

WILLIAM R. G. LOADER

Sexuality and Gender

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament
458*

Mohr Siebeck

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William R. G. Loader

Sexuality and Gender

Collected Essays

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

The articles collected in this volume stem from my engagement with attitudes towards sexuality, broadly understood, over the past two decades. They are to large extent the by-products of my detailed research into individual writings published in a number of volumes in recent years. It had always interested me to compare and contrast what I had found in these. Most of the pieces gathered here are thus products of curiosity and exploration as I sought to make connections across what I had seen. They include some summaries but are primarily responding to questions about historical influence, both on the writings and from one writing to another. I offer fuller explanation in the Introduction.

I express my gratitude to Murdoch University, Perth, Australia, where I taught as Professor of New Testament for many years and am now Professor Emeritus. I also thank the Uniting Church in Australia, in which I served for over forty years in its ministerial formation programme in Western Australia. Its commitment to taking engagement with historical research seriously both enriched me and enabled me to enrich its resources for study and research.

Particularly in the area of sexuality and its related area of gender studies, people both inside and outside the churches have often been perplexed, troubled or driven into division. The articles collected in this volume reflect some of the “backroom” work which I have undertaken to help bring a better understanding to such discussion, to enable people to grasp what ancient writers were saying and why, as a basis then for assessing what one might say in our contemporary setting two millennia later.

Since the collection brings together works published in a range of academic publishers, often with differing style guidelines, I have sought to reshape all to fit a single style, mostly following the SBL Handbook of Style, the source of reference also for common abbreviations. For English translation of biblical writings, I have used the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version), unless otherwise indicated and for English translation of the Septuagint, NETS (A New English Translation of the Septuagint).

I am grateful to Professor Jörg Frey and to Mohr Siebeck for their willingness to make this volume possible. I also acknowledge the patience and support of Gisela, my wife, who has accompanied me for over half a century of married life and kept me grounded in what it means to live in a fruitful and fulfilling relationship.

William R. G. Loader, FAHA

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Introduction

Sexuality and Gender are key aspects of human experience. In this volume I use “sexuality” not in a narrow sense of sexual theory or sexual orientation, but more broadly to refer to matters pertaining to sexuality, including orientation, feelings, behaviour and social norms. Gender and gender roles may overlap with these but may also be quite different from matters of sexuality. Who in a household may wash the dishes, do the vacuum cleaning or make the beds has nothing to do with sexuality!

The primary focus of the studies included in this volume is issues of sexuality but with gender as a secondary focus. I began engaging in research on sexuality in the world of the New Testament in response to what I saw as a need to resource discussion about sexuality as it was increasingly occupying the agenda of churches in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. There had been something of a sexual revolution in the 1970s as effective contraception became readily available and moral constraints based on the fear of pregnancy became less cogent. For some, sexual behaviour became a free-for-all of experimentation, not always with healthy consequences. For others, it meant rethinking the grounds for sexual ethics in the broader context of responsible and healthy relationships.

One of the more positive outcomes was the freedom and flexibility it gave women to become increasingly involved in the workforce and in wider society. What in some contexts became the wild 1970s mellowed in the following decades as people realised that there was more to sexual ethics than dealing with the fear of pregnancy. The emergence of AIDS also brought sobriety to the discussion. The next major development was the need to address the legitimacy or otherwise of same-sex relations, now emerging into discourse as it became increasingly acceptable to give voice to sexual issues in public, a departure from the sometimes false modesty of silence. Broadly identified as homosexuality, the matter included discussion not only of behaviours but also of whether there is such a thing other than being a pathology or perversion.

It was when I saw the documentation that churches were producing that I realised that there was a need for better understanding of sexuality in general in the Bible and its world. My initial focus was not issues in the homosexuality discussion on which a number of studies were beginning to emerge. In that regard I was aware of attempts from both sides of the arguments to redraw biblical statements to bring them into conformity with what were deemed to be acceptable positions for today. I both saw no need to do that and was convinced that such issues needed to be understood within their broader religious and

social context and that this should include a broader investigation of attitudes towards sexuality in that ancient world. My approach to the biblical heritage was and is not one of seeing it as infallible but as understanding it in the context of the faith which I embrace as human witness to the experience of God. As such it engages us as we engage it.

Engaging other people entails for me listening to them as far as possible in their language and context, not listening only to what I want to hear or reading my views into what they are saying. This is as much true of what makes for healthy human relations at any level including marriage as it is of reading ancient texts. At all levels we hallow and respect the other, acknowledge that we cannot know everything about the other and that we will have limitations. This is why the best scholarship in interrogating ancient texts is a collaborative undertaking. I will not always see things that others see. One of the great enrichments of recent decades is, for instance, the realisation that many men, including myself, will not have seen things which many women see. This applies just as much to the richness of approaching texts from different cultures. We are all in this together. The research in the papers included in this volume has therefore greatly benefitted from being in dialogue and discussion with others.

Accordingly, when I realised that there was work to be done in providing detailed discussion of attitudes towards sexuality in these ancient texts, I saw no need to run an agenda, as it were, except to seek as far as possible to listen to and report what I sensed that these authors were saying, whether it corresponded to my own views or not. I sensed a responsibility to do so, not least because the course of my academic research brought me to a place where I had significant background and competence. In 1997, my extensive discussion of the way gospel and later writers depicted Jesus' attitude towards the Law appeared: *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels*, WUNT 2.97 (Tübingen; Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 563 pp., subsequently republished in the United States (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). In the course of that research, I had engaged extensively with attitudes towards the Law, Torah, in the diverse writings of Judaism of the time. This was a sound platform from which then to investigate attitudes towards sexuality.

Like other scholars of the time, I benefitted enormously from the renewed awareness of contemporary Jewish literature brought about as a result of the discovery of the library of ancient scrolls found in the caves at Qumran by the Dead Sea. The scrolls, themselves, were important, providing copies of known works, often centuries earlier than most previously known manuscripts but also copies of unknown works. However, beyond that, the discovery revived awareness of the importance of other Jewish writings of the time, tales, testaments, apocalypses and not least the extensive writings of Philo and Josephus.

My focus on Law, Torah, came in part as a result of teaching Paul and Matthew. My initial engagement with Matthew focussed on christology. The impact of emphasis on the received text and on sequential reading led me to see the importance of the way Matthew has John the Baptist set out Jesus' role as judge to come, whose ministry would set forth the basis of that judgment, namely by expounding the meaning of Torah, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. I had also written on the meaning of Matthew's depiction of Jesus as "Son of David."¹ The latter was part of the first major phase of my research interests which began with my 1972 Mainz dissertation with Ferdinand Hahn, *Sohn und Hoherpriester: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes*, ready for publication in 1973 but, through delays outside my control, appearing eight years later, title unchanged, as WMANT 52 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981). Subsequent work on the christology of John's gospel appeared as *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Structure and Issues* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), recently revised, updated and incorporated in the more comprehensive volume: *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

Engagement with Hebrews had already brought me into detailed discussion of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX). It was this continuing interest which brought me into partnership with Wolfgang Kraus, with whom I co-convened the "Septuagint and the New Testament" Seminar for the Society for New Testament Studies. He also invited my participation in a series of conferences run in association with the *Septuaginta Deutsch* project. My first paper in the SNTS Seminar was the nucleus of my first monograph on sexuality, namely *The Septuagint, Sexuality, and the New Testament: Case Studies on the Impact of the LXX in Philo and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), which examined the decalogue, the creation stories, and Deuteronomy 24.

On the creation texts it was clear, for example, that the LXX could be read as implying a hierarchy of being, of male above female, and of female as more susceptible to sexual seduction. It was indeed read by authors such as Paul in this way. The strongly attested reordering of the decalogue commands of the second table to put adultery first also had an impact; Philo emphasising that its being first in order reflected that it was the most serious of sins.

I took the discussion of the creation stories in Genesis LXX further by investigating the possible influence on the translators from Plato's account of creation in the *Timaeus*. The outcome is the first chapter in this volume: "Sexuality and Ptolemy's Greek Bible: Genesis 1–3 In Translation: '... Things Which They Altered For King Ptolemy' (Genesis Rabbah 8.11)."

¹ William Loader, "Son of David, Blindness, Possession, and Duality in Matthew," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 570–85.

The four chapters which follow are papers given at the *Septuaginta Deutsch* conferences. The first two also start with the creation stories as in Genesis LXX and then move in different directions to trace their impact: “The Beginnings of Sexuality in Genesis LXX and Jubilees” (Ch. 2) and “Genesis 3:16–19 LXX in Reception: Observation on its Use in Early Judaism and Christianity to ca 100 CE” (Ch. 3). The third was an exploration to seek to discover similar changes elsewhere in significant passages: “Attitudes towards Sexuality in the LXX Translations of Contentious Texts.” The fourth paper is one of two discussions of Proverbs LXX: “Proverbs’ ‘Strange Woman’: Image and Reality in LXX Proverbs and Ben Sira, Hebrew and Greek” (Ch. 4). My focus in all of them was on exploring the impact in relation to matters of sexuality of how the LXX translated the Hebrew, whether intended by the translator/s or not.

My engagement with Proverbs LXX took place in the context of investigation of Ben Sira, informed by the doctoral research of my student Ibolya Balla.² In both writings, the translators made significant changes and in Ben Sira, I identified the author’s selective appropriation of Proverbs. Starting from the same premise of the distinctiveness of Proverbs LXX over against the Hebrew, therefore with some overlap, the sixth chapter, “The Strange Woman in Proverbs, LXX Proverbs and *Aseneth*,” addresses the impact on Joseph and Aseneth, a contribution to a Septuagint conference held in Stellenbosch, South Africa, hosted by Johann Cook, a specialist on Proverbs LXX.

In 2005, I was the recipient of a five-year full time Professorial Fellowship from the Australian Research Council to engage in research on “Attitudes towards Sexuality in Judaism and Christianity in the Hellenistic Greco-Roman Era”. I had already published *Septuagint, Sexuality, and the New Testament* (2004) and *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), later incorporated in revised form into *The New Testament on Sexuality* (listed below). There followed five volumes based on the research undertaken: *Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees on Sexuality: Attitudes Towards Sexuality in the Early Enoch Literature, the Aramaic Levi Document, and the Book of Jubilees* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Sectarian and Related Literature at Qumran* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); *The Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Apocalypses, Testament, Legends, Wisdom, and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); *Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in the Writings of Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); and *Making*

² Ibolya Balla, “Ben Sira/Sirach,” in *The Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality: Attitudes Towards Sexuality in Apocalypses, Testaments, Legends, Wisdom, and Related Literature*, ed. William Loader (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 362–98. See also Ibolya Balla, *Ben Sira on Family, Gender, and Sexuality*, DCLS 8 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011).

Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), which functions as a summary of the findings written for a wider readership and includes a subject index to all five volumes.

Inevitably, I found from time to time moments when I could see that more was to be written, including summary treatments but also comparisons between writings. The sections in this volume which follow include such additional works. The papers on Jubilees belong here, offering both a summary (“Jubilees and Sexuality” Ch. 7) and comparing the Enochic and Mosaic tradition on the basis of Jubilees in a short paper given at the Enoch Seminar on Jubilees, “Jubilees and Sexual Transgression: Reflections on Enochic and Mosaic Tradition” (Ch. 8). Similarly, “Sexuality in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the New Testament” (Ch. 9) engages in comparison.

I was struck in my research by the contrasting way in which authors envisaged the role of sexuality in eschatology, from those who envisaged fertility and abundance of offspring, the dominant perspective, to those who saw future time and space rather as a sanctuary in which sexuality had no place and so celibacy was the rule. The two papers, “Sexuality and Eschatology: In Search of a Celibate Utopia in Pseudepigraphic Literature” (Ch. 10) and “Eschatology and Sexuality in the So-Called Sectarian Documents from Qumran” (Ch. 13), address this. My investigation of the sectarian documents at Qumran, reflected in overview in “Attitudes towards Sexuality in Qumran and Related Literature – and the New Testament” (Ch. 12) led to the observation that one could trace development in their conflicts over sexual issues, which could be helpful as a contribution to the issues of relative dating of the documents. I set out the case for this in “Sexuality Issues and Conflict Development in Qumran Literature” (Ch. 14).

Issues of sexuality and marriage were important at the interface of Jewish and wider Greco-Roman culture, especially in the diaspora. Two papers address this, one more broadly, “Not as the Gentiles” (Ch. 11), and an unpublished paper on the vexed issue of intermarriage: “The Intermarriage Issue in Early Jewish Theologies and the New Testament” (Ch. 20). I had been surprised at how often it featured in Jewish literature in various ways but how little it was addressed as an issue in the emerging Christian movement.

The section on the emerging Christian movement includes a paper on what one can recover of attitudes towards sexuality on the part of the historical Jesus: “Sexuality and the Historical Jesus” (Ch. 15). One aspect of that discussion of importance in the ongoing Jesus tradition is divorce, which receives further exploration in the paper, “Did adultery mandate divorce?” (Ch. 17), where I argue that this is indeed the assumption even when, unlike in Matthew, it is not specified. “Genesis 2:24 and the Jesus Tradition” (Ch. 16) also belongs broadly to this discussion. I wrote the essay, “Sexuality in the World of Jesus and the Future” (Ch. 18), for a wider readership. My interest in Matthew reemerges in

the paper on the potential relevance of its handling of sexual themes for discussing its context: “Does Matthew’s Handling of Sexuality Issues Shed Light on its Context?” (Ch. 19).

My engagement with issues of homosexuality in the broad sense came as I moved to investigate Jewish writings in the diaspora context where the issue emerges as a theme. The paper, “Reading Romans 1 on Homosexuality in the Light of Biblical/Jewish and Greco-Roman Perspectives of its Time” (Ch. 21), was a presentation given at the Ethics Seminar of the Society for New Testament Studies. It is one of many papers I have written on the topic in response to widespread demands but my most detailed treatment.³ My reading of Paul’s texts is that, like other Jews whose writings have survived, he operated on the assumption that God made people only heterosexual. That meant that any orientation, attitude or action which runs contrary to that is to be seen as a violation of divine will. Given its widespread occurrence in the pagan world of his time, it served him well as providing common ground with the Roman congregations. He was hoping that they might become his hosts once in the rest of his letter he had been able to defend his gospel against the critics who will have had their ear.

The final two papers, “Social Justice and Gender” (Ch. 22) and “To God and Back: Projections of Male Grandeur” (Ch. 23), pursue issues of gender, which surface at various points in the preceding essays but which in these papers come directly into focus. They, too, highlight assumptions held by New Testament writers which have undergone questioning in recent times. Here, too, as with homosexuality issues, early attempts to explain away the differences and render the writings more comfortable have given way to critical engagement which in this way respects the integrity of the text with its time-bound perspectives and honours it.

³ See also William Loader, “Homosexuality in the New Testament,” *SBL Odyssey* (2018) <http://bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/homosexuality-in-the-new-testament>; “The Bible and Homosexuality,” in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology; ed. Preston Sprinkle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 17–48, 102–107, 148–52, 194–99; “Same-sex Relationships: A 1st-century perspective,” *HTS* 70.1 (2014): 423–31; doi: 10.4102/hts.v70i1.2114.

Sexuality and the Septuagint

1. Sexuality and Ptolemy's Greek Bible

Genesis 1–3 in Translation “... Things which they altered for King Ptolemy” (Genesis Rabbah 8.11)

The “King Ptolemy” referred to in this early fifth century rabbinic commentary on Genesis is Ptolemy II Philadelphus (reign: 283–46 BCE). “The things which they altered for King Ptolemy” alludes to instances where the Greek translation differs from the acknowledged Hebrew text.¹ All translation is to some degree alteration, intended or otherwise. We have no access to the minds of ancient translators, let alone their intentions, so that at most we can describe the translated text and directions in which it points, including its alterations. Once translated, however, texts take on a life of their own, as they are read and re-read in new contexts and produce new meaning. This investigation explores the “altered” texts, including possible influences which shaped them, and, above all, the potential meanings thus created.

The translation of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, seems to have taken place in part in response to Ptolemy II Philadelphus. This paper must forego discussion of the complex historical issues.² Instead, it will focus on those formative chapters with which Torah begins, the account of

¹ In rabbinic tradition the lists vary from 10 to 18 items. The particular instance to which *Genesis Rabbah* refers is Genesis 1:27, which in the Hebrew reads: “Male and female he created them.” The lists allege a Greek form of the text which read: “Male and female he created *him*.” In his discussion of this variant, Emanuel Tov concludes that the Greek variant may already reflect a variant Hebrew text. Emanuel Tov, “The rabbinic tradition concerning the ‘alterations’ inserted into the Greek translation of the Torah and their relation to the original text of the Septuagint,” in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, NovTSup 72 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1–20, 11, 17–18. Whether in Hebrew or Greek, the presence of a singular, “Let us make *'ādām*” in 1:26, might easily have attracted a change to a singular in 1:27, but we cannot rule out the possibility that androgynous understandings of the text (possible in Hebrew or in Greek) may have prompted the change. See also the discussion in G. Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmi: Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 22–112, who argues against taking the instances as evidence of a different Hebrew *Vorlage*. Perhaps the original translators did alter the text for Ptolemy in this way. Outside of these discussions in the rabbinic Hebrew texts there is no manuscript evidence for the singular.

² See the appendix to this paper below.

creation and of human beginnings and do so with a particular focus on the attitudes towards sexuality which are reflected in them. It will then explore possible influences on the translators of Plato's *Timaeus* and its attitudes towards sexuality.

Genesis and Plato's *Timaeus* on Creation

Genesis 1 and 2 contain two different accounts of creation, widely believed to reflect two different mythological traditions and coming from different sources, P and J. In the first, 1:1–2:4, creation takes place over six days, with God resting on the seventh. The climax of creation is the creation of humankind (אדם) “male and female” (1:27). In 2:5–24, however, we have a different sequence. God forms a human being (a man, אדם 'ādām) from the dust of the ground (אדמה 'ādāmā), a Hebrew word play (an earthling from earth), and then proceeds to create plants and animals for him and finally a woman to be his companion.

There is evidence that the Greek translators were sensitive to the issues of the two stories, at least to the extent that they added some elements to the text which smoothed the differences. The apparent second creation of plants and animals now becomes the emergence of what had been created but had not yet come into being. Similarly, the creation of man and woman of 1:27 now finds its elaboration in 2:18–25. The background assumption is that what was made according to the first story comes to concrete expression in the second.

The translation achieved this with only slight modifications. It added “began” (ἤρξατο) into 2:3 which reads in Hebrew, “So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had created to make (אשר־ברא אלהים לעשות)”. In Greek it now reads: “So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the works that he had *begun to* make (ὃν ἤρξατο ὁ θεὸς ποιῆσαι)”. God's rest on the seventh day does not imply the task had been completed. The addition also forms a neat formal *inclusio* with the opening verse of Genesis: “In the beginning” (Ἐν ἀρχῇ).³ In a sense, 1:1–2:4 is the beginning of creation for the LXX.

Similarly, the translation of 2:4 represents “these are the generations” (אלה תולדות) by “this is the book of the origin/becoming” (Αὕτη ἡ βίβλος γενέσεως – hence the book's subsequent name: γενεσις) and emphasises the word “becoming” (γίνομαι) in what follows. The explicit addition of ἔτι (“still, yet”)

³ So John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, SBLSCS 35 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 21; William P. Brown, *The Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek texts of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3*, SBLDS 132 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 26.

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