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The Specter of Judeo-Christianity and the Politics of Gender Deviancy

From St. Paul of Tarsus to St. Paul, MN

With the 2012 presidential campaign monopolizing the national conversation, the present moment offers an ideal vantage point from which to reflect on the inescapable shadow of the “Judeo-Christian Tradition” in American political discourse. Nowhere, perhaps, is this imposing shadow more apparent than in the politics of sexuality. This essay explores the presence of deviant sexuality in American politics from two angles. I consider first the varied uses of the Judeo-Christian tradition to conjure a terrifying menace of rampant decadence threatening to undo national stability. Second, I compare the rhetorical strategies apparent in this *modern* discourse with the poetics of gender deviancy in *ancient* Jewish and Christian contexts, probing the continuities and discontinuities evident in these two discursive contexts.

A COLD, blustery March wind could not temper the fiery passion of then Minnesota State Senator and recent Republican presidential candidate Michele Bachmann. With thousands of constituents gathered on the steps

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of the State Capitol in St. Paul to support her proposed ban of same-sex marriage, Bachmann's ominous message was crystal clear. The gay rights agenda is an insidious and destructive force that, if left to its own devices, will inevitably tear to shreds the fabric of Minnesota, and indeed, the nation at large: "We will have immediate loss of civil liberties," Bachmann predicts, "for five million Minnesotans. In our public schools, whether they want to or not, they'll be forced to start teaching that same-sex marriage is equal, that it is normal and that children should try it."¹ Earlier that same month, as a guest on the radio program "Prophetic Views Behind the News" (hosted by Jan Markell, KKMS 980-AM, March 6, 2004), Bachmann signaled in unequivocal terms the apocalyptic magnitude of this "earthquake issue": "We're in a state of crisis where our nation is literally ripping apart at the seams right now, and lawlessness is occurring from one ocean to the other. And we're seeing the fulfillment of the Book of Judges here in our own time, where every man [is] doing that which is right in his own eyes—in other words, anarchy."²

Bachmann's well-known views on homosexuality are by no means exceptional within the Republican Party. A two-day drive down I-35 brings us to the doorstep of another prominent Republican, Texas Governor Rick Perry. While Perry's 2010 book, *Fed Up!: Our Fight to Save America from Washington*, has come under some critical scrutiny in the shadow of the Republican primaries, an earlier publication—*On My Honor: Why the American Values of the Boy Scouts are Worth Fighting For*—has largely gone unnoticed.³ Yet it is within the latter that one finds a similar, Bachmann-esque angst over the perceived threat the "radical homosexual movement" poses to the survival of "America's soul." Indeed, Perry offers his voice as a weapon in this "multi-

¹ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "For Bachmann, Gay Rights Stand Reflects Mix of Issues and Faith," *The New York Times* (July 16, 2011), <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/17/us/politics/17bachmann.html>.

² Quote from the website "The Bachmann Record"; accessed on October 5, 2011 at <http://www.thebachmannrecord.com/thebachmannrecod.html>. The program "Prophetic Views Behind the News" has since been renamed to "Understanding the Times," which is part of Jan Markell's Olive Tree Ministries (<http://www.olivetreeviews.org/>). Online archives of the radio program only go back to 2005.

³ Rick Perry, *Fed Up!: Our Fight to Save America from Washington* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2010); idem, *On My Honor: Why the American Values of the Boy Scouts are Worth Fighting For* (Macon: Stroud & Hall, 2008). See also the discussion in Jon Ward, "Rick Perry's Lesser-Known First Book Could Be A Distraction from Economy-Centered Message," *The Huffington Post*, September 19, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/19/rick-perry-first-book-distraction_n_970804.html.

faceted war [against] the radical leftist movement that seeks to tear down our social foundations,” framing his book as a clarion call “for any American concerned that our society is slipping from the high moral ground of liberty to the valley of license.”⁴

In a similar vein, and with remarkable candor, Oklahoma State Representative Sally Kern warned her constituents in 2008 that homosexuality was “the biggest threat our nation has, even more so than terrorism or Islam.” In a recent interview promoting her new book, *The Stoning of Sally Kern*, she defended her belief in the menace of homosexuality vis-à-vis radical Islam: “It’s more dangerous . . . because it will tear down the moral fiber of this nation,” noting especially that this form of deviant sexuality is destroying America’s founding “principles of religion and morality,” without which “this nation will not survive.”⁵

Now on one level, this brief trip down the north-south corridor of the Midwest underscores the powerful and somewhat pervasive presence of the “deviant homosexual” in current American political discourse, particularly within certain segments of the Republican Party. In fact, this menace of a sexually deviant monster has carried enormous political currency in at least the last three decades. Moreover, probing the inner dynamics of this discourse, one can easily detect the unmistakable specter of a Judeo-Christian moral code lurking beneath the surface. Bachmann, Perry, and Kern each forge a clear link between sexual morality and national stability, framed by a historiography of decline, and saturated with a healthy dose of apocalyptic drama. Perry warns that America is “slipping from the high moral ground of liberty to the valley of license”; Kern laments that America’s foundation of religion and morality is being destroyed, threatening the very existence of the nation; and Bachmann similarly evokes a national crisis with an increasing wave of “lawlessness” ripping apart of seams of this country. The increasing normalization of homosexuality is thus emblematic of America’s departure from her own golden age of Judeo-Christian morality that at one time ensured the stability and security—the greatness—of this nation.

⁴ Book description from Stroud and Hall Publishers’ website: http://stroudhall.com/index.php/section/moreinfo/on_my_honor/.

⁵ Quotes from Marie Diamond, “GOP Legislator: Homosexuality is ‘More Dangerous’ than Terrorist Attacks Because We Have to Deal with it Every Day,” *Thinkprogress*, September 9, 2011, <http://thinkprogress.org/lgbt/2011/09/09/315628/gop-legislator-homosexuality-is-more-dangerous-than-terrorist-attacks-because-we-have-to-deal-with-it-every-day/>.

American evangelicalism, which has played an increasingly prominent role in the political scene, is unquestionably one of the driving forces animating the politics of sexuality in Bachmann, Perry, and Kern.⁶ To take but one example, Richard Land, current president of The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and member of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (appointed by President George W. Bush), weaves together these very same elements—an ever-increasing rise of immorality, typified in the Gay Rights movement, corresponding to a precipitous decline in national stability and security—in his book *For Faith and Family*, although the link to a putative golden age of Judeo-Christian morality is much more explicit. In particular, Land invokes a sharp binary between “Judeo-Christian sexual values” and the current “polluted sea of pagan sexuality.”⁷ Land’s discussion is further saturated with the language of decline in which a rather uniform and monolithic Judeo-Christian morality functions as the *past* standard by which *present* decadence is measured. And of course, the prime culprit in this “freefall into pagan sexuality”⁸ is the deviant homosexual, the “ultimate perversion” that has crept into American culture and threatens the very survival of this nation.⁹

Land’s binary between a Pagan and Judeo-Christian sexual ethic calls to mind the well-worn dichotomies—Judaism vs. Hellenism; Christianity vs. Paganism—that have often characterized popular, and even scholarly, interpretations of the ancient social and religious landscape. When viewed from within this larger conceptual framework, Judeo-Christianity thus becomes a mechanism to mark out clearly delineated, and hermetically sealed, boundaries of identity, in the process invoking a time in the distant past, the early

⁶ In particular, several commentators have recently called attention to the evangelical influences on Bachmann and Perry, with a particular emphasis on evangelical Dominionist theology; see Forest Wilder, “Rick Perry’s Army of God,” *The Texas Observer*, August 3, 2011, <http://www.texasobserver.org/cover-story/rick-perrys-army-of-god>; Michelle Goldberg, “A Christian Plot for Domination?,” *The Daily Beast*, August 14, 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/08/14/dominionism-michele-bachmann-and-rick-perry-s-dangerous-religious-bond.html>; Ryan Lizza, “Leap of Faith: The Making of a Republican Front-Runner,” *The New Yorker*, August 15, 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/08/15/110815fa_fact_lizza; Paul Rosenberg, “Exposing Religious Fundamentalism in the US,” *Al Jazeera*, September 6, 2011, <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/09/2011948160923228.html>.

⁷ Richard Land, *For Faith and Family: Changing America by Strengthening the Family* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 77.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 91–110 (quote at 91).

centuries of the Common Era, when Jews and Christians spoke with a common voice, rooted indeed in a common scripture, in opposition to Pagan (i.e., Greek and Roman) sexual immorality. Indeed, it is precisely this unrelenting opposition that ensured the survival, and ultimate triumph, of a distinctly Christian identity. Furthermore, the same moral-ethical code that energized the founding of Christianity was also operative in the founding of the United States of America. Fast-forward to present day America, and the rhetorical potency of Land's reified Judeo-Christianity is clear, functioning to censure a precipitous fall from this golden age of morality, to reassert the clarity of religio-cultural boundaries in an increasingly diverse, multi-cultural, global society, and to reclaim the stability, strength, and distinctiveness of a nation that is currently on the brink of ruin.¹⁰ It is thus not surprising that Judeo-Christianity can easily elide into American patriotism and exceptionalism.¹¹

Shifting from present to past, the rhetorical strategies outlined above, and in particular the notion of a golden age of morality giving way to rampant decadence, are likewise evident in wide range of ancient Jewish and Christian sources, especially of the apocalyptic variety. For example, books 1–2 of the Sibylline Oracles—in its final form, an obviously Christian redaction of a Jewish oracle¹²—explicitly articulate a schema of decline culminating in apocalyptic destruction and Edenic restoration.¹³ The basic narrative framework of this text is a familiar one in ancient Jewish apocalyptic literature: a

¹⁰ William E. Arnal sees a similar dynamic at play in modern scholarly constructions of a Jewish Jesus, wherein such historical claims function to articulate “cultural distinctiveness and identity ... in the face of conditions in which precisely these features of identity are becoming more and more questionable” (*The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity* (London: Equinox, 2005), 71). Whether in academic or political discourse, an imagined past often serves as a particularly useful means of navigating *present* concerns and anxieties.

¹¹ Land's assumption throughout his book is that America's unique and exceptional status—the greatest nation on earth—is being jeopardized by its current contempt for Judeo-Christian values.

¹² In one sense, then, we have here a genuinely Judeo-Christian document, though given that the Christian redactor clearly gets the final word, the Judeo- component does not fare as well as the Christian component. Indeed, our redactor is quick to tell us that in the eschaton God will damn “all the Hebrews after Jeremiah” (*Sib. Or.* 2.249).

¹³ For a useful introduction to the Sibylline Oracles, including a discussion of the complex redactional history of Oracles 1–2, see especially John J. Collins, “The Sibylline Oracles, Books 1 and 2,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 330–34.

succession of ten generations (though generations eight and nine are missing) corresponding with an ever-intensifying spiral into degeneracy.¹⁴ The bliss of Eden, marked notably by the absence of “licentiousness” (*Sib. Or.* 1.35), gives way to a succession of decadent generations—excepting the brief, post-flood sixth generation, which is described as a “golden, excellent” generation characterized by justice and prosperity (*Sib. Or.* 1.283–305)—reaching its nadir in the excessively depraved tenth generation, placed, not incidentally, in the context of the “seven-hilled Rome” (*Sib. Or.* 2.6–38). Then, in a scene that could have been borrowed from the playbook of Pat Robertson, this final generation is subjected to the full fury of divine judgment, which especially targets “those who defiled the flesh by licentiousness” and those who “aborted what they carried in the womb” (*Sib. Or.* 2.280).¹⁵ It is particularly interesting to note that in one group of manuscripts a fairly extensive selection of ethical sayings from Pseudo-Phocylides is inserted between the description of the wicked tenth generation and the account of the final eschatological judgment (*Sib. Or.* 2.56–148).¹⁶ Included in this series of moral teachings is an explicit prohibition of *arsenokoitein*, a Greek compound verb—the nominal form is used by Paul in 1 Cor 6:9—that clearly denotes some kind of male-on-male sexual activity, though the precise meaning of this term is much disputed.¹⁷ The net rhetorical effect of this insertion is clear: it is incumbent upon the righteous, who find themselves living in the last days, to resist with steadfastness the licentious and deviant ways of this wicked generation.

We can now add into the mix the other St. Paul in the title of this essay. The opening chapter of Paul’s letter to the Roman-Christian community—the *locus classicus* of the Pauline opposition to homoeroticism—evinces a similar emphasis on moral decline.¹⁸ The wider context of Paul’s specific

¹⁴ Johannes Geffcken, *Komposition und Entstehungszeit der Oracula Sibyllina* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1902), 47–53; John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 63–65, 238–40.

¹⁵ John J. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles: A New Translation and Introduction,” in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*.

¹⁶ See especially Alfons Kurfess, “Das Mahngedicht des sogenannten Phokylides im zweiten Buch der Oracula Sibyllina,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 38, no. 1 (1939): 171–81.

¹⁷ See recently Fredrik Ivarsson, who argues, in the context of his discussion of Paul’s usage, that the term refers to “sexually dominated males” (“Vice Lists and Deviant Masculinity: The Rhetorical Function of 1 Cor 5:10–11 and 6:9–10,” in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, ed. Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 182).

¹⁸ See especially Stanley K. Stowers’s important discussion of this text, which places Paul’s

comments on deviant sexual behavior is suggestive. The paragraph begins with the unveiling of an angry God, whose wrath is unleashed against “all impiety and wickedness” (*pasa asebeia kai adikia*; Rom 1.18). The initial manifestation of this *asebeia* actually stems from a philosophical problem: how to characterize the divine nature. In language clearly steeped in Greek philosophical traditions, especially Platonic and Stoic thought, Paul takes to task those who, though initially recognizing the true, invisible nature of the supreme God (1:20), have exchanged this imperishable deity for anthropomorphic and theriomorphic images of the divine realm (1:23).

Paul’s rhetoric of a departure from aniconic worship clearly recalls Roman antiquarian traditions—most notably Varro’s *Antiquitates rerum divinarum* and Plutarch’s *Numa*—recounting the primitive *pietas* of Rome’s putative golden age, when Romans worshiped an invisible, aniconic God.¹⁹ Varro in particular evokes a framework of decline: the erection of images (*simulacra*) introduces *error*, signaling Rome’s departure from a more reverent and pious form of worship (*apud* Augustine, *Civ.* 4.9, 31). For Paul, the intrusion of images (*eikones*) into Roman religion—what he calls exchanging “the truth about God for a lie”—initiates a fall into utter degeneracy (Rom 1:24–26): the “lusts of their hearts” wallowing in “impurity” and “degrading passions” (*pathē atimias*) that are manifest particularly in women exchanging their “natural use” (*physikē chrēsis*) for that which is “against nature” (*para physin*) and men eschewing the “natural use of women” (*physikē chrēsis tēs thēleias*) in order to commit “shameless acts with men” (*arsenes en arsesin tēn aschēmosunēn katēgazomenoi*). Rome’s putative golden age of primitive piety thus becomes in Paul a crucial weapon for censuring Rome’s present corruption.

It is important to note that although Paul’s historiography of decline functions in part to condemn Roman decadence, this should not be misconstrued as simply another instance of “Judeo-Christian” opposition to the “Paganism.” Indeed, as is evident in the Varro reference cited above, Paul

discourse in Romans 1 within the context of “decline of civilization narratives”; Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 83–125.

¹⁹ George H. van Kooten, “Pagan and Jewish Monotheism according to Varro, Plutarch, and St. Paul: The Aniconic Monotheistic Beginnings of Rome’s Pagan Cult—Romans 1:19–25 in a Roman Context,” in *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez*, ed. Anthony Hilhorst, Emile Puech, and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 633–51. See also my discussion of primitive aniconism in Jason von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome: (An)Iconic Rhetoric in the Writings of Josephus* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 156–63.

deploys in this text a distinctly “Pagan” (i.e., Roman) discursive strategy. Roman authors frequently evoked a “cultural nostalgia” for bygone days of *virtus* and *pietas* in order to censure present immoralities.²⁰ Stories about ancestral laws, deeds, and *mores*, collectively embodied in the rhetorically potent concept of the *mos maiorum*, fostered an image of a glorious era of pristine piety and morality, when fully masculine men ensured the stability of social hierarchies and the purity of the *cultus deorum*.²¹ And this idealized past functioned as a critical index for the present health of the Roman state, with the virtue of “Old Rome” standing in judgment of perceived departures in the present. Paul’s remarks on gender deviant behavior thus fit nicely within this wider Roman discursive context.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus deploys an equally intriguing, but very different, historiography of decadence. Whereas Paul frames present gender deviancy within a schema of decline from a primitive age of piety, Josephus emphasizes instead the extent to which such deviant behaviors in the present can potentially undermine national stability. The passage in question, found in book 4 of *Bellum Iudaicum*, includes a rather remarkably decadent, and surely hyperbolic, portrayal of John of Gischala and the Judean rebels under his command (*B.J.* 4.560–563). Specifically, Josephus censures the rebels, and by extension John himself, for pursuing “illicit sexual pleasures,” which includes cross-dressing, but especially “playing the part of a woman” between the sheets, so to speak—i.e., pursuing anal intercourse.²²

This charge of effeminacy and sexual passivity must be viewed within the larger literary context of Josephus’s account of the war against the Romans, and specifically the author’s claim that the political chaos (*stasis*) that ultimately culminated in the devastating destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem was the result not of a *foreign* despot intent on oppressing the Judeans but of *Judean* tyrants (*B.J.* 1.10)—John of Gischala, among others—whose “savage cruelty” (*B.J.* 1.26–27) devastated the country with “innumerable evils.” Indeed, this rampant impiety of the Judean rebels ultimately inflicted a disastrous blow on the political stability of the region (*B.J.* 7.263–64). The nexus of tyranny and impiety thus points to the broader socio-political dimensions

²⁰ Rebecca Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13.

²¹ See the discussion in Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome*, 139–44.

²² The ensuing discussion of Josephus is a brief synopsis of an argument that I develop more fully in “Effeminacy in the Shadow of Empire: The Politics of Transgressive Gender in Josephus’s *Bellum Iudaicum*,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 101, no. 2 (2011): 145–63.

of Josephus's historiography of decadence, underscoring a clear link between gender deviant behavior and national instability.

Here again, as with Paul, Josephus gives voice not to a distinctly "Jewish" opposition to "Pagan" decadence but to a distinctly *Roman* angst over the potentially calamitous effect of gender deviant behavior. Roman sources are replete with accusations of effeminacy linked with moments of political vulnerability, particularly during, and shortly after, the political chaos surrounding the demise of the Julio-Claudian regime, a turbulent period in Roman political history that fostered a veritable cottage industry of gender deviant tyrants. Caligula and Otho, for example, are both accused of giving in to an unleashed libido, especially by pursuing anal intercourse with numerous adult men (Suetonius, *Calig.* 36.1; *Otho* 12; Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.30; Juvenal, *Sat.* 2.99–109). And the emperor Nero, according to numerous Roman sources, stands at the head of this class of decadent tyrants—wild and unruly, with erotic cravings that included, among many other lurid activities, playing the part of his freedman's wife, even to the extent of imitating the screams of a newly penetrated virgin (Suetonius, *Nero* 29).

The primary issue in these sources is not simply gender deviancy as a character flaw in a tyrant. Indeed, the stakes are much higher than personal moral failings. Effeminate emperors and other political figures, beyond emasculating their own bodies behind closed doors, threaten to emasculate the body politic, weakening, and ultimately endangering, Roman hegemony. Discourses on gender deviancy thus played a crucial role in articulating and disseminating Roman imperial ideology. The language of masculinity, with particular emphasis on a man's role as phallic penetrator, conveyed the politically charged image of domination. On the other hand, sexual passivity (or receptivity) exhibited political weakness and vulnerability.

Cassius Dio vividly captures this ideological/political dimension of gender deviancy. In his account of Rome's attempt to suppress a British uprising led by the inimitable Boudicca (ca. 60–61 CE), the Roman historian highlights Rome's vulnerability under Nero by juxtaposing, with obvious irony, Boudicca's masculinity with Nero's effeminacy (*Rom. hist.* 62.6.4). Indeed, the Nero-led Romans initially suffered an "unspeakable slaughter" (*Rom. hist.* 62.7.1–3). The impression left by Cassius Dio's narrative is that the queen could boast a more impressive phallic presence than her Roman counterpart. On the other hand, the Flavians, at least as mediated through their rather relentless propaganda machine, assiduously sought to re-masculinize Rome in the wake of the chaotic Neronian regime: hence a repeated emphasis on

Vespasian's masculinity and exceptional moderation, particularly on display in his legendary efforts to expel effeminate impulses from his army (Suetonius *Vesp.* 8.3). The Flavian message was crystal clear: Rome's imperial penis was once again fully erect, ready and able to penetrate any foreign enemy standing in its way.

Josephus's treatment of John of Gischala and his rebels should be viewed within the larger context of this thoroughly gendered Roman imperial ideology. This is particularly the case, given the compositional context of Josephus's oeuvre—Flavian Rome, a world replete with visual representations of Rome's masculine dominance. Indeed, personifications of a visibly masculine Rome were frequently juxtaposed with images of women, who function as obvious representations of conquered *ethnē*. This is evident, for example, in the corpus of *Iudaea Capta* coins that repeatedly portray the Judean *ethnos* as a subjugated woman.²³ Josephus's accusation of effeminacy and sexual passivity thus marks out the Judean rebels not simply as depraved and dangerous tyrants with an unleashed libido. Rather, this pericope functions in part as a narrative reenactment of the image of *Iudaea Capta*. The effeminacy of the Judean rebels, on display particularly in their eagerness to pursue anal penetration, anticipates their role in the effemination of Judea. In other words, John and his faction of rebels ultimately inflict their gender deviant disease on the nation itself, causing Judea to bend over, as it were, and passively submit to Rome's penetrative dominance.



Returning to the present, it seems clear that in one sense Bachmann, Perry, and Land are navigating a well-worn path. Ancient Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians collectively inveighed against perceived manifestations of degeneracy, particularly honing in on the problem of gender deviancy displayed in certain forms of homoerotic behavior. And all seem to voice a singular, solemn warning: such decadence has the capacity to weaken, and ultimately destroy, a nation. Thus, on the link between national stability and sexual morality, and the crucial role historiography plays in articulating a national moral compass, past and present seem to be dancing to the same tune.

²³ Davina C. Lopez, "Before Your Very Eyes: Roman Imperial Ideology, Gender Constructs and Paul's Inter-Nationalism," in Penner and Stichele, *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, 117–23.

But it is precisely this commonality, the strikingly *unremarkable* and *unexceptional* nature of this discourse on decadence, that exposes the fundamental *discontinuity* between today's reified Judeo-Christian tradition and the Jewish and Christian sources that comprise this tradition. The aforementioned political figures imagine a univocal Judeo-Christian tradition—past and present—in opposition to *Pagan* deviant sexuality. And yet, as we have seen especially in the case of Paul and Josephus, it is precisely the “Pagans” (in part, at least) who provide the inspiration, and rhetorical ammunition, for ancient Jewish and Christian discourses on homoerotic decadence. In other words, to a certain extent Jews, Christians, and Pagans are participating in a common discourse on morality. Moreover, although space did not permit a comparison of ancient and modern notions of gender in the present essay, recent scholarship has called attention to the fundamental alterity of ancient conceptions of gender and sex, raising the possibility that representatives from this Judeo-Christian tradition might not even recognize Bachmann's deviant homosexual.²⁴

It is perhaps appropriate to end with the central question of this volume: What is “Judeo-Christianity”? My answer is embedded in the title of this essay. The “Specter of Judeo-Christianity” is just that, a specter, a ghost, a terrifying phantom. It certainly is an effective one. It frightens. It angers. It rallies. It motivates. And, very likely, it brings in some votes. But, as I occasionally have to remind my kids while they're snuggled beneath the covers, it's a ghost, and as far as I can tell, ghosts just don't exist. As such, this mythological creature tells us more about the people who imagine its existence than an actual phenomenon in the distant past.

²⁴ See, for example, Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner, eds., *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Penner and Stichele, *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*.