endow a synagogue would be among those more observant of Jewish customs. Together, these assumptions would argue against the possibility of the centurion, as portrayed by Luke, being involved in paederasty. However, the case cannot be closed entirely. It is also possible that Hellenistic Jewish communities in general, or the one at Capernaum in particular (which, as we noted above, was later rather heterodox in its attitude toward graven images), may have been more accepting of Hellenistic moral practises than was Philo, and that paederasty, particularly if it conformed to the higher Hellenistic ideals for the practise, as the caring evidenced by the centurion's request suggests this did, might have been tolerated in a God-fearer for whom this remained one area of non-conformity.

Summary and Conclusions

In summary, the points of the argument are:

1. Respecting the concensus of critical opinion, it is probable that Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10 are both drawn from the same original account; that Matthew's version better represents that original; and that the word *pais* was used in that account, with Matthew preserving the word while Luke substituted *doulos*.

2. The word *pais*, when used in the context of a close non-parental relationship such as that portrayed here—a relationship that John, when using the account, found fitting and explicable as a parent-child relationship—could have conveyed to a first-century audience the implication of paederasty.

3. Not only could this account have been read as referring to a paederastic relationship, but the author of Luke, by substituting *doulos* for *pais* (thus affirming his understanding that the relationship was non-parental while using a less provocative word), and by adding the qualification that the boy was *entimos*, indicates that he understood it that way.

4. While it is presumed be that a deeply observant God-fearer would not practise paederasty, the possibility that this account does refer to paederasty cannot be eliminated for that reason. There were many levels of observance among God-fearers, and the details that imply that the centurion was an observant God-fearer are probably Luke's composition.

I would therefore conclude that we must seriously consider the possibility that this passage in the New Testament does refer to homosexuality, in its classical form of paederasty, though there is no one fact that requires that it be seen in that way.

What are the implications of this? To begin, this passage will not allow us to reach any sweeping conclusions about Jesus' attitudes toward paederasty or homosexuality. As we noted early in this paper, the story does not contain any authoritative moral teaching on the subject. This is merely a detail in a story which had, for its authors, quite a different purpose than the presentation of ethical teaching. For that matter, it is widely recognized today that the Gospels are neither biographical in their intent nor do they portray for us an "historical Jesus"; while they contain historical materials, they are rather the

record of what the Church, at the time of their composition, believed about Jesus. Therefore, the most that can be claimed is that a segment of the early church out of which the "Q" document and Matthew arose, was not concerned, and believed that Jesus was not concerned, when confronted by a responsible, loving paederastic relationship, but rather held it subordinate to questions of faith. This is entirely consistent with the rest of the image created by the Gospels. From accounts such as those of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11, where the hostile and self-righteous attitudes of the accusers are shown as more troubling to Jesus than the woman's sin) or, from the same chapter in Luke which holds our centurion's story, that of Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee (7:36-50, where it is the woman's act of faith that Jesus notes rather than her violation of moral laws), as well as the repeated statements that Jesus extended table-fellowship to sinners (Mark 2:13-17 and its parallels Matthew 9:9-13 and Luke 5:27-32, Luke 15:1-2) and his own observation that he expected prostitutes to enter the kingdom before the conventionally righteous (Matthew 21:31-2), Jesus is shown as more concerned with the state of a person's faith than with their observation of conventional, and particularly sexual, morality. There is nothing unusual, then, in the response Jesus is shown to have toward the centurion, whose request is evidently based on his real love for the boy as well as his strong trust in the saving power of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus is depicted as affirming the relationship here, and fulfilling the centurion's faith, by restoring his boy to him.

The passage has bearing, nonetheless, on the debate in the church over homosexuality. On the one hand, it surely strengthens the general thesis proposed by Boswell that the early church possessed a greater tolerance for homosexuality than was previously suspected—and than it seems to possess today. On the other hand, there has been a tendency, particularly notable in Boswell and Scroggs, to argue that while the early church was tolerant of adult male homosexuality, condemnation was directed to the vicious and unsavoury side of paederasty. Evidently there was little other side. Boswell relates deteriorating attitudes to-

ward homosexuality in the early church to revulsion against the sale and prostitution of unwanted children, incest and child slavery as associated with pederasty, but also reveals his own view when in his index 'Pederasty' refers one to 'Children, sexual abuse of'.⁴³ Scroggs takes a much longer route, first arguing that because of the partners' difference in age the nature of pederasty is inequality, and because inequality always leads to domination, and domination to dehumanization and abuse, and second, because the relation is inherently impermanent and intended to last for only a few years, "it is clear that most forms of pederasty had at least the *potential* to create concrete relations that would be destructive and dehumanizing to the participants, particularly the youths... Given this potential and its frequent actualization, that early Christians should repudiate all forms of pederasty is not unduly surprising."⁴⁴ He concludes, "what the New Testament was against was the image of homosexuality as pederasty and primarily here its more sordid and dehumanizing aspects".⁴⁵ One would never suspect, from all this, that the same society also contained nurturing, self-sacrificing relationships such as those cited by Lambert.⁴⁶

The issue is not, however, whether historically there were positive, nurturing relationships—which there surely were—or destructive, dehumanizing ones—which there also surely were—nor even in what proportion they existed. With the discovery of a New Testament passage which suggests an attitude of toleration toward a non-exploitive, caring pederastic relationship, the focus must move back to where it always should have been: that it is not homosexuality, or pederasty, or any other specific sexual relationship that Christian ethics condemns, but dehumanization and exploitation of another person in any relationship, heterosexual or homosexual, intragenerational or intergenerational.

Editors Note:

D. H. Mader was graduated from Union Theological Seminary, New York, and served for fifteen years as a clergyman. He currently lives in Europe as an artist and writer. He prepared the introduction for the new edition of the early gay poetry anthology *Men and Boys* (New York: Coltsfoot Press, 1978), and his book reviews have appeared in *The Cabirion*, *Pan* and other journals.

NOTES

1. T. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), p. 110-111.
2. Romans 1:26-7, I Corinthians 6:9, Timothy 1:10. A considerable literature exists dealing with exactly what these passages mean, the most important being J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: U. of Chic. 30 Press, 1980), Appendix I, 750 pages 106-113; Horner, *op. cit.*, chapters 7 and 8; J. J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (2nd ed., New York: Next Year Publications, 1985), pages 50-56; R.

- Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), chapter 7. It is not within the scope of this article to enter into the debate over Pauline intentions.
3. Horner, *op. cit.*, p. 123; McNeill, *op. cit.*, p. 65, makes a similar argument including Acts 8:26ff. The Old Testament background is Lev. 21:20 and Deut. 23:1, excluding eunuchs from the covenant community; a similar law regarding castrated animals is found in Lev. 22:24. The context of Lev. 21:16-23, however, makes it clear that the objection is to castration as a physical imperfec-

tion.

4. F. F. Bruce, *Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1983), pages 63-5.
5. Horner, *op. cit.*, pages 120-21. One of the more remarkable poetical flights is W. Wattle's, "John", *Lanterns in Gethsemane* (New York: Dutton, 1918), and no less than the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham was responsible for seeing a homosexual allusion in Mark 14:15; L. Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love* (Berkeley: U. of California, 1985), p. 281.
6. The mention by Horner, *op. cit.*, p. 122, cites previous

ources but devotes less notice to his than to his theories involving Matthew 19:10-12. The foreign sources include J. Martignac, "Le Centurion de Capernaum", *Arcadie*, March, 1975, p. 17ff, which I have not been able to examine; a thoroughly un scholarly notice in E. Gillibert, *Le Colosse aux pieds d'argent* (Paris: Metanone, 1975), and a poetic enthusiasm by D. Christopoulos, "The Centurion Cornelius" (trans. K. Friar), *Gay Sunshine Journal*, No. 47, 1982, p. 170, the earliest mention in English is J. P. Rossman, *Sexual Experience Between Men and Boys* (Boston: Association Press, 1976), p. 99. It is also mentioned in J. J. McNeill, "God and Gays: A New Team", *Christopher Street*, 1:4, October, 1976, p. 27; it was with the encouragement of Dr. McNeill that this paper was begun.

7. The parallels between this story and another healing story, that of the Syrio-Phoenician woman's daughter (Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30), must be noted. Both accounts involve an appeal to Jesus by an adult Gentile on behalf of a child, followed by a commendation from Jesus about faith, and a healing effected at a distance by Jesus' word alone. There is even, in Matthew's version, a negative embassy (verse 23b)! On this basis, some of the more thorough form-critics have suggested that there is a common origin for these two stories. Two things appear to militate against this, however: the severe difference in

Jesus' initial response to the request; and the different sources from which the accounts came (Mark for the Syrio-Phoenician woman, "Q" for the Centurion). While it is not impossible that, at an extremely primitive level in the development of tradition, both reflect a common event, and there are certainly similarities of motif, we will not here assume any connection.

8. For non-professional readers unfamiliar with this designation and how it came to be proposed, the easiest introduction is still probably that of A. M. Perry, "The Growth of the Gospels", *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 7, p. 60ff, or D. T. Rowlingson's article "The Synoptic Problem", *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4, p. 491ff.

9. S. MacLean Gilmour, "Introduction to St. Luke", *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 8, p. 13; B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London: MacMillan, 1928), p. 233; S. E. Johnson, in his Exegesis to Matthew includes Matthew 9:32-33 as from "Q" as well: *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 7, p. 337 and p. 359.

10. D. C. Pellett, "Capernaum", *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, pages 532-4; K. W. Clark, "Galilee", *ibid.*, Vol. 2, pages 346-7.

11. Loisy, Wendland and Klostermann are cited as favoring Matthew by N. Geldenhuis, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1950), p. 221; Dibelius' suggestion that the motif of messengers is a Lucan creation and Bultmann's argument that

paid stood in the original "Q" source are cited in I. H. Marshall, *Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 277 and 279.

12. A. Plummer, *International Critical Commentaries: Gospel According to St. Luke* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), p. 196.

13. J. Chapman, *Matthew, Mark & Luke* (London: Longmans Green, 1937), p. 103.

14. V. Taylor, *Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: MacMillan, 1945), p. 76.

15. A. R. C. Leaney, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke* (London: A. & C. Black, 1966), p. 141.

16. J. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Gospel According to Luke (1-IX)* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), pages 451, 468-9.

17. N. Geldenhuis, loc. cit.

18. I. H. Marshall, loc. cit. Marshall does construct a response to the problem in Luke of a first-person statement in the mouth of a messenger, by citing the oriental practise of ambassadors memorizing statements, and Biblical examples thereof, which is credible but not wholly convincing. T. H. Robinson, *Moffett New Testament Commentary—The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978) must also be numbered among those favouring Lucan primacy.

19. C. G. Montefiore, *Synoptic Gospels* (N.Y.: KTVA Publishers, 1968), Vol. 2, pages 423-4.

20. W. F. Howard, Exegesis of John, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 8, p. 538.

21. J. H. Bernard, *International Critical Commentary: Gospel Ac-*

- cording to John (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1928), Vol. 1, p. 166.
22. Plummer, op. cit., p. 197; Howard, op. cit., p. 536; Bernard, loc. cit.; J. Marsh, *The Gospel of St. John* (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 236.
23. Streeter, op. cit., p. 409.
24. R. E. Brown, *Anchor Bible Gospel According to St. John (I-XII)* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 193.
25. C. K. Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 248, however, presents arguments that *pais* here is an assimilation from the synoptics.
26. Hesychius Alexandrinus, *Lexicon*, ed. M. Schmidt (Jena, 1858-68), Vol. 2, p. 256.
27. H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 1289.
28. J. A. Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (London: Privately Printed by Leonard Smithers, 1901, and subsequent reprints); G. Ives, *The Graeco-Roman View of Youth* (London: Cayme Press, 1926). That both works have the polemic purpose of defending homosexuality by appealing to the classical tradition, and therefore are somewhat unwilling to confront the darker side of paederasty in ancient culture, where it intersected with prostitution and slavery, does not negate their value.
29. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978); Boswell, op. cit., chapter 3; R. Lambert, *Beloved and God: The Story of Hadrian and Antinous* (New York: Viking, 1984), chapter 6.
30. Lambert, op. cit., p. 78.
31. Scroggs, op. cit., chapters 2, 3 and 4.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
33. Dover, op. cit., p. 16; Bernard Sergent, *Homosexuality in Greek Myth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 10. It is not clear whether Sergent's statement is on his own authority, or is based on Dover, whom he cites.
34. Dover, loc. cit. While we lack any commonly used terms that are the equivalent of *eromenos* or *paidika*, the situation with *pais* might be compared with the contemporary use of the word "boy": while in common usage it would refer to a minor male child, when used of or in a gay setting it carries a distinct sexual connotation.
35. Liddell and Scott, op. cit., p. 576; T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1949), p. 64.
36. I. H. Marshall, op. cit., p. 279, goes to some pains to point out that *entimos* here should be read more with Luke's other usage and Paul, rather than that in 1 Peter.
37. Manson, loc. cit., concurs, suggesting that Luke used *entimos* to explain concern that would not normally have been shown to a slave.
38. The issue of the authorship of these Gospels, upon which we touch now, is much too complex to be explored here. For non-professional readers unfamiliar with the controversies surrounding it, the most accessible background is probably that in E. P. Blair's article "Luke", section 1 of V. Taylor's "Gospel of Luke", and section 9 of F. C. Grant's "Gospel of Matthew", *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, pages 179, 180 and 312, respectively; and S. E. Johnson's "Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew", section VII, S. M. Gilmour's "Introduction to the Gospel of Luke", section F, and G. C. H. MacGregor's "Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles", section IX, in the *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 7, p. 242, Vol. 8, p. 9, and Vol. 9, p. 19, respectively. In brief, there is broad consensus, but by no means unanimity, that the Gospel of Luke was likely written by the individual of that name who, according to the Acts, accompanied Paul, and that the Gospel of Matthew was probably written by an unknown Syrian Christian and attributed to the disciple whose name it bears.
39. Horner, loc. cit.
40. M. H. Pope, "Proselyte", section 5b, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 929.
41. Scroggs, op. cit., chapters 5 and 6.
42. E. R. Goodenough, "Philo Judeus", *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 796.
43. Boswell, op. cit., p. 143-4.
44. Scroggs, op. cit., chapter 3, particularly pages 36-8 and 43. It is clear that, by these criteria, most human relationships have similar potential for dehumanization, and could therefore be condemned. Almost every human relationship—most marriages, all parental and pedagogical relations, and labour/management relations, among others—involves inequality, and all accordingly contain po-

tential for abuse, physical, emotional, financial and otherwise. So too does paederasty, no more and no less. Similarly, many human relationships are of limited duration, among them parenting and, increasingly, marriage itself—not to mention heterosexual relations not involving marriage. It is questionable if any of these would be criticised for their limited duration alone. Indeed, classical paederasty might have been less damaging than some of these open-ended relationships, as it was clearly understood by both partners that it was of limited duration.

45. Scroggs, *op. cit.*, p. 126. This allows him to conclude that what the New Testament has to say against homosexuality is irrelevant to today's situation, in which homosexuals seek to attain permanent, fully equal and mutually fulfilling relationships.

46. Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

HOMOPHILE ETHICS

by
Merritt M. Thompson

Of all the problems which confront homosexuals, perhaps none is more widespread and penetrating in its effect on the welfare and happiness of the group than that of the rightness and wrongness of homosexual acts, that is, their ethical implications. In the current literature of the day one constantly finds references to homosexuality as perversion, one of the crimes of the period, a characteristic of abnormal and perverse people. Preachers have condemned it; judges have scorned those who practiced it; ridicule has been heaped upon it; and in fact it has been listed in company with the worst human aberrations. Thus homosexuals have been subjected to the most intense feelings of guilt or have defied social standards and lived secret lives apart from and coldly separated from their fellow men, if not victimized by their enemies and classified and secluded as criminals in penal institutions. The voices raised against such inhuman treatment have been few and far between with no organized effort to remedy the situation until our own day when for the first time questions are being raised and discussed in groups of intelligent people.

The reasons for the strong feelings against homosexuality are not wholly clear, but there are some historic facts which throw light upon the subject. The ancient Hebrew people were a small group alienated from their ancestral lands over a long period of time and, when circumstances permitted them to return, they found them occupied by strange and hostile nationalities who must be conquered and driven out by warring activities. Consequently potential warriors were at a premium and a high birth rate was desirable. Polygamy became a virtue and anything which hindered the increase of population

would be looked down upon. Thus a point of view was established against irregular sex activities which was later extended to all sex activities. The transition from the Hebrew to the Christian culture carried over the antagonistic attitude toward sex. The views of Paul, the organizer of the Christian Church, are well known. His influence went so far that celibacy became a rule for the priesthood of the growing institution, and morality became practically synonymous with abstinence from sex activities. There may have been a psychological basis in part at least for the identification of chastity and holiness. That nature has made the organs of sex those also of excretion is one of the anomalies which are found in the natural world and which offend the rational mind. Sex thus becomes "dirty" merely by association. A possibly more profound reason may lie in the rise of mysticism, an aspect of human culture which has defied all attempts to define it or set limiting boundaries to it, but which has exerted enormous influence and is clearly recognized in the history of religion. The relation of mystical states of mind and sexual ecstasy is indicated in the writings of mystics, such, for example, as those of Santa Theresa and others, as well as in practices wherein, for example, nuns are called "the brides of Christ." Thus sex and religion are placed in the position of rivals for human allegiance and, to our own day, sin is more vividly portrayed in terms of sex by the teachers of "morality" than in any other area. It is thus natural that the denial of man's basic urges must be accompanied by a philosophy of life which exalts suffering and deprivation in this life only to be assuaged in a life beyond the grave. A curious fact of our times is the enormous increase in the membership of the churches at the same time that there is a