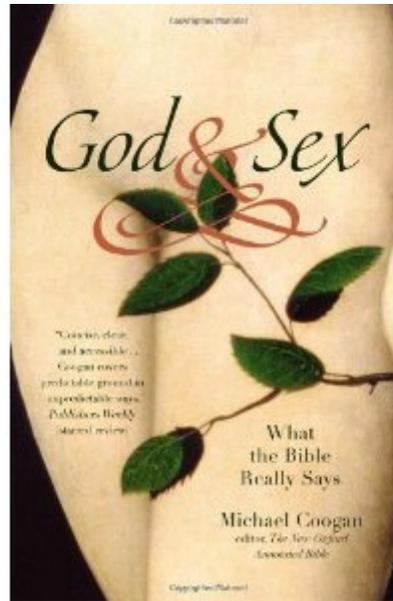


Book Review of: *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says*, by Michael Coogan

ISBN: 978-0-446-54525-9

Reviewed for *Culture Wars*, September 2012 issue

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Michael Coogan's book, *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says*, is one of the most revolting and heterodox pieces of prose I've read in a long time. Ironically, the book has no right to be called by its given title since, as we will see, Coogan



doesn't believe that God has anything to do with either the God or the sex he finds in the Bible; and what he believes "the Bible Really Says" is not what the Bible says at all. It is a figment of Coogan's fertile imagination that he intends on using to create a new sexual revolution or, at the least, give traction to the one already upon us. The endorsement chosen from Bart Ehrman, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Misquoting Jesus*, sets the pace. Ehrman says Coogan "shows how ancient authors viewed the world of sexuality, and how these ancient reflections can influence modern thinking on issues ranging from adultery and premarital sex to same-sex relations and heterosexual sex within marriage." Another remark on the inside cover says, "...the Bible contains many contradictory, ambiguous, and downright strange directives." Coogan was also interviewed by TIME magazine and he essentially says the same things.¹ Make no mistake about it. Coogan is attempting to turn traditional sexual mores upside down and, interestingly enough, he will attempt to do so by appealing to the Bible itself as the source of these revolutionary ideas. So buckle up. You're in for an interesting ride.

Of himself, Coogan says that he "studied in a cloistered Catholic seminary in the early 1960s." From that experience he gives one curious anecdote. He says the seminary "razored out" the Song of Solomon out of the Old Testament "lest its steamy language become what was called 'an occasion of sin.'" If true, Coogan seems to have had an over-reaction that led him to the opposite extreme. Not only does he now read the Song with relish, he characterizes it as "delights that are not just those of nature: it is a place where sex – unmarried sex, sex for its own sake and not just for reproduction – is celebrated" (pp. 17-18). Contrary to Coogan's thesis, however, the Song mentions nothing about explicit sexual activity, much less can it be proved that the two lovers were unmarried. Traditionally, the writing has been attributed to Solomon – the man with 300 wives and 700 concubines. As we will see, all of Coogan's conclusions are by innuendo – what he eisegetes from the passage, not what the passage actually says. In a word, Coogan sees sex around every corner and under every rock in the biblical text. And when there actually is a sexual narrative in the text, Coogan distorts it to fit his own sexual agenda.

Coogan on the Bible's "Contradictions"

Coogan is the director of the Harvard Semitic Museum; a professor of religious studies at Stonehill College; and is the editor of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Today these titles are cause for concern rather than confidence since, as with most current biblical scholarship, Coogan doesn't believe that the Bible is divinely inspired. To him it is nothing more than the words of man acting as if they are God's. His introduction is filled with disclaimers on the origin of the Bible. In one instance he says: "But unhappily we have not succeeded in changing the way most nonspecialists and even many in the clergy think about the Bible. People still maintain that the Bible is God's word, plain and simple: that God is the author of Scripture. Even non-scholars can see the problems with this. If God wrote the Bible he is a forgetful writer. Did he give the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai or on Mt. Horeb? Did David kill Goliath or did Elhanan? Was the Last Supper a Passover meal or not?" These objections, of course, are the old canards liberals like Coogan have methodically employed to convince the naïve and uneducated that they should not trust the Bible. Coogan doesn't bother mentioning to the reader that there are perfectly viable solutions to these apparent contradictions (e.g., Moses issued two sets of commandments in two different places; Elhanan killed Goliath's brother (cf. 1Chr. 20:5; 2Sm 21:19); the Last Supper was not an actual Passover but was celebrated on the same day). Rather, his goal is to give the impression that the Bible is just a hodge podge of different ideas from different writers at different who inevitably contradict each other. Once that doubt is planted in the reader's mind, Coogan goes to work to fill the vacuum.

This kind of apologetic comes in handy for Coogan when he begins to deal with the details of sexual relationships in the Bible, especially when he addresses homosexuality—the subject he spends most of his time discussing. His thesis regarding how to view the Bible's negative outlook on homosexuality is stated no better than on page 140: "Biblical writers were aware of same sex relationships...but the writer's understanding of such relationships, like their understanding of gender and slavery, was that of their own times. Contemporary moralists who argue that the Bible is opposed to homosexuality...are correct, but when they appeal to the Bible's authority as a timeless and absolute moral code, they ignore the cultural contexts in which the Bible was written." Hence, the way Coogan defends modern acceptance of homosexuality is very clever. As the devil did to Eve, the tempter doesn't disagree with what God ordered; rather, he invents a plausible reason why God ordered it, which, in turn, reflects badly on God and allows the devil to pretend he is helping you. Coogan is clever enough not to disagree with the Bible's teaching against homosexuality; rather, he simply injects the notion that the Bible was written by men with cultural biases and that Coogan is here to save you from their narrow-mindedness. Thus he establishes doubt in the Bible's objectivity by a two-fold approach: (a) the Bible is no different than the writings of Shakespeare or Homer, since all such literature reflects the culture of its day, and (b) proof of the Bible's bias on sexual matters is seen in its mistakes on historical matters.

Such historical matters include the declarations of Ezekiel. Coogan writes: "in the Ten Commandments, Yahweh declares that he punishes sons for the sins of their fathers to the third and fourth generation. But centuries later, speaking to the prophet Ezekiel, he seems to have changed his mind: 'a son shall not suffer for his father's iniquity, nor shall a father suffer for his son's iniquity'...clearly different writers had different views. Inconsistencies like these require first that the readers of the Bible who consider it authoritative read all of it, not blithely picking only passages that coincide with their own views" (pp. xvi-xv). In reality, it is Coogan who "blithely" flies by these passages without understanding their import.

Exodus 20:4-5 is speaking in the plural to Israel. As such, when the fathers commit sins corporately (as Israel did in Exodus 32 when they worshiped the golden calf), God judges the sons with the fathers. But in instances where a single father commits sin, God does not punish the son. Instead of attempting an explanation, Coogan accuses the Bible of contradiction. This is nothing new. Exploiting apparent contradictions in Scripture to dissuade the naïve from believing it is as old as the hills. It is the very methodology that Coogan teaches at Harvard “Divinity” School.

Coogan on the Bible’s “Sexual Euphemisms”

Let’s first look at Coogan’s treatment of Adam and Eve. He claims that the “good and evil” they were forbidden to partake of was sex, but he is silent as to his reasoning for this. This approach to Eden appeals well to his audience since Coogan thus implants in their minds that the God of the Old Testament creates man as a sexual being but forbids him to have sex. This makes God appear to be a vindictive and spiteful being – a caricature that Coogan cultivates throughout his book. As a result of Coogan’s imposition of sex into the story line, he totally misses the import of Eden (*i.e.*, that Adam and Eve attempted to usurp God by eating what they thought was divine food). But this kind of story-line is of no interest to Coogan, since his goal is to show that the Bible is little more than an ancient book of misplaced sexual taboos.

Coogan’s proof text for his thesis about Adam and Eve is just as inane. He appeals to a passage about David and Barzillai in which the latter says to David: “Today is my eightieth birthday; can I know between evil and good? Can your servant taste what he eats and what he drinks? Can I still hear the sound of singing men and singing women?” (p. 8). Coogan then says “the king was offering him the pleasures of the court, royal feasts, royal musicians, and ‘good and evil,’ which I interpret as the royal harem.” Coogan doesn’t even entertain the possibility that perhaps Barzillai, being 80 years old, was somewhat demented and not able to judge things as wisely as he did in his younger years, not to mention that Coogan breaks his own rule which prohibits using a text written by a later author to determine the meaning of a previous author. In this instance Coogan allows David to be a commentary on Adam but, as we saw above, that was not the case with Ezekiel and Moses.

Coogan then introduces a second proof text: “...eating is a widespread euphemism for sex, as the biblical proverb [Prov 30:20] shows: this is the way of a woman committing adultery: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, ‘I have done nothing wrong.’ Obviously the proverb concerns far more than table etiquette.” This is a typical example of Coogan’s reading into a passage what he wants to see. There is no euphemism for sex here. The impact of the passage is that the woman has already committed adultery but she then goes about her normal activity, one being to sit down and eat, and by doing so she shows that she doesn’t give a second thought to the grievous sin of adultery she has just committed. The passage is trying to teach the callousness of the adulterer, not reiterate her sexual exploits.

As Coogan sees Adam and Eve’s “sin” as engaging in sexual intercourse, he remarks, “they immediately recognized that they were naked...so they covered themselves with what would become the proverbial fig leaves.” So Coogan is trying to tell us that Adam and Eve didn’t recognize they were naked when they were having intercourse, only after? This is absurd. Coogan fails to see that the reason Adam and Eve covered themselves is that they had become ashamed because of their sin. Married couples often do the same. If there is sin in their relationship, they are ashamed and refrain from exposing their nakedness to each other, and to God. Coogan tries to cover his tracks by saying “sexual intercourse is only one possible interpretation,” but the issue here is not possible interpretations but cogent ones.

Coogan also fumbles over the role of the sexes as they relate to the story of Adam and Eve. He writes: “the consistent picture we get for ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity is patriarchal. The first woman was punished for her disobedience by the divine decree that her husband would rule over her, and that applied to her descendants as well...That decree illustrates the bleakness of the overall biblical picture for feminists who would claim the Bible as an authority” (p. 59). The only thing bleak here is Coogan’s interpretation. Eve was not put under the rule of Adam because she sinned. She was already under the rule of Adam. Adam named Eve and took her as his wife, both signifying his rule over her, and God authorized the marriage (Gen 2:23-24). Moreover Adam was created first, and according to the Bible this means that he ruled over her (1 Tim 2:12-13: “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet, *for it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve*”). Paul makes an ontological arrangement, not a consequent one. When, after she sinned, God said to Eve, “your desire shall be for your husband, but he shall rule over you,” the Hebrew idiom means “because of your sin you will desire to rule over your husband, but he shall rule over you.” The stress is on her concupiscent desire that she can never fulfill, similar to the pain of child birth that she can never escape. Coogan claims that Paul’s analysis is merely a “paraphrase of the creation story” and that the Bible “reflects...the superiority of men to women.” Quite the contrary. As Coogan confuses the sexual roles (leading eventually to him condoning homosexuality) he also confuses the gender roles, failing to distinguish “superiority” from “authority.” In other words, Adam’s authority over Eve does not make her an inferior being. It makes her a protected one, the very thing Adam failed to do when Eve was confronted by the devil.

Coogan performs a similar twisting with the story of Rahab. He writes: “the spies whom Joshua had sent to reconnoiter the land around Jericho went to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and ‘lay’ there, and when the king of Jericho learned of it, he told her to ‘bring out the men who went into you.’” Coogan holds that this language means the spies had sex with Rahab, especially because she was a prostitute. Hardly. Coogan conveniently leaves out the remainder of the sentence. The whole sentence reads, “Bring out the men who have come in to you, who have come into your house, for to search out the land they came,” which means that the spies sought to conceal themselves from the king of Jericho, not have sex with Rahab. In fact, Rahab is later praised for hiding the spies (Jos 6:22-24). The New Testament exalts Rahab in two places, Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25, for her faith and works. Obviously, these writers wouldn’t hold Rahab up as an example of a justified person if she engaged in the prostitution it condemns in other places (e.g., 1 Cor 6:9-10). There is not one remote suggestion in the text that Rahab had sex with the spies, but Coogan is bent on seeing it there because he established his thesis before he did his exegetical work.

Coogan does the same with Ruth and Boaz. He claims that when Ruth “uncovered his feet” and then “lay at his feet” until dawn, this means they had sexual intercourse. Coogan conveniently disregards the story line which states that Ruth was seeking redemption from the next of kin under Levitical law and that Boaz warned her that there was another person first in line before him from whom he must first get permission to take Ruth as a wife. That being the case, if Ruth and Boaz already had sex prior to getting permission from the next of kin, then they would have broken the very Levitical law they intended on upholding. The whole thrust of the story is that Ruth and Boaz must wait for sexual intimacy until the time is right (Ruth 3:7-18). Coogan, of course, wants them to have sex before the time is right.

Coogan then proceeds to the story of Jael and Sisera in Judges 5:24-27. He claims that the words in verse 27 (“Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down”) refers to the fact that “Jael seduced Sisera and then killed him as he slept in postcoital fatigue.” Here Coogan conveniently reverses the story line by making it seem that Jael killed Sisera after he fell at her feet, but the text says that Jael first killed Sisera (by putting a peg into his temple) and only then did Sisera fall between her feet and lay down.

What Coogan does with the story of Zipporah and Moses is even worse (Exodus 4:24-26). God comes to kill Moses for not circumcising his son Gershom whom he had with Zipporah. Apparently Zipporah knew why God was angry, for she immediately circumcised Gershom. It is also apparent that she didn’t like circumcision because after she cut off Gershom’s foreskin she said to Moses, “You are a bridegroom of blood to me,” as she threw the foreskin at his feet. Admittedly, this story is very short and quite obscure, but that certainly doesn’t give one license to read all kinds of sexual innuendos into it, as Coogan does. Coogan says that the throwing of the foreskin at Moses’ feet was really Zipporah’s putting it on Moses’ penis and pretending to take it off so as to make it appear to God that the foreskin came from Moses, not Gershom.

Additionally, Coogan wastes no time in making God look silly, saying, “This mysterious – not to say irrational – deity is here depicted as a malevolent night demon” with Zipporah “tricking the homicidal deity...a strange and mysterious God.” Coogan puts God in these dim lights in his entire book. Later in the book (pp. 182-190) he depicts God as “a jealous, angry, even abusive husband” an “insanely jealous and abusive husband, subjecting his wife to gang rape and gang murder...with no trace of sympathy” when referring to the judgments God gave to Israel for her fraternizing with the idols of the nations, which the prophets rightly call her “whoredom.” Coogan thinks these passages are “problematic” for Christian theodicy and accuses the traditional view of ignoring them and thus “cherry-picking for scriptural support for preconceived conclusions” and that “such selectivity raises profound questions about the Bible’s authority,” leading him to conclude that “the messy details of the Bible itself...require thinking of the Bible in a more nuanced way than simply as the literal word of God.”

The “problem,” however, is all Coogan’s. Like most liberals, the underlying agenda is to convince his reader that the Bible cannot be trusted for it is not “the literal word of God.” Coogan arrives at this position because, as he did with the story of Adam and Eve, he fails to see the story of sin and its consequences. Not once in his book does he acknowledge that Israel actually did things worthy of divine wrath or that the reason the Bible condemns any sex outside of marriage is that such acts are morally sinful. For Coogan the Bible’s sexual prohibitions are merely cultural taboos written, perhaps, for the same reason that Karl Marx said religion was the “opiate of the people” or that Aldous Huxley said that religion was good because it controls the masses. For a man like Coogan who sees nothing more than myth in the Bible and admits that “the description of God as Israel’s husband is metaphorical...in fact all theology is metaphor,” it is quite ironic to see him try to take the speck from the Christian’s eye when, in fact, he has a log in his own.

What of Zipporah? She was the daughter of the priest of Midian and was not Jewish. Thus her aversion to circumcising her son is implied. But God had commanded circumcision as the identity marker for the Abrahamic covenant about 600 years earlier and had made clear that disobedience to such mandates would result in death (Gen 17:14). If Zipporah still wanted a husband to support her, she knew she needed to circumcise her son so that God would not kill Moses for disobedience. She eventually did so, but

reluctantly, expressing her aversion to circumcision by throwing the foreskin at Moses' feet, similar to when we throw things to the ground when we are disgusted with them. Of course, her son is obviously bleeding profusely because of her abrupt surgery and thus Zipporah seeks to blame his condition on Moses and his religion, calling him a "bloody bridegroom." My guess is that Moses and Zipporah didn't have the happiest of marriages.

Of course, Coogan, bent on seeing sex around every corner of the Bible, backs up his "Moses' feet = Moses' penis" formula with "...when I explain this to students, they often ask about the woman who bathed and kissed the feet of Jesus, and in this case, as both ancient and modern imaginative elaborations suggest, sexual innuendo may be present." Coogan is trying to make his naïve students believe that the woman who is repenting of fornication (for the Pharisees know her as "a sinner") is at the same time making sexual advances to Jesus by some kind of foot fetish or secret fellatio. That this doesn't strike Coogan as in the least bit odd says more about Coogan than it does the story.

Even when a sexual scene is depicted in the biblical text, Coogan gets the interpretation wrong. For example, Isaiah 57:8 uses a metaphor of adultery to depict Israel's fraternizing with the pagan nations: "Behind the door and the doorpost you placed your indecent symbol. Deserting me, you spread out your high, wide bed; And of those whose embraces you love you carved the symbol and gazed upon it" (NAB). Coogan interprets the words "indecent symbol" as "dildo" because "the Hebrew word here can mean either 'maleness' (hence, 'dildo') or 'memorial.'" Coogan should check his Hebrew lexicon again. The Hebrew word is *zikarun*.² It is used 23 times in the Hebrew bible and never with the concept of "maleness" and always with the concept of "remembrance." Another word, *zakar*,³ can refer to a "male" but that is not used in Isaiah 57:8. Contrary to Coogan's view, the point of the passage is to depict Israel as a woman who has a memento of her lover (*i.e.*, a "remembrance") behind her door so that only she can see it but passers-by cannot. Besides, what good would a dildo do her if she is already in bed with her actual lover?

Even Coogan's theological interpretations often goes astray because he tries to force a sexual interpretation into the passage that doesn't fit. For example, he says, "So Paul, the bachelor, thought that abstinence and celibacy were the highest ideals, and that sex was to be avoided – because he mistakenly thought that the Second Coming of Jesus was imminent." Although many scholars read into Paul's words that he anticipated the Second Coming in his lifetime (*e.g.*, 2 Thess 2:1-11; 1 Thess 4:13-17), nowhere does Paul explicitly say so. Moreover, when Paul encourages Christians to be unmarried and celibate like himself, his audience is limited to those who have been given such a gift from God, whereas he tells all the others to get married. This is clearly stated in 1 Cor 7:1-35 and it's puzzling how Coogan could have missed it. Additionally, the only reason Paul encourages celibacy in this passage is so the Christian can devote more time to the work of God instead of being distracted by the world, especially during the heavy persecutions the Church endured in first three centuries before Constantine. There isn't the slightest indication in Paul's words that it was because the world was going to end soon. Of course, Coogan's view leads right to his misinformed conclusion that "another fallout from Paul's views is the requirement in the Roman Catholic Church that clergy be celibate...partly to ensure that church property not be bequeathed to a priest's heirs" and that "Paul's assertion that only the unmarried can fully devote themselves to the Lord" is a mere "rationalization." Never mind that Paul, Timothy, Silas and many other celibate men, including the Apostles, accomplished the astounding task of having "preached the gospel to the whole world" by this time (Col. 1:6) due to the fact that they had no family commitments to straddle them down.

The only “rationalization” going on here is Coogan’s since it becomes obvious by 36 pages into his book that he is looking for some way to rationalize his own liberal views of sex.

Coogan and the Bible’s “Negative Attitude Toward Sex”

Coogan consistently appeals to the canard that the Bible has a “negative attitude toward sex.” One example is the “emphasis on Mary’s perpetual virginity...that has characterized much of Christian teaching for two millennia.” Coogan tries to support this view by claiming the perpetual virginity is “contradicted by reference to the brothers and sisters of Jesus,” and that the belief “that they were his cousins is equally without basis.” Like many liberals, Coogan fails to give us any exegesis of the biblical texts in his endnote to prove his contention. He just makes assertions and expects us to accept it because he has discovered the inside track on the Bible – sex. For those interested in a detailed exegesis of the original Hebrew and Greek texts pertinent to the brothers of Jesus, please consult my critique of David Klinghoffer’s book, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus* at our website <http://www.catholicintl.com>.⁴

In the same vein, Coogan claims that the “negative attitude toward sex” is demonstrated by John’s book of Revelation. Coogan makes this conclusion merely because John says “the one hundred forty-four thousand saved would be men ‘who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins’” (Rev. 14:4). This is quite ironic. In the very place where Coogan should be recognizing highly symbolic language due to the fact that almost the entire book of Revelation is symbolic, he now chooses to be literal so that he can accuse John of prudishness for insisting that only “virgins” go to heaven. What Coogan fails to see is that “virgins” (Greek: *parthenos*) is a symbol of those who have avoided spiritual fornication, not those who chose the celibate life style as a vocation. This is noted in the marked contrast in the Revelation between “fornication” (which is mentioned twelve times)⁵ and those who refrain from it. In fact, in the very context, Rev. 14:8, John speaks about the “nations who drink the wine of the whore of Babylon and her fornications.” Obviously, then, in the symbolic language John is using, the “virgins” are those who avoid these spiritual fornications. There are 144,000 of them because this is a symbolic number (12 x 12) derived from the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles, which represent the saved from the Old and New Testaments, respectively. The same number and its permutations are then developed in Revelation 21 when speaking about heaven. In the end, all Coogan’s complaints about the Bible having a “negative attitude toward sex” are basically a litotes for a 1960s-style revolution to condone all varieties of sexual encounters without the guilt dictated in Holy Writ.

Coogan on Abortion

Coogan’s desire for sexual freedom doesn’t stop at sex. It also includes freedom for abortion on demand. Obviously, modern man needs a fail-safe when the birth control he used doesn’t go as planned. On page 66, Coogan says that the God of the Jews was “an abortionist” because he commanded the Israelites to kill pregnant women of the foreign nations he was judging. He makes the same caricature of God when he covers the issue of the woman suspected of adultery in Numbers 5 who, in her judgment from God, is caused to have an abortion of the fetus she is carrying. Traditional exegesis of these passages would conclude that God, because he is God, has the right to take life when he deems it necessary, especially when sin is involved. But Coogan doesn’t use traditional exegesis. As most modern scholars, Coogan

doesn't believe in the God of the Old Testament, so, in that sense, he is not slighting him. We need to remember that Coogan doesn't believe the Old Testament is inspired by God, if he believes in God at all. For Coogan the Old Testament is just a collection of ancient Jewish mores and taboos. The God of the Old Testament is nothing more than an invention of the Jews. Hence, the passages we are reading, including Numbers 5, are merely the moral decisions made by Jewish leaders who then attribute them to their God, which, in turn, morally legitimizes the practice of abortion. In other words, if the Jews arbitrarily decided when it was permissible to abort a fetus, we can do the same in our day.

Coogan then tries another tactic to promote abortion. He writes: "Opponents of abortion, undeterred by its lack of mention in the Bible, find support for their view that the fetus is a human person in texts that describe divine providence in caring for a person even before birth...But they are hardly clear statements about the status of the fetus as a human person." He's right. The Bible doesn't talk about the "status" of the fetus as a human person as if the fetus has to be graded on a scale of viability before we are allowed to declare it human. Why should it? Any idiot can reason that if it walks like a duck and acts like a duck it is, in fact, a duck. In fact, since Coogan has access to modern biological discoveries about the "status" of the fetus that were not available to the ancient Jews (*e.g.* a fetal heart beat begins at just 18 days of gestation), he should all the more fall on his knees and marvel at the fetus being human. The fetus is not the problem. Coogan is the problem.

Sex is No "Laughing" Matter

Sometimes Coogan embellishes the sexual overtones in the text in an effort to prove his thesis. This is aptly illustrated when he deals with the word "laugh." Coogan first mentions that "when Isaac was born, Sarah exclaimed, 'God has brought laughter for me, because whoever hears of this will laugh with me.'" He then mentions that "the same word is used in two other stories about Isaac." One of them is the instance in which "Abimelech...looked out a window and saw Isaac making his wife Rebekah laugh. So Abimelech summoned Isaac, and said: 'She is your wife!'" Coogan concludes that "'laugh' must have a sexual connotation." Really? This is the problem when one is always looking for hidden meanings in the Bible. Every word becomes a candidate. But there is no hidden meaning here. It is simply a case of Isaac and Rebekah engaging in a little flirtation with each other and in the process Isaac perhaps tickled Rebekah by kissing her multiple times around the neck and saying sweet nothings in her ear. This is common affection between husbands and wives. Rebekah laughed merely because she was being affectionately caressed by Isaac in some manner. It has nothing at all to do with "laughter having a sexual connotation." If it did, why does Coogan refrain from saying that the laughter Sarah exhibited when God told her that she would deliver Isaac refers to some "sexual connotation" between Sarah and God? This is the problem with allegorizers like Coogan. They consistently avoid the contradictions that their inordinate symbolism creates.

But Coogan doesn't stop there. Instead of recognizing the contradiction, he produces another specious example of his thesis. In this case, "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian [Ishmael], whom she had borne to Abraham, making her son Isaac laugh," which then prompts Sarah to tell Abraham to expel Hagar and her son because "this slave woman's son will not inherit with my son Isaac." Coogan concludes: "What was Ishmael doing? The intent of the narrator is to suggest something awful: Ishmael was 'playing with' Isaac: that—as well as not wanting Isaac's inheritance to be diminished—is why Sarah

had Abraham send Ishmael and Hagar away. There is a hint of homosexual incest here.” So now we see how versatile the word “laugh” really is: (a) it can refer to normal laughter (as is the case between Sarah and God); (b) it can refer to heterosexual sex (as is the case with Rebekah and Isaac); and (c) it can refer to homosexual sex (as is the case with Isaac and Ishmael). It’s rather amazing how Coogan gets triple duty over such a seemingly innocent word.

The “Intent” of the Biblical Writer

Coogan’s first mistake was to believe he knows the “intent of the narrator.” He does so because the appeal to the “intent” of the author is one of the fundamental planks of modern biblical scholarship. It is often used to denude Genesis of any historical reality since the scholar merely has to wave his hand and say, “History was not the intent of the author.” How convenient. If you ask this same scholar how he knows the “intent” of the Genesis author, he won’t give you any biblical proof for his assertion. Instead, he’ll tell you modern science has shown evolution is the means by which the world came into existence and thus the “intent” of the Genesis author could not have been special creation in six days. He’ll also tell you that since it would be impossible to put animals of all kinds into an ark, the “intent” of the Genesis author could not have been to depict a literal worldwide flood. He’ll also tell you that since we know snakes don’t talk, it was not the “intent” of the Genesis author to depict a literal scene in the Garden of Eden. It is easy to see what is happening here. A presupposition against the supernatural is the determining factor to guess the “intent” of the author. In Coogan’s case, it is a presupposition that the Bible is filled with sexual innuendo, and thus things as simple as “laughter” can be filled with all kinds of salacious meaning. That Sarah was merely concerned that the boyhood laughter shared by Ishmael and Isaac showed the two families were blending very well together, which may have eventually persuaded Abraham to give half of the inheritance to Hagar, this doesn’t even cross Coogan’s radar screen.

Interestingly enough, the homosexual innuendo that Coogan draws out from Sarah’s words is judged by Coogan as a “scurrilous attribution of unacceptable sexual behavior to others...non Israelites.” But on the very next page, Coogan speaks of homosexuality in a positive way, stating: “Opponents of same-sex marriage often assert that from the beginning marriage has been between one man and one woman. Well, yes and no: in the beginning, according to Genesis, there was only the original couple in the Garden of Eden, no one else with whom either could have any sort of relationship; but Genesis never reports a marriage ceremony.” Coogan then goes off in the very next sentence to talk about polygamy, and how it is justified from the Bible because “men began to have more than one wife, beginning with Cain’s descendant Lamech, who had two wives” and that the “Mormons...are right” since “the Bible provides authoritative models...with no hint of divine disapproval.” This is typical of Coogan’s convoluted logic throughout the book. Coogan is saying that because Adam did not have the choice of having Steve, only Eve, we cannot conclude that God intended only heterosexual marriage. Forget the fact that, long after Adam and Eve produced numerous offspring we don’t read of any of them getting married to the same sex. In fact, we don’t even read about the homosexuals in Sodom getting married. Same-sex marriage, to be sure, is a new low for mankind brought to us courtesy of the modern generation that Coogan fully supports. Forget the fact that Jesus and the rest of Holy Writ do, in fact, declare a “marriage ceremony” for Adam and Eve since the words “a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” are attributed to God himself. Forget the fact that Lamech was a murderer and, like the typical western gunslinger, made up his own rules of justice to protect himself from reprisal,

just as he made up his own rules for marriage.⁶ Coogan can't see these things because he insists on reading the Bible with rainbow-colored glasses so as to make it appear as if the Bible condones all the sexual perversions he and his ilk want accepted today.

Coogan and the Role of Women

Along with his promoting of free sex, homosexuality, abortion and polygamy, Coogan also disdains the Bible's teaching on the role of women. He calls the fact that Paul says the woman will be "saved through childbearing" and is to be subordinate to her husband" [1 Tim. 2:15] as a "divinely established gender imbalance" (p. 83) Here is where Coogan tries to play both sides against the middle. Earlier (p. 57) he told us that this same passage, 1 Tim 2:11-15, was not written by Paul but a "later writer who used Paul's name." Why? This is another favorite ploy of modern biblical scholarship. When they don't like something they read in the Bible, the first line of defense is to use the "historical critical" tool of claiming that the passage was not written by a first century witness but by a second or third century redactor who had various prejudices, among them are prejudices against free sex, homosexuality, abortion, polygamy, and gender equality. This redactor then wrote all kinds of aberrant views into the Bible and made it appear as if they were God-ordained and written by one of the personalities in the New Testament. In Coogan's specious logic we are thus supposed to believe that the later Christians were a sneaky group of liars. We are supposed to believe that, despite vigorous Church teaching, they had suddenly developed all kinds of cultural and sexual idiosyncrasies that were diametrically opposed to the teachings of Paul, but, in order to propagate their redacted views, made it appear as if Paul wrote them! Coogan says the same about the traditional Gospel writers. He claims that "it is unlikely that any of the Gospels were written by the individuals to whom they are attributed" (p. 206). Even if they were, Coogan claims that they "reflected their own cultural backgrounds" with the "result that we cannot know exactly what Jesus said about anything" (p. 91). In other words, these Christians were out-and-out fabricators who didn't give a whit what Jesus and Paul taught. Why does Coogan go to such lengths? Because he needs these presuppositional platforms to convince you that the Gospels and Epistles were not written by eyewitnesses, or were written through the cultural biases of whoever wrote them, and thus he can claim that their accounts are not factual and therefore unhistorical, including their mandates against the sexual sins he enjoys to commit and lead others to commit.

Coogan on Divorce

Coogan's dealing with the Bible's teaching on divorce is equally facile. Remarking on Malach 2:16's statement in which God says, "I hate divorce," Coogan claims: "...such an absolute statement misrepresents the admittedly opaque Hebrew. Furthermore, it is inconsistent with earlier biblical law, supposedly divinely given, as well as with Yahweh's own divorce of Israel [Jer. 3:8]...To be sure, such inconsistency is not surprising, given the nature of the Bible as an anthology of writings by many different people at many different times." First, there is nothing "opaque" about the words "I hate divorce." They are from the common Hebrew word *sane*,⁷ used hundreds of times in the Bible. Why Coogan doesn't explain the difficulty he sees with Mal. 2:16 is anyone's guess. Consequently, the only thing that becomes "opaque" here is Coogan's analysis. Coogan sees inconsistencies because, not only is he predisposed to do so because of his belief that these are only human-authored texts, but also because he, like most historical-critical scholars, have long ago given up on actually exegeting and harmonizing

the biblical texts. In effect, the more contradictory they can make the texts, the less of an authority the texts have over their lives, and we end up with free sex, homosexuality, abortion, polygamy, gender equality and divorce.

What Coogan fails to see is that the permission for divorce in Deut. 24 was deliberately made ambiguous by the use of the Hebrew phrase, *ervat dabar*⁸ (*lit.*, “nakedness of a thing”). Essentially, *ervat dabar* recognized divorce for anything the Jews could conceive. Since the Jews were already in the throes of rebellion, God allowed them to have their desire to divorce, in full force, as their punishment. According to Paul, God does the same with homosexuals. He allows them to go headlong into their lusts as a punishment for their unbridled lust (see Romans 1:24-28). They think because they have acquired sexual freedom and can parade in the streets of Sodom and San Francisco that God isn’t taking notice, but not only is He taking notice, He is doing so in the most penetrating way. As a manner of speaking, we could say that God allows them to screw themselves into oblivion. In the same way, God allowed the Israelites to divorce themselves into anarchy.

From the beginning, divorce for fornication (leading to adultery) was permitted. It was part of natural law. Irrespective of the Jews’ use of Deut. 24:1 to divorce, Jesus allowed divorce for fornication (*cf.* Matt 5:32; 19:9 with Matt 1:19) and Paul explains why in 1 Cor 6:16. For the same reason, the Catholic Church allows divorce for fornication (but not remarriage).⁹ In the same way, God divorced Israel for her fornication (*cf.* Jer. 3:8; Isa. 50:1). He could also have her stoned to death if He so chose (Ezk. 23:47).¹⁰ As such, God need not appeal to Deut 24:1 since that passage did not specifically mention fornication. He did so only to mock the Jews who had insisted on divorcing their wives – a kind of divine ‘what goes around comes around.’

Coogan then makes one of his more outlandish conclusions: “The Pharisees are right: Deuteronomy does allow divorce. But Jesus refutes their argument with the astonishing assertion that this law is not authoritative. Rather, it was a concession to the Israelites’ stubbornness....The problem with Rabbi Jesus’s argument, I would say, were I a Pharisee, is that the first text he quotes [Gen 1:27] is about gender differentiation, not marriage or divorce.” The problem here is that Coogan is the Pharisee. He slices and dices Scripture according to his own preferences just as the Pharisees did to Jesus. The Pharisees thought they were clever in citing certain Scriptures, but Jesus always cited the Scriptures they left out. The same is true in Coogan’s case. When Jesus quotes Gen 1:27 he is connecting it to Gen 1:28, which says that God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. Obviously, they cannot multiply unless they become “one flesh” in marriage. Thus Gen 1:27-28 is not merely speaking about gender differentiation but about the two genders coming together in sexual union and producing offspring. But rather than quote Gen 1:28 to affirm the direction of his thought, Jesus quotes Gen 2:24 (“the two shall become one flesh”) since it essentially says the same thing. The only thing Coogan can say is “neither text explicitly mentions marriage, let alone divorce. Were Adam and Eve married? Again, Genesis does not say.” Coogan says such inane things because he failed to understand that, according to Jesus, God himself uttered the words of Gen 2:24 and thus was the authority who married Adam and Eve.

Coogan also tries to make it appear as if Jesus and Paul disagree. He writes: “According to Paul, more clearly than in the Gospels, Jesus was opposed not just to remarriage after divorce but to divorce itself....Yet Paul, even though aware of Jesus’s view allows for divorce: ‘if she does separate...’” This is

just another case of Coogan being too quick to claim contradiction – a terrible disease of most modern biblical scholars. As noted above, although Jesus was against divorce for every cause, he did allow divorce for fornication, with the proviso that a divorced person could not get remarried. Hence, Paul is agreeing with Jesus, since when Paul says “if she does separate...” he is referring to divorce for fornication. Coogan gets off track because he left out the very next statement from Paul, which is “let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.” In other words, since she is divorced for fornication, she, as Jesus said and Paul agrees, must “remain unmarried,” otherwise she will commit the sin of adultery.

Coogan’s approach then leads him to see Jesus and Paul contradicting each other in regards to what is known as the Pauline Privilege in 1 Cor 7:12-16, that is, that a divorce and remarriage are allowed if the divorce is based on the fact that one spouse is an unbeliever who does not wish to remain in the marriage. Coogan concludes: “Just as Jesus apparently felt free to reject the authority of Moses, so Paul, who thought that he knew what Jesus said, on his own authority—”I say, not the Lord”—also felt free to modify Jesus’s teaching in the light of changed circumstances.” No, Paul wasn’t “modifying” Jesus’ teaching. Jesus did not teach on the issue of mixed marriages since the Jews to whom he was speaking in the Gospels were all considered people of God.¹¹ So when Paul confronted the new circumstance of mixed marriages as he went to preach to the Gentile world, an additional law for marriage and divorce was needed.

The only contradiction is in Coogan’s mind. This naturally leads him to accuse the Catholic Church of being contradictory, stating, “Roman Catholicism prohibits divorce under most circumstances. The Catechism of the Catholic Church [para. 1650] cites Jesus’s words in Mark, which do not provide any exception, as its scriptural authority—a blatantly selective use of scripture, ignoring Matthew’s different view” (p. 97). If Coogan had bothered to read the paragraph right before the one he cites, namely ¶1649, he would have noticed these words: “Yet there are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons [e.g., fornication]. In such cases the Church permits the physical separation of the couple and their living apart” (*cf.* paras. 2382-2383).

Coogan on Homosexuality

The big kahuna for Coogan is homosexuality. There is a continual undercurrent in his book seeking to legitimize it. Coogan is playing with fire. The average society, according to the historian Arnold Toynbee, lasts about 200 years until it starts to decline. He writes that, out of the 19 societies catalogued from the beginning of written history, all of them declined and fell due to moral corruption. Only two societies did not succumb to moral corruption, and they survived indefinitely. (One of them was western Christianity, namely Catholicism, the Holy Roman Empire and beyond).¹² The institutionalization of homosexuality (*e.g.*, homosexual marriage; homosexual rights, etc) is the final and most devastating immorality, since shortly thereafter the society completely collapses. No society has ever survived long after homosexuality was legally condoned and permitted.

To begin, Coogan tries to make a distinction between homosexuality and homoeroticism, claiming that the ancients were the latter not the former since they didn’t know anything about sexual orientation. Perhaps, but this is really a distinction without a difference. Whatever label one uses, it is still male-to-

male sex or female-to-female sex. Second, contrary to gay activists today, Coogan denies that David and Jonathan were sexual partners, but he sides with these same activists in their standard apologetic concerning Sodom and Gommorah. If you haven't heard it before, brace yourself. The homosexual lobby claims that the sin of Sodom was not homosexuality but inhospitality! As Coogan argues it: "Was sodomy the sin of Sodom? So it would seem. But wait—Lot then offers the townsfolk his daughters...As far as Lot was aware, then, the men of Sodom were not homosexuals." This is another one of those instances in which we find ourselves scratching our head at Coogan's attempt at logic. How does Lot's offer of his daughters prove that the men at his door weren't homosexuals? If the men had asked for Lot's daughters instead of the male visitors only then would Coogan have a point. But since the men ask for males then obviously they must want males for sex. The only hanging issue is why Lot would offer them his daughters. Maybe he was desperate and didn't know what to do. Maybe he was stalling for time. Maybe he didn't like his daughters. After all, they later made him drunk and forced sex on him (Gen 19:30-38). Whatever the answer, we know that what Lot said about his daughters was rash and inappropriate. Perhaps the two men with him realized how rash Lot's statement was and this prompted them to intervene, which they then did and struck the people with blindness. The point in fact remains that the men of Sodom were homosexuals. No amount of hermeneutical abracadabra is going to remove that fact.

So why does Coogan insist otherwise? He appeals to a text in the Wisdom of Solomon 19:14 which says: "they refused to receive strangers who came to them...and made their guests their slaves." Coogan declares that this "refers to the inhabitants of Sodom...for this ancient writer, one sin of the citizens of Sodom was an appalling violation of a fundamental social principle of antiquity, hospitality: they wanted to rape strangers in town. Now rape, as feminists have convincingly argued, is a crime of violence rather than one of sex...So, the attempt to rape Lot's visitors is an example of Sodom's immorality, because they wanted to violate hospitality with violence against strangers in town" (pp. 124-125). First, I find it interesting that, when Coogan wants to prove a point he doesn't hesitate to use the Bible as his authority to decide the issue (even though in this case Coogan's footnote shows that he can't decide whether Wisdom is canonical or not). Be that as it may, Coogan's first mistake is that Wisdom 19 is not talking about Sodom. The context deals with Israel's stay in Egypt. This is easily seen in the context beginning at verse 1, with obvious historical markers such as the "Red Sea" in verse 7; the plagues of flies and frogs in verse 10; the abundance of quail in verse 12 and following with various miracles that God performed as the Israelites went through the desert in the remainder of the chapter. Coogan neither reveals the translation he is using nor gives us the benefit of other translations, but *The New Jerusalem Bible* even names the "Egyptians" in verse 14 based on the context.¹³

But let's, for the sake of argument, agree that Wisdom 19:14 is referring to Sodom. Let's also agree that the Sodomites wanted to make visitors their slaves. How does that add up to them not being homosexuals? What if, in fact, the Sodomites wanted to make male visitors their male sex slaves? There is no escape for Coogan. To limit the sin of Sodom to inhospitality is nothing more than an attempt, and a bad one at that, to euphemize what is actually going on there. Even if the sin of Sodom was limited to indiscriminate rape (as Coogan insists) who in their right mind would call that a sin of "inhospitality"? Inhospitality occurs when someone comes to your house for a friendly visit and you fail to give them tea and crumpets, not when they take your children upstairs and rape them. Coogan's apologetic just shows how sick and perverted society has become today. That Coogan and gay activists would stoop to this kind

of apologetic to sanction homosexuality is nothing but a case of pure desperation.¹⁴ It does reveal one very important thing to us, however. It tells us that these people still have a conscience and a sense of morality, otherwise they would not be seeking to justify homosexual behavior by claiming that it is not sinful. The mere fact that they have attempted to go down this path means that they have already climbed 9 of the 10 steps needed to condemn them.

Coogan makes another attempt to neutralize the Bible of specifying the sin of homosexuality. The purpose, of course, is to make homosexual sex as normal as heterosexual sex by arguing that the only thing the Bible condemns is non-consenting sex between two people (*i.e.*, rape). If Coogan can show that homosexual sex is not singled out any more than heterosexual sex, he believes the Bible's silence would condone consenting homosexual sex. Although he failed to prove his contention with his "inhospitality" argument, in this instance he argues that the word "sodomy" does not appear in the Bible. This is a rather specious appeal. Granted, the technical terms "sodomy" or even "homosexuality" were not used prior to the nineteenth century. They originated as clinical terms to describe what was commonly understood in all previous generations as sexual relations with someone of the same sex. Often, however, neither Hebrew nor Greek assigned one word to describe an action or state. For example, Hebrew did not have a word for "uncle" and thus whenever an uncle is in view the Hebrew describes the person as "your father's brother" and a grandfather as "your father's father." The same is true with homosexuality. It was described by rather long phrases in both Hebrew and Greek. Hebrew used "a man who lies with a male" (Lv 20:13). Greek would refer to them as "abandoning the natural function of the woman" or "burning in lust towards one another, men with men" (Rm 1:27).¹⁵ Similarly, although the word "sodomy" may not have been used in the Bible, references to the "sin of Sodom" occur more than a dozen times in Scripture.¹⁶ Coogan is oblivious to these facts and instead he tries to make a case that the 1611 King James Version's translation of the Hebrew *qohdesh* as "sodomites" in Deut. 23:17 should really be translated literally as "holy man." But this fails to consider the some Hebrew words had the same consonants but were pronounced differently because different meanings were intended, although Coogan does finally admit that perhaps "holy" is a euphemism for prostitute.¹⁷ His intention here, however, is to generalize the word instead of allowing it to specify homosexual activity (*i.e.*, sodomy). But even generalizing it does not eliminate the possibility that the male prostitutes were sodomites. Since the female prostitutes were obviously penetrated by male customers, there is no reason to believe that the male prostitutes were not also penetrated, since that is the superior position.

Coogan's next attempt is to dilute some of the basic commands against homosexuality. Since he can't do anything to neutralize the straightforward commands in Leviticus ("You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination," and "A man who lies with a male as one lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall be killed; their blood is upon them," Lev. 18:22; 20:13) he admits they "are the only explicit references to male homoerotic relations in the Hebrew Bible" but that these same laws are "not found in the law of Deuteronomy," perhaps implying that Israelites had relaxed such prohibitions by the time Deuteronomy was written. Coogan also admits that in the New Testament there are "three passages that condemn homoerotic relationships," such as 1 Cor. 6:9-11 "...nor soft men, nor males who bed males...will inherit God's kingdom") and 1 Tim. 1:9-11 ("fornicators, males who bed males") and Rom. 1:24 ("for this reason God gave them over to dishonorable passions: for the females exchanged natural intimacy for unnatural, just as their males, giving up natural intimacy with females...males with males acting disgracefully").

Now, observe how Coogan tries to neutralize these passages from actually condemning homosexuality: “These verses...state that homoeroticism among both men and women was a divinely imposed condition: men who have sex with men and women who have sex with woman do so because God made them do it. Ironically, this is not very far from the modern view that sexual orientation is innate rather than chosen, although Paul would not have put it that way” (p. 138). So, once again, Coogan puts the theological horse before the cart to suit his own agenda. Homosexuality is now deemed God’s fault. God made them that way and therefore they are only doing what comes natural to them. Coogan is blind to the fact that Paul specifies that the decision to become homosexual came from the human participants and, after they continued in this reprobate behavior for some time without repentance, God gave up on them and allowed them to pursue their lusts without His restraining help, for the precise purpose of preparing them for judgment.

As if Coogan’s above facile attempt to get around Romans chapter one isn’t bad enough, he tries another approach: “I suspect that Paul was informed in part by the ancient Israelite taboo against mixing categories....He also seems to have had a view of what was ‘natural,’ but it too was culturally conditioned, as was his insistence that men should not wear their hair long because to do so was unnatural.” In other words, Paul isn’t getting information from God about homosexuality; rather, he is just relying on his ancient Israelite culture which was equally prejudiced against homosexuals. As Coogan sees it, if it wasn’t Paul’s Jewish taboos that were negatively influencing him, it was his own cultural preferences. Coogan is so crass that he thinks nothing of comparing something as innocuous as the length of one’s hair with male anal coitus, as if they both come out of the same mold. In other words, Coogan is basically saying, “Hey, don’t get all bent out of shape about homosexuality. It’s no more harmful than if a man were to grow his hair long, and how harmful can that be?”

Coogan tries to defend his view by citing what he believes is a contradiction in the enforcement against homosexuality. Referring to his opposition as “contemporary moralists who argue that the Bible is opposed to homosexuality,” Coogan claims that they “are selective in their use of biblical authority. Few...would enforce the death penalty for these offenses as the Bible also commands.” First, Coogan fails to make the proper legal demarcation. The Mosaic covenant was superseded by the New Covenant (*cf.* Hebrews 7:18; 8:1-13; 10:9-16; 2Cor 3:6-14; Col 2:14-15). As such, the New Covenant decides which, if any, of the Mosaic moral, civil or ceremonial laws it will use, and this includes the laws regarding capital crimes. There would be no contradiction if the Church decided not to use the Mosaic death penalty. When the Christian Church was not in control of the land, it left decisions of life and death to the secular government, but it did not hesitate to excommunicate those who committed capital crimes (*cf.* 1 Cor. 5:1-6; Rom. 13:1-7). After Constantine, the Church came into power and the Holy Roman Empire did, indeed, impose the death penalty for homosexuality.¹⁸ It is only in our day when the Church has become very weak and tolerant that stringent laws and punishments against homosexuality have subsided.

Coogan then comes to Jesus, stating, “Jesus would probably not have approved of male homoerotic activity because of its condemnation in Leviticus.” Ya think? But wait. Coogan then partially retracts his brilliant insight and says, “But note the ‘probably’—for the Gospels report no words of Jesus on this issue, and, for that matter, little on human sexuality in general...What about Jesus’s own sex life? Again,

the Gospels are silent...” So, rather than admit he is falling into the classic faux pas of ‘arguing from silence,’ Coogan attempts to make the silence work in his favor. This is a sign of a man with an agenda. Like the typical Pharisee bent on preserving his life style in the face of the Gospel’s challenges, Coogan takes advantage of every loophole he can.

Doctrinal Issues:

In other areas, Coogan gives us a mixed bag of good and bad. On the one hand, he is careful to chastise his ideological colleagues for seeing more than what the Bible actually says (even though Coogan himself is as guilty of this eisegetical blunder as they are). For example, he tells them that it is probably not correct to say that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene or that she was a prostitute. On the other hand, Coogan makes elementary errors with the Hebrew text and its theological concepts, such as when he tells us that “for most of ancient Israel’s history strict monotheism was not the norm... We find an example in the opening chapters of Genesis... God addresses his pantheon... ‘Let us make humans in our image,’” which Coogan says is better interpreted as “because the gods are male and female, humans are as well” and speaks of God as “...the entire pantheon...the divine couple, Yahweh and his goddess consort.” This then leads Coogan to ask, “But was he [Jesus] really his divine father’s only child? No: the pantheon included other ‘sons of God,’ mentioned some half-dozen times in the Bible” (p. 176). Coogan then tries to support these heterodox interpretations by appealing to the passage in Gen. 4:1-6 about the Nephilim who were “the offspring of divine and human beings.” Yet, at the same time, Coogan calls the whole story a “myth” that was “preserved because stories of beginnings traditionally included a time when intercourse between gods and humans occurred and produced superhuman children.” He then adds, “they were the offspring of the king and queen of heaven and thus members of the pantheon over which the divine couple presided,” but concludes that such stories “stem from a living religious tradition in ancient Israel itself...” Last but not least, what would Coogan’s book be without his grand conclusion from this section: “Yahweh is envisioned as a sexual being”!

So, once again, we are left scratching our head. Coogan does not believe that Jesus was the divine Son of God anymore than he believes that Mary was impregnated by the Most High (which he says is “mythological language”), yet he appeals to other “myths” in the Bible to support such conclusions. Just what does Coogan see in the Bible as true? Is there anything that is not myth? How can Coogan support his alternative interpretation of Gen. 1:26, which he believes is a myth (“let us make humans in our image”), with an appeal to another myth as support? This is what happens when one begins with the premise that the Bible is no more divine than Shakespeare or Homer, as Coogan does. One never has a solid foundation from which to judge anything in the Bible. Everything it says about morality and theology is either based on myths, cultural biases, racism, prudishness, or other human idiosyncrasies. Everything is up for grabs. Before one knows it, one has made up a religion that is entirely antithetical to the Bible, and in the process he builds a platform from which to condone all kinds of aberrant sexual behavior, as Coogan does. Not once does Coogan look in the mirror and ask himself the honest question: are all my efforts to demythologize the Bible merely a product of my own intellectual myths, cultural biases, societal prejudices and sexual habits? In essence, Coogan has become the god who judges the Bible rather than allowing the God of the Bible to judge him.

May 2012

¹ <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2027582,00.html>

² The Hebrew word is זָבַח

³ The Hebrew word is זָבַח

⁴ <http://www.catholicintl.com/index.php/component/content/article/35-covenant/259-a-review-of-david-klingshoffers-why-the-jews-rejected-jesus>

⁵ Rev. 2:14, 20, 21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; 19:2.

⁶ Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say: I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” (Gen 4:23-24 RSV)

⁷ *Sane* is the transliteration of שָׁנָה used over 100 times in the Hebrew Bible.

⁸ *Ervat dabar* is the transliteration of עֵרְוַת דְּבָרָה which is in the construct form and thus makes the translation and meaning rather obscure. The construct form does not allow the translation to be “a thing of nakedness,” which would point toward an act of fornication. The construct form reverses the words to “the nakedness of a thing” and does not allow a tautology. The question then becomes what, precisely, is the nakedness of a thing? Based on Jesus’ interpretation for the origin to be Israel’s “hardness of heart,” the phrase appears to be God’s way of taking the legitimate reason for divorce (i.e., a thing of nakedness) and turning it upside down (“nakedness of a thing”) just as the Jews had turned Israelite society upside down with their inordinate sins and consistent lust. The resulting ambiguity in meaning for *ervat dabar* was what caused the difference between the Shammai and Hillel sects of the Pharisees in Jesus’ day, the one sect taking the more liberal view of *ervat dabar* and concluding that divorce was allowed for “every cause” and the other sect saying it was only allowed for fornication. Interestingly enough, the passage (Deut. 24:1-4) does not precisely give permission for divorce; rather, it says “if it happens that a wife is divorced for *ervat dabar*...” since the only command in the passage is that the wife cannot go back to her former husband if she is divorced from the second husband, even if he dies.

⁹ Jesus allowed divorce for fornication in the following passages: “But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity (Greek: *pornia*), makes her an adulteress” (Mat 5:32 RSV); “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery” (Mat 19:9 RSV), but Jesus did not allow remarriage for a divorced spouse (cf. Matt 19:9c; Rom. 7:1-4; 1 Cor 7:11-12, 39). Paul explains that fornication makes the two sinners “one flesh,” and as such it already competes with the prior “one flesh” bond of the first marriage. “Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two shall become one flesh’” (1Co 6:16 RSV). Since the illicit union cannot be undone, then it becomes a perpetual rivalry to the marriage, and serves as a natural separator of spouses, both spiritually and physically. Until any remedy is applied, the marriage remains in a natural state of defilement and separation. Hence, it is part of natural law that fornication is the only cause for divorce, for a “one flesh” union contracted with another person separates the spouses automatically.

¹⁰ Some hold that divorce for fornication/adultery would not be a reality since Deut. 22:22 states that a woman caught in adultery would be stoned to death, and therefore would not be divorced. But Deut. 22:22 specifies the need for two or three witnesses to the act of adultery before the sentence of death can be administered (cf., John 8:3-5; Matt 1:19). In cases where no witness were available but the husband had a suspicion of his wife’s adultery, he was left with the prescription in Numbers 5, after which he could divorce his wife. Moreover, the divorce mentioned in Deut. 24:1 is not stated as a permission but only as a consequence. The only command given in Deut 24:1-4 is that once married to another man, the woman can never be remarried to her first husband, even if the second husband dies.

¹¹ The only exception is Mark 10:12 where Jesus adds that a woman who divorces her husband cannot remarry. Since Deuteronomy did not make any provision for a wife to divorce her husband, Jesus could thus be referring to Gentile law which allowed a wife to divorce her husband, or he could also be referring to a change in Jewish law established by the Pharisees which allowed a wife to divorce her husband.

¹² But both the Old Testament and New Testament writers were adamantly against all homosexual acts. The Church was explicit on this issue, as is noted in the writings of the early Church Fathers. Below are just a few who have written on the issue: **Chrysostom**: “But when God abandons a person to his own devices, then everything is turned upside down. thus not only was their doctrine satanic, but their life was too....How disgraceful it is when even the women sought after these things, when they ought to have a greater sense of shame than men have” (*Homilies on Romans*, 4); **Chrysostom**: “This is clear proof of the ultimate degree of corruption, when both sexes are abandoned. Both he who was called to be the leader of the woman and she who was told to become a help meet to the man now behave as enemies to one another. Notice how deliberately Paul measures his words, for he does not say that they were enamored of one another but that they were consumed by lust for one another! You see that the whole of desire comes from an excess which cannot contain itself within its proper limits, for everything which transgresses God’s appointed laws lusts after monstrous things which are not normal. “The normal desire for sexual intercourse united the sexes to one another, but by taking this away and turning it into something else, the devil divided the sexes from each other and forced what was one to become two, in opposition to the law of God...The devil was bent on destroying the human race, not only by preventing them from copulating lawfully but by stirring them up to war and subversion against each other” (*Homilies on Romans*, 4). **Cyprian**: “If you were able...to direct your eyes into secret places, to unfasten the locked doors of sleeping chambers and to open these hidden recesses to the perception of sight, you would behold that being carried on by the unchaste which a chaste countenance could not behold. You would see what it is an indignity even to see...Men with frenzied lust rush against men. Things are done which cannot even give pleasure to those who do them.” (*To Donatus*, 9); **Severian**: “Paul did not say this lightly, but because he had heard that there was a homosexual community at Rome” (Commentary from the Greek Church); **Ambrosiaster**: “It is clear that, because they changed the truth of God into a lie, they change the natural use (of sexuality) into that use by which they were dishonored and were condemned to the second death. For since Satan cannot make another law, having no power to do so, it must be said that they changed to another order and by doing thing which were not allowed, fell into sin” (*Commentary on Paul’s Epistles*).

¹³ The Greek Septuagint does not contain either “Egyptians” or “Sodomites.”

¹⁴ Coogan tries to use other arguments to support his “inhospitality” contention, but they are specious. He argues that Jesus’ words in Luke 10:8-12 teach the sin of inhospitality. In reality, Jesus is only saying that the sin of refusing the Gospel is worse than the sin of Sodom simply because Sodom did not have the opportunity to hear the Gospel as the Jewish cities of Bethsaida and Chorazin did. Coogan also argues that the “other flesh” of Jude 7 refers to the men of Sodom wanting to have sex with angels, and Coogan uses Genesis 6:1-4 as teaching that angels had sex with women. All of this is mere conjecture. As it stands, the clause “they went after other flesh” is from the Greek ἐκπορνύσασαι and ἀπελθοῦσαι ὀπίσω σαρκός ἑτέρας. The first is a combination of the Greek “pornia,” which is derivation for our English word “pornography,” and the prefix “ek” which means “out of.” The second phrase literally means “going after different flesh.” The operative word here is “different,” which is from the Greek ἑτέρας (from which we get the word “heterodox”). In this context it refers to sexual relations that are “different” than normal sexual relations, *i.e.*, homosexual relations.

¹⁵ But at one point the Greek does, indeed, describe homosexuality with one word. In 1 Cor 6:9, St. Paul uses the word ἀρσενοκοῖται stating that such persons will not inherit the kingdom of heaven: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, **nor homosexuals**.” This word appears one other time in the New Testament, 1Tm 1:10: “and immoral men and **homosexuals** and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.” The Greek word ἀρσενοκοῖται is a combination of the words ARSEN = “male”; and KOITUS = “sexual copulation.” The English word “coitus” means sexual intercourse. So here we have a word in Greek that is about as precise as a word can be to describe two males having sexual relations. The word ἀρσενοκοῖται literally means “male sexual relations.” We also find the word ἀρσενοκοῖται in classical Greek literature many years before and after the New Testament made use of the word. It appeared in the *Revenue Laws of Ptolemy Philadelphus* 6, 10, 25; *Anthologia Palatina* 9, 686, 5; and *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum* viii, 4, p. 196, 6; 8; and the

Sibylene Oracles 2, 73 and *Polycarp to the Philippians* 5:3. The pedigree is established, and thus, any claims to “homosexuality” surfacing as merely a “nineteenth century” classification is simply fallacious.

¹⁶ “Sodom” is used as a figure of sexual sin and is referred to as the place of divine judgment over two dozen times in Scripture (cf. Dt 29:23; 32:32; Is 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jr 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Lm 4:6; Ez 16:46-56; Am 4:11; Zp 2:9; Mt 10:15; 11:23; Rm 9:29; 2Pt 2:6-8; Jude 7, the last of which specifies homosexuality).

¹⁷ The Hebrew of Deut 23:17 contains both *qahdesh* (male prostitute) and *qedehshah* (female prostitute). The Masorites put different vowel pointing on *qahdesh* than the Hebrew word for holy *qohdesh*, so that they could be distinguished.

¹⁸ According to a homosexual activist site: “Boswell expanded Bailey’s efforts with the original thesis that Christians were not particularly homophobic before the 13th century in spite of the death penalty imposed by Christian Roman and Byzantine Emperors and the anathemas hurled at sodomites by the early Church Fathers. He claimed that the secular governments, far more than Inquisitors, and without direct Christian inspiration, carried out most of the arrests, trials, tortures and executions of sodomites during the 14th and 15th centuries... Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, alongside Deuteronomy 22:5 and 23:18, expressly forbade male homosexuality and cultic crossdressing and prostitution. Furthermore, the account of the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 19 gave quasi-historical example and sanction to the death penalty prescribed in the Priestly Code. All these texts, read in the *Vetus Latina* and then in St. Jerome’s translation, gave divine sanction to intolerance. To this day they remain the ineluctable “bottom line” in the arguments of the foes of gay rights, cited by the Supreme Court in *Bowers v. Hardwick*. Even if at the outset the scope and purpose of these provisions of the Mosaic Law was narrower than the blanket condemnation that later became normative, the Judaic tradition was unambiguous; in Hellenistic Judaism, perhaps as an abreaction to Greek *paiderasteia*, male homosex was made tantamount in gravity to murder. Palestinian Judaism did not lag behind: the Talmud (b. Sanhedrin 73a) went so far as to ordain that one had the right to kill another male to prevent his committing this crime, a plea still entered as “homosexual panic” in certain gaybashing cases in the guise of a justly enraged “victim” approached for homosex... The Christian emperors, who became the head of the Church and remained so in Orthodox lands Caesars and popes instituted the death penalty at first perhaps only for certain, then for all, homosexual acts. The sons of Constantine the Great decreed an antisodomy law in 341[10], and the decree of Theodosius the Great in 390, followed by Justinian’s *novellae* 77 and 141 in the sixth century, ordained death by burning for the “sin against nature”. Moreover, Justinian initiated a long tradition of making tabooed sexuality the scapegoat for society’s ills, asserting that God sent plagues, famines and earthquakes as punishments for sodomy. Hence at the outset of the Middle Ages Imperial law, inspired as it was by theologians, prescribed death”... the Corpus retains the antihomosexual laws promulgated by Justinian’s predecessors. Justinian shrewdly perceived, however, that like divorce, sodomy could not be extirpated by a stroke of the pen. Tenaciously, he issued new laws in 538-9 and again in 559 which reiterated the death penalty already ordained in 390 by the Theodosian Code 9.7.3. In the first of his *novellae* (no. 771), he ascribed homosexual lust to diabolical incitement and claimed that “because of such crimes there are famines, earthquakes and pestilences,” inferring that sodomy endangered the very physical basis of the empire. Such reasoning was a superstitious regression, a point conveniently ignored by Christian apologists who would have Justinian act only out of “sincere concern for the general welfare.” The second (no. 141) was the first law ever to cite Sodom, a land supposedly still burning with inextinguishable fire. Mingling magnanimousness with severity, Justinian appealed to such sinners to confess themselves humbly and penitently to the Patriarch of Constantinople, consigning those not repenting “to the avenging flames.” With his consort Theodora he conducted a witch hunt, publicly disgracing several sodomites, whether penitent or not. The rulers alleged sodomy to persecute those “against whom no other crimes could be imputed,” (Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*) or whose fortunes offered tempting adjunct to the imperial treasury (Procopius, *Secret History*, 11:34-36)... The Eclogue of Leo III (d 741) reduced the penalty to castration but later codes such as the mid-ninth century *Basilica* reaffirmed death. Other emperors themselves were nevertheless reputed to have indulged. Theophanes the Confessor lists the “impious lust for males” among the crimes of the iconoclast Constantine V (741-775), who sought to limit the monks’ power. (http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/BIB/Homosexuality_in_the_Middle_Ages.htm).