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WHEN TWO BECOME ONE:  
Reconsidering Marriage as a Sacrament in Protestant Theology

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By  
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APPROVAL SHEET

WHEN TWO BECOME ONE:  
RECONSIDERING MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT IN PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

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## **Dedication**

To and for my wonderful wife, Lauren  
May our love shine brightly into the eschaton

## Abstract

Protestant theology has historically rejected marriage as sacrament, a rejection which continues to resound in the majority of contemporary Protestant scholarship. Yet many, if not most, arguments against sacramental marriage tacitly follow an outline set forward by Luther and Calvin which, if examined with critical scrutiny, is based on a problematic soteriological premise. In light of this, the present study sets forward a comprehensive argument in favor of Protestant theology reaffirming marriage as a sacrament through systematic investigation into the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), New Testament, and Christian history. After developing a critical hermeneutic founded on realist epistemological grounds, a continuous line is drawn from Genesis to Revelation that affirms marriage as not only sacred in a general manner, but specifically designed by God for the welfare of human society, both physical and spiritual. This consistent thread is shown in the fabric of early Hebrew society, despite its historical acceptance of polygamy as a social necessity, and served as a central symbol of the prophetic rebukes of Israel/Judah. A yearning for a spiritual aspect of marriage that transcends even death can be seen arising from the eschatological hopes of the Israelite textual traditions, which come into further expression in the New Testament. While the words of Jesus concerning the fate of the remarried widow are often used to negate or dismiss eschatological expectations for marriage, a positive evaluation is given that provides a historical context for interpretation which affirms rather than denies eschatological hope. Celibacy, the only other acceptable Christian sexual pattern, is developed by Paul in 1 Cor 7 as a careful balance of issues that does not relegate marriage as spiritually inferior, as it is often taken. On the basis of these scriptural traditions, the historical development of the sacramental theological tradition is presented with emphasis on the contributions of Augustine of Hippo whereby marriage is part of the larger sacramental fabric while still maintaining a special place due to its pre-fallen origin and symbolic import. In contrast, the Scholastic tradition sought pseudo-empirical formulae whereby sacraments served as instrumental causes of Grace. It was on this basis that the Protestant tradition, originating initially in Luther and Calvin, rejected marriage as a sacrament due to its apparent disassociation with the instrumental transference of Grace, which they reserved for baptism and communion. As a consequence, the Protestant tradition inherited problematic theological bases that have in turn opened the door to divorce by functionally allowing secular society to determine marital norms. In contrast, the present study provides a positive presentation for a cohesive view of marriage derived from Scripture that advances marriage as a special and sacred institution much in need of revitalization and respect.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*So they are no longer two but one flesh.  
What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.<sup>1</sup>*

It is often remarked in contemporary cultural forums that marriage is in a state of crisis and that it needs to be defended, particularly its sanctity.<sup>2</sup> This call has resounded among Christians who feel threatened by the promulgation of alternative sexualities and lifestyles that are considered to be divergent from if not downright incompatible with the ethos of the traditional biblical worldview.<sup>3</sup> Yet too often the call to defend marriage amounts to little more than condemnations of these alternative sexual patterns with little recognition of the actual essence of marriage as being sacred or even further why it should be defended at all.<sup>4</sup> Even if it is granted that non-normative patterns of sexuality are contradictory to the Christian ethos, focusing on rejecting these alternatives does little to defend or even define marriage beyond the basic formula of one male plus one female. The consequence is that Christians are widely becoming associated with social antagonism and accused of hate speech for these so-called

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 19:6, English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001). Parallel Mark 10:8-9. Here Jesus is citing/alluding to Gen 2:24. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations are from the ESV.

<sup>2</sup> A good example of this can be seen in Pope Francis' comments May of 2015 which referred to marriage and family as facing a "serious cultural crisis". His comments are cited and evaluated in Pete Baklinski, "Pope Francis: Marriage and family facing 'serious cultural crisis'", *Life Site News*, May 28, 2015, accessed September 8, 2017, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/pope-francis-marriage-and-family-facing-serious-cultural-crisis>.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cliff McManus, *God Defines and Defends Marriage* (Silicon Valley, CA: GBF Press, 2017), 11-14.

<sup>4</sup> While anecdotal as evidence, simply entering the phrase "sanctity of marriage" into an online search engine will immediately give numerous examples of this direct connection to the condemnation of homosexual marriage. For example, a recent (2015) op-ed article supporting the "Sanctity of Marriage Act" is almost exclusively focused on the family as a social and civic unit, with religion only mentioned in association with the first amendment: "Anywhere same sex marriage is the law of the land, the first amendment right to freedom of religion becomes null and void." Dennis Shannon, "Why I Support the Sanctity of Marriage Act" April 16, 2015, accessed September 5, 2016, [http://www.auburnvillager.com/opinion/article\\_b6b652ba-e442-11e4-a9dc-7f05c879dcd8.html](http://www.auburnvillager.com/opinion/article_b6b652ba-e442-11e4-a9dc-7f05c879dcd8.html). Critical literature affords relevant studies which will be assessed in the literature review below.

defenses of marriage while the cultural sway continues to push ardently against such efforts.<sup>5</sup> Thus even as there remains a widespread sense in contemporary Christianity that divergent sexual lifestyles are to be resisted and marriage is to be defended, there is also a growing sense of shame and even guilt associated with any attempt to articulate this. Is the debate over sexuality already lost to the winds of secularization? Can Christianity establish a substantive definition and defense of traditional sexual norms that offers a way forward?

### RESEARCH QUESTION

Even as so much of contemporary discussion surrounding the supposed defense of the sanctity of Christian marriage primarily antagonizes alternative sexual patterns, the present study will set this task aside entirely in order to focus instead on providing a positive argument for marriage as a sacred institution and specifically for Protestantism to reconsider its identification as a sacrament. To fulfill this goal, the study will advance in two primary modes of investigation, though deeply intertwined: textual and historical. As it will be articulated below in more detail in the section on methodology, Christian theology is first and foremost a reflection of the sacred texts of the Holy Bible, which include a wide variety of writings ranging over the course of millennia that include a diversity of genres as well as stages of editing and canonization.<sup>6</sup> Even

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<sup>5</sup> The op-ed cited above was written specifically in response to a prior article that claimed that support for the Sanctity of Marriage Act was comparable to the denial of minority rights under Jim Crow legislation. Don Eddins, "Same-sex marriage: Let's hope Alabama does not suffer through another embarrassing era of defiance" Feb 5, 2015, accessed September 5, 2016, [http://www.auburnvillager.com/opinion/same-sex-marriage-let-s-hope-alabama-does-not-suffer/article\\_5e252ad4-ad49-11e4-be66-7f85fc7c51f1.html](http://www.auburnvillager.com/opinion/same-sex-marriage-let-s-hope-alabama-does-not-suffer/article_5e252ad4-ad49-11e4-be66-7f85fc7c51f1.html). These accusations are often found in comments in online forums wherein any association with the Christian position on the issue is branded as bigotry.

<sup>6</sup> The specifics of theological methodologies will be articulated in the methods section below, as there is of course much debate over the precise nature of the Bible and its relationship to theology. Even while these definitions vary greatly among theologians, there is a rather universal agreement that for theology to be considered Christian it must account for the biblical texts in a foundational regard.

while monolithic definitions are not to be expected from such a diverse source, it will be imperative for a full study on the development of sexual themes through the Hebrew-Israelite-Judaic society into the period of the New Testament.<sup>7</sup> Yet to conclude with the writings of the New Testament would not suffice for a comprehensive study of the nature of marriage as it has evolved in the intervening two millennia, thus historical inquiry will serve to further develop the foundational ideas mined from the biblical sources as these concepts were variously tested in the crucible of the historical furnace. Accordingly, the two foundational questions the present study will seek to answer are first, what does the Bible say about the nature of marriage, and second, how has the Christian Church historically developed this legacy?

### *Relevance of Study*

While it is frequently stated that fifty percent of new marriages will end in divorce, in reality the situation is much more complex, even leading some contemporary studies to conclude that the divorce rate is beginning to decrease.<sup>8</sup> Part of the difficulty in establishing clear objective facts about the contemporary state of marriage involves the processes of collecting such data and the further complexity in evaluating its relevance. Even if the statistics concerning divorce rates may appear to support the idea that marriage is on the rebound, at least part of the cause for this trend is that fewer people are getting married, many are waiting until later in life to do so, and it has become standard practice for couples to date for much longer periods when compared to

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<sup>7</sup> The NT thereby reflects both continuations and departures from the prior Hebrew norms particularly in relation to the infusion of Greco-Roman ideologies involved with the acceptance of Gentiles into the early church.

<sup>8</sup> Brittany Wong, "The Truth About the Divorce Rate is Surprisingly Optimistic," *The Huffington Post*, December 2, 2014, accessed September 6, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/02/divorce-rate-declining\\_n\\_6256956.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/02/divorce-rate-declining_n_6256956.html).

prior generations whereby broken relationships are more likely to resolve in breakups rather than in divorces.<sup>9</sup>

So why does there remain such widespread fear that marriage as an institution is being eroded or even destroyed by contemporary culture?<sup>10</sup> At least part of the problem involved is the loosening of sexual morals in the wake of the sexual revolution of the mid-twentieth century. Purely objective standards, such as marriage and divorce rates, are insufficient for gauging the state of contemporary marriage; instead, a key feature that is perhaps even more demonstrative is the public perception of sexual norms and acceptable behaviors. A recent article in *National Health Statistics Reports* evaluating the shift in perceptions on sexual behavior patterns not only finds that acceptance of pre-marital sex and cohabitation is rising but even further that approximately three-quarters of respondents agreed that “It is okay to have and raise children when the parents are living together but not married.”<sup>11</sup> Thus even as divorce rates and perceptions of divorce have started to improve, a considerable part of the problem is that marriage is increasingly being seen as a non-essential institution.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, as a broad social issue, there is a rising need for a definitive explanation of the nature of marriage and its value.

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<sup>9</sup> Miller provides a summation of a cluster of recent studies that have drawn this conclusion. Claire Cain Miller, “The Divorce Surge is Over, but the Myth Lives On,” *The New York Times*, December 2, 2014, accessed September 6, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/02/upshot/the-divorce-surge-is-over-but-the-myth-lives-on.html>. Divorce statistics are largely based on demographic reports from the National Center for Health Statistics, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this study, American culture is the primary social setting though implications are broader.

<sup>11</sup> Jill Daugherty and Casey Copen, “Trends in Attitudes About Marriage, Childbearing, and Sexual Behavior: United States, 2002, 2006–2010, and 2011–2013,” *National Health Statistics Reports* 92 (March 2016): 3.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Wanda Parham-Payne, Bette J Dickerson, and Tekisha Dwan Everette, “Trading the Picket Fence: Perceptions of Childbirth, Marriage, and Career”, *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 40, no. 3 (2013) 85-104; A. B. Barr, Simons, R. L., & Simons, L. G. “Nonmarital Relationships and Changing Perceptions of Marriage among African American Young Adults”. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77, no. 5 (2015), 1202-1216.

Yet in considering the value of marriage, many defenses center on its civic or social value, citing the stability of the family unit and its role in the production of good citizens.<sup>13</sup> Although most Christians would agree that marriage also represents a sacred rite and is not purely reducible to its social aspects, on what basis is this claim to be made? It is thus an essential task to consider what makes marriage not only a valuable civic institution but also something that represents theological worth as well. Accordingly, the present study proposes to define marriage as a sacred Christian practice, and more precisely as a sacrament, to demonstrate why it should be considered more than just a cultural apparatus of the production of family units.

### *Literature Review*

Before moving into the methods and proposed thesis of the present study it is instructive to review a representative selection of prior studies both to demonstrate what has already been claimed in critical literature, as well as to defend the need for further development of the topic. One of the problems with approaching the present subject is that a large portion of the literature written on it is primarily directed toward the practical promotion of marriage and often amounts to a sort of sub-category of the self-help genre.<sup>14</sup> Filtering down to only those studies which can be strictly considered critical academic works, there are four basic categories herein reviewed as

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<sup>13</sup> A keen example of this approach currently in its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition is W. Bradford Wilcox, *Why Marriage Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (West Chester, PA: Broadway Publications, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> A few examples will suffice to demonstrate this category, listed in chronological order: Glenn T. Stanton, *Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997); Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 1999); Douglas Weiss, *Sex, Men, and God* (Lake Mary, FL: Siloam, 2002); Alice P. Matthews and M. Gay Hubbard, *Marriage Made in Eden: A Premodern Perspective for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *A Daring Promise: A Spirituality of Christian Marriage* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Triumph, 2007); Jonathon Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015). These studies often have good arguments but as a whole tend to focus on the practical side of promoting marriage and sexual values rather than the theoretical or theological, which is the emphasis of the present study.

instructive prior studies: general theological treatments, ethical considerations, historical studies, and sacramental theology. It should further be noted that one of the reasons for the need for the present study is that marriage as a topic is very rarely treated with serious consideration by Protestant theologians.<sup>15</sup> Considering how vital sexuality is to the human condition and how important marriage is for the community, both secular and religious, it is rather astonishing that so little is said of it in Protestant systematic theology. Thus, a secondary motive of the present work is to establish sexual theology, specifically dealing with marriage and the production of the family, as a legitimate topic for consideration in systematic theology.

Starting in the general treatments of theological sexuality, a positive counterexample and exception to the general observation noted above that systematic Protestant theologians typically devote little or no direct attention to sexual themes or the topic of marriage is found in Paul Jewett's posthumously published theology, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human*, which is grounded in the *imago dei* and subsequently devotes an unusual amount of attention to anthropological and therefore sexual themes.<sup>16</sup> Of particular interest is that Jewett not only engages with the topic of marriage variously but also devotes a detailed excursus on the topic of sacramentalism and its relation to marriage.<sup>17</sup> While Jewett's theology is in certain regards

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<sup>15</sup> It will be argued this is at least partially a result of the dissociation of marriage as sacrament. Indeed, Protestant theologies tend to devote shockingly little discussion to the issue of Sacramentalism at all. For example, Roger Olsen devotes a mere seven pages to the topic with no mention of marriage at all, *The Story of Christianity* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 265-267, 404-408. Stanley Grenz meanwhile focuses his theology on the concept of community yet has no discussion of marriage besides marking it in a list among the other seven enumerated sacraments before cursorily and summarily rejecting it as non-sacramental, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 518-519.

<sup>16</sup> Paul K. Jewett, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human, A Neo-Evangelical Theology*, ed. Marguerite Shuster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). Jewett's critical expertise in the area of theological anthropology was demonstrated in his earlier work, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Points of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 222-228.

atypical of systematic works, particularly given the interpolation of his sermons (an editorial move by his editor M. Shuster) but also the regular applications of theological themes in ethical discourses, even so his work remains an important contribution to the topic and in particular gives credence to the claim that sexual themes should not be excluded in critical works of theology. Yet even while his work does develop sexuality and marriage in a theological mode, the discussion of Sacramentalism is generally limited and his final conclusion on the topic is highly reflective of his existentialist philosophical leaning as clearly summarized by his claim that “the oneness (*henosis*) of marriage [is] an instance of the I-thou encounter that rests on a unique, lifelong fellowship with one’s sexual partner.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, while Jewett makes a remarkable contribution to the topic, it does not obviate the need for the present study as his definition could just as easily be applied to secular relationships.

Another valuable, if somewhat dated, work on the topic is the anthology *Male and Female: Christian Approaches to Sexuality* edited by Barnhouse and Holmes which includes a diversity of perspectives divided into four headings: historical studies, contemporary issues, psychological approaches, and theological perspectives.<sup>19</sup> In the theological section there is an article generally titled “Theology of Marriage” which paints with rather broad strokes the argument that marriage and sexuality should be taken seriously as an object of theological inquiry, though the article itself does not provide much textual or critical substantiation and concludes somewhat generically that Christian theology of marriage should discern “how sexual and family relationships can be seen to reveal the glory of the Lord.”<sup>20</sup> More particular to the

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<sup>18</sup> Jewett, *Who We Are*, 227.

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes III ed. *Male and Female: Christian Approaches to Sexuality* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> Rosemary Haughton, “Theology of Marriage”, in *Male and Female* ed. Barnhouse and Holmes (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 221.



present inquiry, there is an article devoted to the question of sacramentality but is somewhat unorthodox in its treatment of the topic by inquiring not of the sacramentality of marriage as such but rather of sexuality itself. The claim thereby is that sexuality should be considered sacramental in regards to its capability to provide existential fulfillment and completion in sexual bonding and coupling (not unlike Jewett's existential orientation).<sup>21</sup> Once again, while upholding sexuality as positive, this does little to establish its specifically spiritual aspect nor does it develop marriage as a sacrament but rather sexuality more broadly construed.

In addition to these theological treatments of marriage and sexuality, there are a variety of works by Christian scholars on themes of sexual ethics, perhaps most notably Stanley Grenz' *Sexual Ethics* which is particular to the Evangelical Protestant tradition.<sup>22</sup> As a work of ethics the main goal of this text is to provide applicable ethical discourse on a range of related issues, but Grenz is also adroit in his establishing of a theological framework to understand anthropology, and thereby sexuality.<sup>23</sup> Further, Grenz devotes approximately a third of the work to the issue of Christian marriage, including corollary topics such as divorce and adultery, and in particular articulates a brief but specific reasoning for the four-fold purpose of marriage: an outlet for sexual expression, the creation of the family, providing companionship, and as a "spiritual metaphor".<sup>24</sup> Even as Grenz offers one of the better developed Evangelical perspectives on

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<sup>21</sup> "As a man I am only partially human. That other part of me has to be enacted by someone else. The aim of Christian sexuality is not satisfaction but completeness." John W. Dixon Jr., "The Sacramentality of Sex" in *Male and Female*, ed. Barnhouse and Holmes (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 252.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997). For a comparable Catholic study cf. Todd A Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *Sexual Ethics: A Theological Introduction* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> In particular, note the theological implications of sexuality in Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 44-51.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 66-71.

sexual themes, his treatment of the topic exemplifies the need for further studies as it does little to develop the spiritual aspects which are left vague and open to metaphor and symbolism leaving connections to critical theology tangential at best.

Another vital contribution to Evangelical sexual ethics that has proven foundational to subsequent studies is Lewis Smedes' *Sex for Christians*, originally published in 1976 which, not unlike Jewett noted above, takes an existentialist oriented approach.<sup>25</sup> In essence, human sexuality is entirely purposeful and driven by the *imago dei* whereby both the individual and the collective are equally essential components for the fulfillment of the potential goodness of the created state; thus the person seeks completion through experience of the other, exemplified by the sexual polarity of the male/female dichotomy which is foundational to the experience of marriage.<sup>26</sup> Positive sexual ideals thus enhance one's humanity and celebrate the purposeful design of sexuality, fidelity and fulfillment, while in contrast negative sexual behaviors are those that distort the inherent goodness of divine creation and do violence to the dignity of the individual.<sup>27</sup> While ethical oriented studies such as Grenz and Smedes contribute greatly to the topic, they further demonstrate the need for the present study due to the generally minimal development of the theological concepts which are foundational to the task.

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<sup>25</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, *Sex for Christians: The Limits and Liberties of Sexual Living Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). This work has been highly influential on Judith Balwick and Jack Balwick, *Authentic Human Sexuality: An Integrated Christian Approach* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008) as well as Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, 13-26.

<sup>27</sup> It is of interest to note that Smedes focuses most of his attention to the topic of sexual distortions and leaves considerably less developed the positive ideals which are mainly only alluded to in passing and not systematically developed as he does with the distortions. The Balwicks correct this lack in their subsequent study which is more even-handed in its development.

Moving now to the third category of texts, historical treatments of Christian views of marriage are also instructive to the present study and will be particularly important to fill out the historical argumentation that will follow in the second half. The historical inquiry herein will be focused on two major periods: first, the development of the early church through to Augustine and the establishment of the medieval synthesis, and second, the rise of Scholasticism in the late medieval period and the Reformation reaction to it. Fortunately, there are two historical tomes that correlate to the basic contours of the present investigation.

First, the early church period through to Augustine has been historically developed by Philip L. Reynolds' excellent treatise *Marriage in the Western Church* which focuses on the process whereby Christianity took the pre-existing social institution and assimilated (or baptized) it, what he calls the process of Christianization.<sup>28</sup> To understand what elements of marriage were redefined or altered by this process, Reynolds first develops the civic background of the institution in both its Romanic and Germanic forms. The core of the work then develops how the early church came to redefine marriage and its associated cultural norms including sexual behavior such as adultery which had been previously defined narrowly as a wife having sexual relations with someone other than her husband but was interpreted instead by the Church Fathers as extending to both partners equally.<sup>29</sup> One of the reigning principles for this process of reinterpretation was the notion of parallel laws, the *lex humana* and *lex divina*, so that the prior Roman laws were conceived as the former and were more permissive while the higher divine law was more radical in its norms and prohibitions.<sup>30</sup> After concluding his survey of the

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<sup>28</sup> Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Christian Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 122-124.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 141. The law of the church, then, is an attempt to navigate between these poles, the human and the divine.

Christianization process in the early church, Reynolds offers a summary of Augustine's perspective on marriage which he argues offered a key development whereby marriage was conceived as not simply a physical, carnal, and social relationship but also a spiritual one which did not depend principally or solely on sexual behavior as its defining characteristic.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally Augustine's view of marriage as sacramental is developed to argue that he did not view it in the same light as Baptism or the Eucharist but still regarded it as fundamentally sacramental such that it is an indissoluble bond that when infused with the power of Christ is made holy and spiritual from something that is otherwise essentially physical and social.<sup>32</sup>

Reynolds will serve as a vital contributor to the chapter on the origins of sacramental theology and in particular aid in reconstructing Augustine's view, but the present study will endeavor to go further and integrate additional primary research from Augustine's writings to develop the sacred aspect of marriage and challenge the scholarly perception of his position.

Second, on the topic of the shift from the late-medieval period to the Reformation, John Witte Jr. provides an excellent historical overview in *From Sacrament to Contract* of the Scholastic influenced canon law and critical responses of the various mainline Protestant traditions.<sup>33</sup> The over-arching thesis of the work is that the evolution of ideas on the topic of Christian marriage has been "from a sacramental model that prioritizes canonical norms and ecclesiastical structures to a contractarian model that prioritizes private choice and contractual strictures."<sup>34</sup> Even as Witte recognizes that the terminology shift appears to indicate a process of

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<sup>31</sup> Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 257.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 308-309.

<sup>33</sup> John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 12.

secularization, he resists this conclusion and argues instead that despite the outward language of spirituality in the canon law that it was just as secular as the contractarian approaches of the Reformation, which he takes to be more spiritual than typically acknowledged. While Witte's study will be an important secondary source for the historical reconstruction of the Reformation debate concerning the sacramentality of marriage, the present study will argue against his claim that the replacement of sacrament with covenant and contract respectively did not in fact diminish its sacred value. Indeed, the above noted general lack of theological treatments of marriage in Protestant systematic theology lends initial credence to the claim that desacramentalizing marriage eventuated in its secularization, yet it remains to be proven in more critical detail precisely how the rejection of marriage as non-sacramental played out in Protestant theology and the negative effects that it produced.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to these two excellent historical overviews of the two periods that this study will examine, there is a substantive critical anthology devoted to the topic of "Covenant Marriage".<sup>36</sup> Even while this nomenclature initially harkens to the Reformed tradition, the text takes a much wider scope including selections from Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim perspectives in addition to the Reformed view and resolves in the final chapters on social and legal issues. Accordingly, this text proffers a wealth of secondary source material for the present study and will be helpful as a guide of the various views on the topic from across the religious

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<sup>35</sup> Note briefly in contrast how Catholic systematic theologies deal more directly and significantly with marriage due principally to its qualification as a sacrament, thus in the purview of theological study. For an example of a recent work that demonstrates this, cf. Thomas P. Rausch, *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016). This excellent and relatively brief (only 300 pages) text devotes an entire chapter to the subject of sacramental theology in addition to a chapter on the "healing and vocation sacraments" whereby marriage is developed specifically and significantly. This sort of engagement is fundamentally lacking in Protestant theology.

<sup>36</sup> John Witte Jr. and Eliza Ellison, ed. *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

spectrum. Even while this anthology will prove valuable to the present study it still does not obviate the need for it as the focus is principally on the function of covenantal themes in marriage with only passing reference to the topic of sacramental theology and its relation to marriage.<sup>37</sup>

The theological, ethical, and historical studies surveyed demonstrate contemporary critical works on the topic of Christian marriage while not replacing the need for the present study which will argue for the re-introduction of sacramental marriage into Protestant theology. It has been observed that there is a marked dearth in critical Protestant theology concerning what makes Christian marriage specifically holy or sacred with most treatments focusing rather exclusively on rejecting it as a sacrament as noted above. In contrast to this trend in Protestantism, there is a relative wealth of theological writings on marriage in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions that are conjoined with its sacramental identity. Thus while the present study is principally focused on the issue as it relates to the development of the Protestant tradition, it will be greatly enhanced by an understanding of the Catholic and Orthodox views which tend to be more developed (and poorly understood in Protestant circles); thus a concise review of relevant contemporary scholarship on sacramental theology and marriage is in order.

First, the most important critical study on the Catholic view of the sacraments can be found in Joseph Martos' *Doors to the Sacred* which provides a thorough overview of the development of sacramental theology from its incipient roots in human religiosity through the

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. John Witte Jr. and Joel A. Nichols, "Introduction" in *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Witte and Ellison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 14-15. James Turner Johnson, "Marriage as Covenant in Early Protestant Thought: Its Development and Implications" in *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Witte and Ellison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 125. The Catholic and Orthodox selections include more development of sacramental theology, to be expected, though oddly their relevant remarks are not listed in the book's index under the topic of *sacramentum*. Michael Lawler, "Marriage as Covenant in the Catholic Tradition" in *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Witte and Ellison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 76-78; Stanley Samuel Harakas, "Covenant Marriage: Reflections from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective" in *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Witte and Ellison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 96-97.

major eras of Christian development: early, medieval, Reformation, and contemporary.<sup>38</sup> After a broad historical overview of the concept of sacrament through these periods, the remainder of the work is devoted to developing the special history for each of the seven enumerated Catholic sacraments, their origins, articulations, debates, and applications. Therein marriage is given significant development including its roots in prior traditions, the process whereby the church gradually took over its institutional elements, and the various debates over its nature. Of particular interest is how candid and critical Martos is in describing the internal debates in the process of the Scholastic enumeration of the seven sacraments and the difficulties in applying such definitions to marriage as well as how they were resolved.<sup>39</sup> Thus while Martos writes primarily for a Catholic audience, his work is invaluable to the study of sacraments and fleshes out the topic considerably more than Protestant texts typically provide.

As noted already, there is a pronounced lack of serious theological studies on the topic of marriage in Protestant scholarship, accentuated further by the relative abundance in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions. In the Catholic tradition, Michael Lawler's text *Marriage and Sacrament* offers a clear and concise view of sacramental matrimony that considers both biblical and historical warrants for such identification as well as corollary topics such as divorce and remarriage, the role of sexuality, and childbearing.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Daniel Hauser's *Marriage and Christian Life* offers a more extensive survey of the topic treated by Lawler and in particular extends the discussion of human sexuality and anthropology, once again grounded in the central

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church, Revised Edition* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Triumph, 2001), 3-144.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 374-375.

<sup>40</sup> Michael G. Lawler, *Marriage and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993).

concept of sacramental theology.<sup>41</sup> Julie Rubio meanwhile presents a Catholic theology of marriage in *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* that is less centralized on sacramental theology and instead focuses on the relationship of marriage to the production of family units, thereby devoting extended discussion to the relative roles of family members and the relationship to Christian identity.<sup>42</sup> Even this brief overview of contemporary Catholic sources demonstrates the relative seriousness which is given in the Latin tradition to the topic of marriage in marked contrast to Protestant treatments.

In addition to the Catholic resources mentioned, there are also important contributions from the Orthodox tradition which will further inform the present study. Even while Western Christianity has only relatively lately begun to reconnect with its Eastern brethren, and thus the amount of scholarship remains less developed in Western academia, there still a relative abundance of important studies which should be remarked upon.

John Meyendorff, one of the most important Orthodox authors for introducing the West to the Eastern traditions, provided a relatively brief but substantive account in *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective*, which briefly traces the history of the rite through to the contemporary Orthodox positions including ancillary issues such as family planning, abortion, and clerical celibacy.<sup>43</sup> Points of distinction that emerge include the acceptance of clerical marriage contra Catholicism, the inclusion of the “crowning ceremony” which was an acknowledgement of the marriage rite’s identification as a sacrament, and the acceptance of second marriages through the use of a second more somber rite. Another foundational yet quite brief text by John Chrysavgis,

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<sup>41</sup> Daniel Hauser, *Marriage and Christian Life: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (New York: University Press, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Julie Hanlon Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> John Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975).



*Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage*, lays out a relatively straight forward thesis for marriage as sacrament as grounded in the restoration of the whole cosmos in the resurrection (a distinctly Orthodox focal point) whereby marriage serves “as a way of life and love, as a God-given reality, mediating the meeting between the eternal and the temporal. What concerns the Church at all times is nothing less than salvation, the sanctification of every person, every relationship, everything – to the last speck of dust.”<sup>44</sup> Of further interest is the catalogue of primary sources which occupy the bulk of the text following the short treatise on marriage that cover from Basil the Great in the fourth century through to twentieth century Orthodox sources.<sup>45</sup>

A more extensively developed treatment that has been translated for the benefit of English readers is *The Sacrament of Love* by Paul Evdokimov which demonstrates a distinctly Orthodox perspective to be differentiated from similar Catholic treatments for its insistence on the inherent good of human sexuality and resultant rejection of clerical celibacy that exposes the bias toward asexual normative patterns which it belies.<sup>46</sup> Evdokimov presents a powerful treatise praising marriage which in light of the infusion of Christ is capable of transfiguration whereby “sexuality undergoes a progressive spiritualization” that reflects the overall sanctification of Christian living.<sup>47</sup> Orthodox treatments of the topic also tend to appeal to the concept of mystery as a ground to the discussion of sacrament, a relevant point considering the Latin *sacramentum* is

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<sup>44</sup> John Chrysostom, *Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 65-173.

<sup>46</sup> A point made also by Meyerdorff but developed more in this treatment. Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985). Evdokimov is particularly lucid in his balanced treatment of celibacy as an acceptable calling for the monastic ascetic type, but reinforces that the individual must feel called to this special charism while the priesthood is a universal calling to all believers, even if clerical ordination is reserved, once again, for those called. Cf. 65-103.

<sup>47</sup> Evdokimov, *Sacrament of Love*, 19. Evdokimov is particularly to be commended for his philosophically astute treatment of these topics.

a translation of the Greek *mysterion*, but as a result the type of precise analytic definitions produced by the Scholastic tradition do not infiltrate Orthodox thought which instead tends to allow for a more holistic and generally mystical approach to the topic. Further, it is interesting to note that all three, Meyerdorff, Chrysavgis, and Evdokimov, apply their theology of marriage to the Orthodox liturgical wedding ceremony which demonstrates how the abstract ideas are concretely manifested in ritual. As with the Catholic sources, these Orthodox texts will prove valuable to the present study and provide an additional perspective that historically avoided some of the pitfalls that will be developed herein, particularly the Scholastic formulas, canon laws, and the resultant Reformation reactions, and can offer thereby at least some insight into how to elevate marriage as sacramental without succumbing to these problems.

Even as most Protestant theological works devote very little attention to the issue of sacramental theology, there are two notable exceptions which focus entirely on it. James White represents the mainstream Protestant perspective on the issue in *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* that offers a brief historical reconstruction of Sacramentalism and the Reformation debate as well as more detailed introductions to the two commonly accepted Protestant sacraments, baptism and the eucharist.<sup>48</sup> Even while the bulk of the work is devoted to these two rites, the five rejected sacraments are treated in a chapter which briefly lays out the argumentation for each, including marriage, and the Protestant justification for its exclusion.<sup>49</sup> While White does support these exclusions, in the final chapter he notes the serious need for critical studies in the area of Protestant Sacramentalism which has been largely silent, consequently “little sense of sacramental efficacy survives among many Protestants” which he

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<sup>48</sup> James F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 119-139.

further traces to “the Enlightenment [which] decisively severed any connection between the spiritual and the physical.”<sup>50</sup> Thus even as White continues to contend against marriage as a sacrament, his work does highlight the need for further Protestant critical investigation such as what is proposed in the present study.

Finally, perhaps of most direct interest for the present study in recent texts on sacramental theology is John Colwell’s *Promise and Presence* which attempts to revitalize the debate over the sacraments by offering a positive accounting, from a Baptist perspective no less, for all seven traditional rites to be reconsidered as sacraments (not just sacramental).<sup>51</sup> The main line of argument maintains that the problem which the Reformers were reacting to was the “notion of grace, then, as an automatic event, as a something at our disposal, as an outcome that can be presumed, [which] is a fatal theological distortion.”<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, while the Scholastic tradition was ultimately the cause of this error, Colwell works to demonstrate that Thomas Aquinas did not originate this view. Rather, it was his interpreters in the canon law tradition whose formulas for ritual efficacy caused the problematic shift in thinking, what is described as “disposable grace” as it focuses on the manner in which the Church does its business of dispensing grace.<sup>53</sup> In its stead, the dominant Protestant reactionary position was that of “unmediated grace” whereby the individual experiences the divine directly without need for the ministrations of the priesthood but this in turn distorts the intrinsic nature of the human-divine relationship which is

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<sup>50</sup> White, *Sacraments*, 141. To be clear, the quote goes on to indicate that Catholics have not been immune to this process.

<sup>51</sup> John Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration in Sacramental Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005). Colwell specifically rejects the label of sacramental and argues positively for each as a proper sacrament.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 29-30.

always mediated.<sup>54</sup> Thus sacraments for Colwell should be properly considered as signs of the union of Christ and Christian which permeates all aspects of life but particularly as represented through certain ritual functions, including marriage. Given its Protestant perspective and aim of resacramentalization, this work stands as the closest analogy to the present study, though it does not replace the need for further study as it is a general overview of sacramental theology and covers all seven traditional sacraments whereby marriage is featured, but not centrally. Further the majority of the work is devoted to the specific arguments about each sacrament individually with only brief accounting for the origins of Sacramentalism, both textual and historic. Indeed, one of Colwell's express aims in his work is to renew the discussion over the sacraments in Protestantism in the hope that further critical studies will be completed, of which the present study fits precisely.

The literature review offered herein is certainly not exhaustive of the field of literature it represents, but rather has presented the principle critical sources on the topic as categorized into four general headings: theological, ethical, historical, and sacramental. In the course of the subsequent investigation many more sources will be consulted, primary and secondary, relative to the various specific topics of inquiry, yet for the purposes of this review it has been demonstrated what recent major critical literature has already been produced, how it relates to the current study, and that none of the texts reviewed obviates the need for the present study.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to articulate a substantive defense of the sacramental identity of Christian marriage, it is necessary to consider what sources should be consulted. The well-known source

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<sup>54</sup> Colwell, *Promise and Presence*, 71-72.

theory referred to as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral offers a simple framework to consider the variety of sources that contribute to Christian theology, namely scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.<sup>55</sup> Even while scholars in the Wesleyan tradition are diverse in their interpretations of the precise relationship of the source categories, it is generally clear that Scripture serves for Wesley and his heirs as the most fundamental and important category.<sup>56</sup> Indeed the centrality of the Bible as the norm of theology is endemic to Protestantism and its central tenet of *sola scriptura*, classically articulated by Luther.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, in order to establish the nature of Christian marriage, the Bible must be the foundational source; but simply announcing this does little to articulate precisely on what terms and using what methods the biblical texts should be interpreted. Similarly, historiographic principles will need to be examined as well, which will drive the second half of the study that looks beyond the Bible to its historic interpreters. Yet before moving into these methodological considerations, the basis of inquiry itself must be accounted for by explicating the epistemological axioms assumed by the study.

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<sup>55</sup> As noted below in the section on biases, the present study will assume a general Evangelical Protestant orientation that does not attempt to pertain to a single denomination, though the Wesleyan influence should be noted it mainly enters as a methodological principle rather than a denominational emphasis as such.

<sup>56</sup> “Thus, we can see in Wesley a distinctive theological method, with Scripture as its pre-eminent norm but interfaced with tradition, reason and Christian experience as dynamic and interactive aids in the interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture.” Albert Cook Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (1985): 9.

<sup>57</sup> While sometimes the Quadrilateral is taken as being in opposition to *sola scriptura*, Thorson argues persuasively that it is actually a natural extension of it, as Scripture remains the central arbitrating standard, “Although *sola scriptura* and the Wesleyan quadrilateral seem to contradict, they complement one another because both offer vital insights to the process of critically understanding and dynamically applying biblical and historic Christian beliefs, values, and practices in the world today.” Donald Thorsen, “Sola scriptura and the Wesleyan quadrilateral.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (2006): 8.

### *Epistemological Axioms*

Before moving into the more specific principles of interpretation, textual and historic, which will drive the present study, the fundamental foundation of epistemology should first be articulated, even if briefly, in order to set forward a basic conception of truth and the parameters whereby it comes to be known. Of the various authors on theological epistemology, none has impacted the present study more than Carl F.H. Henry who provided the most critically developed account of epistemology by an Evangelical author in the first volume of his magnum opus *God, Revelation and Authority*.<sup>58</sup> While too many theologians neglect the question of epistemology, the study of how truth claims are known and tested, Henry demonstrates particular sophistication in his treatment of the topic, especially in his extensive and powerful critique of Barth on this issue.<sup>59</sup> The basic nature of truth must be established for theology to have any validity; “if the question of method and verifiability is left unanswered, even the Christian himself can have no rational certainty in his commitment to God.”<sup>60</sup> In response to this inquiry, Henry establishes the following axiom:

Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its verifying principle; logical consistency is a negative test for truth and coherence a subordinate test. The task of Christian theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Since theology is a rational discipline, it must of necessity declare which method or methods of knowing it considers appropriate to the knowledge of God, and what tests for religious truth it approves... If the epistemological task is neglected, critical scholars will suspect theology’s claims, mistrust its fundamental objectives and feel free to slander theology as human speculation engaged in manufacturing man-made theories about God... Without persuasive epistemic credentials, Christianity will be assimilated to the historical approach prevalent in the modern intellectual world where all events are set in the context of developmental contingency and any claim to finality and absolute uniqueness is leveled.” Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Vol. 1 God Who Speaks and Shows, Preliminary Considerations* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 213.

<sup>59</sup> “Nonetheless [Barth] considers the norm of logical consistency on which science insists to be unacceptable to theology, and does not champion a theology free of contradiction. Barth curiously both champions and disowns consistency with remarkable inconsistency.” Ibid, 206.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 214.

Herein Henry establishes a dense formulation for the appropriate epistemological basis of Christian theological inquiry that can be broken down in the following six paraphrased claims:

1. All truth is revealed by God
2. Truth is detected by reason
3. Truth is verified by scripture
4. Truth must be logically consistent
5. Truth should cohere with other known truth
6. Theology's task is organizing scriptural revelation

These claims in turn demonstrate a series of premises upon which the axiom functions, most importantly the notion that truth is a purposeful gift to humanity by a transcendent personal deity who chooses to reveal it.<sup>62</sup> In order to facilitate this process, humanity was designed with the powers of reason that allows for truth to be conceived of, recognized, and tested. Yet the human mind alone is insufficient in the search for ultimate, particularly salvific, truth and thus must be verified by scripture which functions as the Word of God, both historic and present.<sup>63</sup> Further, while the intellect functions instrumentally to detect truth and test it, Henry is insistent that reason does not manufacture or otherwise produce truth; reason is not the source, which is rather God alone.<sup>64</sup> While Henry's epistemological axiom provides a clear and substantive foundation, two considerations should be made to augment it further.

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<sup>61</sup> Henry, *GRA I*, 215.

<sup>62</sup> Thornbury summarizes this clearly, "What we know, Henry argues, we know because God wants us to know it." Gregory Allen Thornbury, *Recovering Classical Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 54.

<sup>63</sup> Henry's main critiques of Barth concern his mystical bent whereby revelation becomes primarily, if not solely, imminent and personal, thus subjective. Henry's mistrust of the experiential causes him to swing perhaps too far in the opposite direction, leaving little room for experience in his epistemology, but his critique is still apt. Further, his emphasis in the resulting volumes on the personal aspects of the divine reinforce that revelation is both past and present; "Yet the ministry of the Spirit of God, distinct in each operation, is as essential and unique in enlivening God's revelation in the lives of his people as it is in the phenomena of divine incarnation and illumination." Henry, *GRA IV*, 277.

<sup>64</sup> Henry, *GRA I*, 225.

First, in relation to the task of theology, Henry has been critiqued on the charge of rationalistic propositionalism due to his emphasis on the intellect and the cognitive aspects of theology.<sup>65</sup> This impression is to be noted variously, as when Henry writes that the “ideal procedure [of theology] would be to arrange all the truths of Christianity logically by summarizing and systematizing the texts and teaching of Scripture and applying an exposition of the logical content and implications of the Bible on its own premises.”<sup>66</sup> While there is nothing outright objectionable in this statement, it does appear to limit theology to a purely cognitive discipline whose main function is simply to deduce truth-claims and arrange them. Even as Henry was careful not to rely exclusively on cognitive and propositional methods, an overreliance on such needs to be carefully guarded against.

Second, in considering the four sources of the Quadrilateral, it would appear that Henry gives primary emphasis to Scripture and Reason while Tradition (History) and Experience are not as clearly developed. Even as Henry himself engages in evaluation of contemporary events, such as the counter-cultural and Jesus people movements of the mid-twentieth century,<sup>67</sup> he does not adequately connect the theological and historical tasks. Scripture itself, it must be remembered, underwent a lengthy process between its initial composition and its reception by contemporary readers, and thus to have a full and proper understanding of its meaning and message the historical qualities, including the context behind its writing, the processes of redaction and canonization, and the subsequent interpretive traditions, should all be taken into account as part of the total theological process.

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<sup>65</sup> See Thornbury’s excellent summary of this critique, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism*, 54-57.

<sup>66</sup> Henry, *GRA I*, 239.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 112-134.



Just as historical inquiry should be a vital aspect of biblical interpretation and therefore theology, so too theology must ultimately be connected with experience. While Henry himself experienced a powerful conversion experience whereby his prior life as a secular up-and-coming newspaper editor was suddenly realigned,<sup>68</sup> his theological methodology does little to incorporate experiential aspects and much to condemn them.<sup>69</sup> This lack is likely a consequence of his decisive critique of Barth's theology as being built upon an ultimately experiential basis whereby revelation is conceived most fundamentally as an active personal encounter with the divine, rather than as an objective communication or record. Although Henry's critique of Barth is important to consider and experience is certainly too volatile to function as a proper source for theology, instead it should function as the final test of a theological system whereby the ideas are applied into the lives of Christians. Thus methodologically, the present study will not consider experience as a source for its conclusions, but rather claim that its conclusions must ultimately prove relevant through the impacts it makes on the reader (and author).

To summarize, it is the axiomatic premise of the present study that there is a transcendent deity that has both designed humanity with the ability of reason and provided specific historical manifestations which together make intelligible communication between divine and mortal possible. In order to understand the content of this revelatory process the sacred texts of the Hebrew and Christian canons will provide the primary source for the investigation herein. Further, the process of revelation did not conclude with the authorship of the Scriptures, but rather extends through the historic reception and interpretation insofar as these are understood as representations of various attempts to comprehend the divine intention. Reason will throughout

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<sup>68</sup> Carl Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian* (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1986), 46.

<sup>69</sup> "At most an empirical test can indicate whether religious beliefs have a perceptually discernible significance." Henry, *GRA I*, 262.

provide the basic tool of evaluation and the consistency with scripture will determine which historical interpretations are to be championed and which are to be challenged. To this end, the interpretive methodological principles, textual and historical, will next be enumerated.

### *Hermeneutics and Historiography*

As the present study proposes to follow two main lines of inquiry, textual and historical, accordingly the primary methodological considerations of these two disciplines and their relative impacts on the argumentation that follows should be articulated. The aim of the study is not an exploration in hermeneutics or historiography as such, but rather, is reliant on various suppositions developed by these disciplines, so the following comments will be brief. Similar to the epistemological axioms explored above, both textual and historical scholarship rely on a series of unprovable premises upon which their conclusions are founded. Further, there are some important interpretive claims that must be set aside for the purposes of the present study in order to proceed directly to the topics at hand.

To begin, as it relates to textual interpretation, perhaps the most important premise concerns the viability of the transmission of meaningful communication between author and reader. In light of the criticisms of the skeptical movement known as deconstructionism, it is important to note the debate that has emerged concerning the nature of communication itself and the relationship involved in the act of communication. If, as it has been claimed above, there is a transcendent personal deity that desires to communicate with humanity, the act of revelation (both generally in nature and specifically in scripture) thereby involves a particular intentionality and the act of interpretation accordingly follows from this baseline.<sup>70</sup> In essence, if God has

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<sup>70</sup> Vanhoozer's treatment of the topic is the most critical and helpful to establishing this, as his goal is: "to articulate and defend the possibility, in the vale of the shadow of Derrida, that readers can legitimately and

indeed communicated in scripture then the key to interpreting that communication must be the intentionality of the divine author. In contrast, deconstructionism, particularly as espoused by Jacques Derrida, is based on the broken relationship between the intention of the author and the reception of the audience whereby the interpreter is unshackled from the authorial intent and can be liberated to play with the received meaning at his/her discretion.<sup>71</sup> Since all interpretation inevitably involves the whims and biases of the interpreter, why not just set the meaning free and embrace the looming conclusion that meaning is determined by the reader not the author? That is the basic hermeneutic of deconstructionism which the present study rejects in favor of a realist view of communication involving both objective and subjective features that upholds reliable conceptual transaction between author and reader.

To arrive at a meaningful and faithful interpretation of something as complex as the Bible will require significant critical attention and the realization of the many factors involved including the historical context of the writings, the history of transmission, redaction, and canonization, the subsequent interpretative traditions they spawned, and their critical reception by contemporary scholarship. Rejecting both the presumptions of critical modernism which claimed to lay hold of absolute certainty and the radical skepticism of deconstructionism, this study will follow the hermeneutical paradigm espoused by Vanhoozer that “there is an alternative to the direct choice that deconstruction gives us between absolute knowledge and absolute undecidability. The alternative is that we have, and are responsible for acting on, relatively *adequate* knowledge about texts – adequate for specific communicative purposes.”<sup>72</sup> A fully

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responsibly attain literary knowledge of the Bible...there *is* a meaning in the text, it can be known, and readers should strive to do so.” Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is there a Meaning in this Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 24.

<sup>71</sup> According to deconstructionism “all claims about reading for “the meaning” are actually covert strategies for pursuing one interest to the exclusion of others.” Ibid, 156.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 397.

developed textual interpretation must therefore seek out the original intention, maintaining to the best of one's ability to distinguish the nuances between the human and divine authors while recognizing the text as a unified whole, as well as inquire how this intentionality translates to the present readership. But the final product, as indicated above in the epistemological considerations on the theological task, should not simply be cognitive but also demonstrate relevance, another point Vanhoozer highlights:

“What it means” is ultimately not a matter of theory only but of practice, not a matter of sheer knowledge but of wisdom... I suggest we may find a criterion in the demonstration of wisdom, in the *right use* of literary knowledge. Those whose minds and visions have been shaped by the biblical story and by the other types of communicative action will develop a Christian *habitus* – a way of life ... *Those who rightly apply “what it meant” attest the efficacy of the Word.*<sup>73</sup>

To this end, Vanhoozer lists four areas that provide evidence of meaningful application of biblical interpretation which will further guide the present study: faithfulness, fruitfulness, forcefulness, and fittingness.<sup>74</sup> One must be faithful to the intention of the text and seek to draw that meaning forward to the present in order to show how application of concepts enhance the life of the reader and the community. This must also involve ethical integration whereby the intention of the text should be used as a corrective on the life patterns of the community. Accordingly, the interpretations offered herein are not merely attempts at correct cognitive assertions but rather aim further to enhance the understanding of the Christian community so that the lives of Christians may be improved in their walks with Christ. Even as the present study is academic and critical in nature, the conclusion will be devoted to summarizing the findings herein in the hopes that the extensive theoretical developments herein will impact the church as well as the academy.

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<sup>73</sup> Italics original. Vanhoozer, *Meaning*, 431.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

In addition to these foundational hermeneutical principles, some observations on historiography as it will relate to the present study should be made. Just as a foundationally realist perspective will be taken in regards textual interpretation, namely that the intention of the author *can* be detected and *should* be determinative of interpretation, similarly this study will assume a realist historiography that allows for relative confidence in the accuracy of historical reconstructions.<sup>75</sup> Although history is often assumed to be scientific in its methods, in actuality the comparison with the natural sciences is limited due to the fundamental distinction that history cannot be repeated, which is the basis of the empirical methods of natural science.<sup>76</sup> One cannot establish testing conditions whereby historical events are remade; rather historical events are singularities that must be regarded indirectly through the effects they produced in the historical record which are, in turn, colored by the historical nexuses these witnesses occupied.<sup>77</sup> In this regard, historiography bears significantly more resemblance to legal than to scientific argumentation, as it collects relevant data, including archaeological findings, written records, eye-witness accounts (if available), and then reconstructs a coherent narrative that best fits the collected data.

Interpretation of history is thus inevitable and should be properly sublimated into the process. The aims of historical inquiry are not to establish absolute certainty but rather should aspire, much as Vanhoozer indicates in relation to textual meaning, to produce responsible accounts based on relatively adequate evidential bases. Even further, while certain aspects of

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<sup>75</sup> For a thorough articulation of historiographic considerations which will be adopted herein see Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 29-132.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Ibid, 102-104.

<sup>77</sup> While this is a generally regarded phenomenon in historiography, a particularly insightful examination of the complex relationship between the present and past is offered by Francois Hartog, "What is the Role of the Historian in an Increasingly Presentist World?" in *New Ways of History: Developments in Historiography*, ed. Gelina Harlaftis (London: IB Taurus, 2010), 239-252.

historical inquiry are given near canon status by historical consensus, such as with well-established dates, even agreed upon events must be finally interpreted by the historian as to their relative value and legacy. For example, while the historical details surrounding Constantine's ascension are rather well established, there remain significant debates over whether he was actually a convert to Christian ideology or merely an opportunistic pagan and further whether or not the ushering of the Imperial Christian age was positive for the development of Christianity. Accordingly, the present study will recognize the distinction between established "facts" of history, those that enjoy widespread scholarly consensus, and narrative reconstructions which invariably include theoretical evaluations and speculative implications.

Finally, it should be noted that certain long standing scholarly debates will be set aside for the purposes of the study. In particular, the findings of source criticism and the arguments concerning authorship will not directly impact the findings of the study and are in essence inconsequential to it. For the study of the Hebrew Bible, the debates over the construction of the Torah, its relationship to Moses, the process of redaction, source theories, and the like will be set aside peremptorily so as to focus entirely on the project at hand. Similarly, the complex relationship of the Gospels in the New Testament will be referenced only when necessary and the authorship debates will not be entertained herein because they have no impact on the findings. In essence, it will be assumed that the traditional attributions are accurate mainly for the purposes of referencing the various authors, and that the implicit authority of the texts as canonical is beyond dispute. This is not to say that these various critical developments in biblical studies are without merit for consideration, but simply that it is the view of the author that they do not bear significantly on any of the interpretations that the following study will offer and should thus be left to the side for the sake of brevity and clarity.

### *Expectations, Limitations, and Biases*

Having established the theoretical bases of inquiry as well as the methodological considerations involved in making textual and historical claims, a brief word on the consequent expectations of the study including its limits should be made as well as a note concerning the subjective aspects invisible behind the study in the life of the author. As explained above, absolute certainty should not be expected from critical endeavors such as the present study which invariably involve a range of interpretive claims that necessarily requires speculation to some extent. Instead of claiming to possess the singular correct interpretation on any one of the many topics that will be covered herein, the present study rather endeavors to produce a faithful accounting of the biblical and historic Christian conception of marriage that reinforces its sacred value by supporting its identification as a proper sacrament. To this end there will be interpretations and claims, textual and historic, that will be challenged and, as discussed above, the tests of Scripture and reason will be maintained as the standards for evaluation.

In addition to the expectations and aims of the study, its limitations should also be noted. As the primary goal of the study is to produce a consistent, coherent, scriptural account of Christian marriage as a sacrament, the study will survey a variety of texts and traditions to establish this central unifying aim, but as the thesis (detailed in the next section) is a constructive one, it will necessarily have to survey a range of issues and will not provide entirely exhaustive treatment of any of these sub-topics. In essence, the present work is not intended merely as a catalogue of every reference to marriage in the Bible or Christian history, which would be too broad and amorphous a task; rather it seeks to highlight particular relevant texts and emphasize certain features of theological disagreement, not to survey every possible source on every topic

covered but rather to demonstrate the claim that Christian marriage is a sacrament. This is of note simply in regards the nature of the task as often dissertation research is focused very narrowly. Instead, the present work will progress along a broader constructive approach that maintains a singular focus no less, but surveys a relatively wide range of texts and topics to this singular end.

Finally, in approaching a critical study it is important for the author to step out from behind the authorial partition for a moment and express the subjective elements and biases involved in order to account for their relative impact on the study. Even as scholars can work to be objective and critical in their research, there remains still the personal motivations and desires which play no small part in forming the impetus for study. In this case, it should be noted that I initially began to research the topic of marriage due principally to becoming married and in so doing I desired to understand this vital relationship particularly as it relates to my Christian identity. In this way, it might be said that I experienced the sanctity of marriage first and that this framed my motivation for establishing a theological explanation of this encounter. In particular, a motivating issue that prompted me further into this area of study was the historic claim that celibacy is spiritually superior to marriage, something that my experience challenged and so it contributed to my motivation to research on the issue. Even further, as I have continued in my marriage relationship I have been led to consider its ultimate purpose, both in this life and in the life to come in the resurrected state. What, if anything, of marriage will follow into the eschaton? In seeking these questions, then, it must be admitted that my motivation has been primarily to understand and defend marriage, espouse its sanctity, and elevate it as a vital spiritual discipline by confirming it as a sacrament. This may therefore be counted as a bias as it is certainly elemental to the orientation of the present study, but even so I maintain strongly that the admission of this bias does not invalidate or disqualify the findings of the study which will



progress on the aforementioned methodological grounds and maintain a critical academic perspective throughout.

### **PROPOSED THESIS**

Having established the relevance of the present study and its theoretical foundations, the principle argumentation can now be summarized beginning with the central thesis which reaffirms marriage as a sacrament. The historical theological controversy which the study will enter concerns the nature of the marital institution in its relationship to the role and identity of the Church. The majority of Protestant traditions have historically rejected marriage as a sacrament, so the nature of this debate must be understood and considered in order to highlight the distinctive claims of the present study. It will be thus argued that the Protestant rejection of marriage as a sacrament was primarily due to a skewed understanding of sacramental theology as espoused by the late-medieval Scholastic tradition which claimed it as a sort of mechanical process whereby if the necessary ingredients are present then the sacrament is concluded as efficacious in the transference of Grace.<sup>78</sup> While the Protestant Reformers challenged many aspects of the Scholastic tradition, they also assimilated much of its method as well, even if unwittingly, and this is reflected in their assumption of the definition of sacrament as an agent of dispensing Grace which, they argued, is the proper function of Baptism and the Eucharist alone. The present study will instead advocate that this understanding of sacrament, as the vessel of the administration of divine Grace, is faulty and should be reconsidered. In its place, the more holistic sacramental theology of Augustine will be supported whereby the rituals of the visible sacraments serve as a sign rather than a cause of Grace which is given wholly, freely, and solely

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<sup>78</sup> Grace in capitalized form is used herein to denote the soteriological principle of salvation specifically.

by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Just as an individual becomes saved by accepting this freely given Grace, marriage can be ratified by faith in the covenantal promises of the scriptural Testaments and thereby attain sacramental status. Marriage, then, is a sacrament insofar as it is infused with the divine Grace of Christ, whereby an otherwise social and physical institution can be raised to the status of the sacred and spiritual in the hope of the resurrection and eternal life.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

To demonstrate the proposed thesis, the present study will advance along two lines of inquiry, as outlined in the methodological considerations above, textual and historical. To understand the nature of Christian marriage, the origins of the institution in its biblical formulations, both in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament, will each be examined in order to determine a theoretical foundation upon which the historical theories enumerated in the fourth chapter, highlighting the early church and Reformation periods, will be tested. To demonstrate the contours of the argumentation of the present study, brief outlines of each chapter and its primary claims will be provided as follows.

### **MARRIAGE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE**

To understand the biblical perspective, it is imperative to include a critical study on the conceptual and historical development of the Hebrew Bible. On the issue of marriage, three principle themes will be developed: its origin in the creation and paradisiacal state, its development as a social and sacred covenant, and its expression in the prophetic oracles as a symbol of spiritual fidelity between Israel and God. This section will therefore seek to answer

the questions of where does sexuality and the marital relationship originate, how did it evolve historically in the Hebrew-Israelite-Judaic culture, and what spiritual significance did the prophetic movement derive from it?

### *Sexuality in the Creation*

To begin, the origins of creation itself should be considered with focus on the relative place of sexuality in the creation of humankind. This necessarily involves questions of anthropology to develop the role of sexuality and gender relations in human nature. In particular, should sexuality be considered original to the human condition or is it a product of the Fall? To answer this question thereby demonstrates whether sexuality is an essential element to human identity or ancillary and disposable. To support the theologically essential nature of sexuality as part of the divine creative intent, three aspects will be articulated following a reading of the Genesis account, namely the nature, function, and distortion of sexuality. Sexual identity is an inescapable and foundational aspect of human nature, highlighted equally by the summary identification of gender differentiation in Gen 1:27 as well as the existentially rich narrative of the creation of woman in order to bring the man to completion in Gen 2:18-24.<sup>79</sup> Whether sexuality was active in the paradise state prior to the expulsion of the primal couple contributes to consideration of whether sexual function itself can be conceived of in a sin-free mode. It will thus be argued that there is no reason to claim that sexuality proceeded from the Fall due to strong support for the pre-fallen sexuality particularly in the primary command to be fruitful and multiply in Gen 1:28. The Fall is not the source of sexuality but rather accounts for its distortion, as foreshadowed by the gender oriented curses of Gen 3:16-19. Accordingly, it will be argued

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<sup>79</sup> As it will be argued, there are two biblical options for Christian sexuality: marriage and spiritual celibacy. It is only within these two potential frameworks that the human being can attain existential completion.

that the marriage state, of monogamous reciprocal relationship between male and female, is prior to the Fall and not therefore a product of it; rather it is the problems associated with marriage, particularly adultery and divorce, that are a consequence of the primal sin. Marriage, then, can be considered apart from its diminishment by sinful behaviors and concluded to be an essential aspect of the original design and intent for human identity.

### *The Hebrew Marriage Covenant as Social and Sacred*

If the monogamous standard set by the Eden narrative and the implication of the binary pattern of sexuality in the cosmic creation is to be accepted as normative, then why does the proceeding history of the Hebrews allow uncritically for the adoption of polygamous patterns of marriage? Even further, what is to be made of the various indications that sexual chastity was only to be expected of wives and not equally of their husbands? Initially these aspects can be somewhat summarily accounted for as reflections of the Fallen State indicated by the gendered curses noted above, but this accounting needs to be augmented by a study of the social role of marriage in the Hebrew culture. Given the hazy conceptions of the afterlife demonstrated by the earlier texts of the Hebrew Bible (*sheol*), it is widely recognized that the primary means to immortality or anything resembling such, in that context, was through the production of a lasting legacy via procreation. The vital importance of family creation was, it will be argued, the primary impetus behind the acceptance of polygamous patterns of sexuality that were principally intended to ensure that important men, especially tribal leaders, would establish a lasting familial legacy (what Augustine will refer to as the good of *proles*). Reflecting this, many (if not most, though not all) sexual sins of the Hebrew-Israelite culture were on account of their shirking the central role of sexuality for the production of family, such as the sin of Onan in Gen 38.

Beyond the purely social elements of the marriage relationship there remained stirrings of a deeper spiritual perspective that recognized social covenants were also sacred oaths. This is most visibly represented by the saga of Abraham and Sarah whereby their plan to procure an heir via Hagar the slave-maiden was rejected by God such that it was Sarah who would have the child of covenantal promise. Even as some marriages appear clearly as primarily social, such as the businesslike arrangement of Isaac and Rebekah and the seven-year service cycles of Jacob in his quest to marry Rachel, the seed of something deeper, something spiritual, was taking root. The creation of children in the family of Abraham was not simply a matter of physical inheritance, but also represented a spiritual covenant. This is demonstrated most clearly in the sibling rivalry of Esau and Jacob whereby the former sells his physical inheritance to the latter, but also is deftly outmaneuvered in obtaining the special blessing of their father. Thus, at once the family was both a physical and a spiritual covenant, and so there emerges in the biblical perspective a notable tendency towards criticism, even if initially implicit, of the polygamous social pattern. This can be seen in the regular rivalries and complexities involved with polygamous unions, such as the animosity between Sarah and Hagar, Leah's jealousy for Jacob's love of Rachel, Samuel's mother Hannah's barrenness in contrast to her rival, and, most importantly, the direct association between Solomon's excessive number of wives and concubines with the acceptance of idolatry. Even as polygamy was apparently accepted in the Hebrew-Israelite culture, the association of marriage with the spiritual covenants, even if only incipient in the early stages, will lead to a spiritual awakening by the prophets who explicitly connected monogamous fidelity with the divine covenantal promises.

*Marital Fidelity in the Nevi'im and Ketuvim*

Even as polygamous social patterns were widely accepted in the Hebrew-Israelite society and most sexual sins were associated with inhibiting the production of family, there was yet embedded in the institution a deep association with the special covenant of the Abrahamic tradition that served as the leaven of criticism. While these ancient narratives depict much social strife and uncertainty coming from polygamous unions, the connection between polygamy and polytheism became explicit in the early Israelite monarchy during the reign of Solomon, whereby his search for power led him to make covenants with foreign regimes via marriages of alliance. This, in turn, led to his allowing of the construction of temples within Jerusalem dedicated to the various foreign gods that were worshiped by these political wives, a point upon which the biblical text is highly critical.

This association of polygamy and polytheism came to full expression in the ministry of the latter prophets who flourished between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, whereby the relationship of Israel to God was explicitly likened to a marital covenant. While marital fidelity is a regular image throughout many of the prophetic oracles, it is of particular focus in the life of Hosea who not only used it as a central rhetorical image but was further called to perform a prophetic act by marrying a woman of ill repute, having children by her, then condemning her, and finally renewing their covenant. Even while the spiritual elements of marriage were primarily metaphorical and analogical for the latter prophets, there was yet a progression towards a higher reality hinted at in poetry and verse, of a love that defies even death and a hope for eternity.

## **MARRIAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

By the time of the New Testament, the prior acceptance of polygamy had largely faded and been replaced by a monogamous norm that echoed the teachings of the prophets. The early rabbinic tradition, with its emphasis on the personal actualization of the Torah, widely held that to be an elder of the community, a teacher of the Law, one must be married and producing children as that was the first divine command (Gen 1:28). Against this Second-Temple cultural background, the ministry of Jesus affords a collection of relevant teachings on sexual norms that developed out of the larger spiritualization of the Torah. Even more specifically, an argument arising from a Sadducee inquisitor concerning the relation of a widow to her various husbands in the resurrected state prompted a mysterious and complex response from Jesus that demonstrates the difficulty of translating present social norms into the eternal incorruptible state.

Beyond the Gospels, Paul of Tarsus, one of the earliest and most important scriptural interpreters of Jesus, gives the most extensive teachings on the relative value and theological nature of marriage in his interactions with the Corinthian church concerning sexual matters and the married state. With the proper critical rendering, Paul's apparent support of celibacy does not denigrate marriage and actually hints toward the resurrection hope by supporting the right of widows to not remarry and connecting physical sexuality with spiritual identity by rejecting the use of prostitutes by Christians. Taken together, it will be argued that the New Testament reinforces the essential norms set forward by the prior Hebrew tradition while including the hope of the resurrection, though speaking of such with precision is beyond our present ability.

### *Actualization of the Torah*

In order to evaluate how Jesus interpreted the nature of marriage, His teachings on the norms of the prior Hebrew society are imperative. In particular, the present study will push against the widespread tendency, particularly notable in Protestant circles, to sweep aside abstractly the strictures of the Hebrew Torah in the name of abrogation of the Old Covenant. This hermeneutic does damage to the direct teaching of Christ, who repeatedly upheld the mandates of the Torah and even increased them. Indeed, Christ demonstrates a consistent interpretive framework, whereby He challenged the narrow literalistic renderings required of the Pharisaic disciplines by healing on the Sabbath and eating with the ritually unclean. Yet even while challenging these norms, Jesus simultaneously increased the demands of the Law by claiming that it is not enough to not commit outright breaches of the Torah, such as adultery and murder, but rather that these external acts demonstrate a deeper spiritual reality which corresponds to a higher standard than merely behavioral patterns. Accordingly, it will be argued that Christ followed the basic dualism already set forward in the simultaneous view of marriage as social and sacred, physical and spiritual, and that as a whole the ministry of Jesus demonstrates powerfully in support of marriage as a theologically important relationship.

### *Marriage in the Eschaton*

In addition to the teaching of Christ concerning the relationship with the prior Hebrew Law, perhaps the most complex and difficult passage on the topic of marriage is found in the Synoptic controversy with the Sadducees over the question about status of the widow in the resurrection (Mark 12:18-27 and parallels). As this passage becomes a crux for the rejection of marriage as having eternal significance, it is vital to scrutinize it in order to understand the



various complexities and ambiguities of the text and the contours of the expressed teaching. The principle task is to place the teaching properly in its original *sitz im leben* in order to understand the intended meaning of the terms and phrases involved. From this historical-critical rendering the proceeding phrase that in the resurrection persons will be “like angels in heaven”, must be analyzed in order to understand how this rather mysterious inference modifies the assertion that persons will no longer take nor be given in marriage. Broadly construed, there are three principle positions historically given to interpret this phrase, but the present study will demonstrate that these interpretations are either plagued by contradictions or ambiguities that leave them ultimately unsatisfying. It shall then be argued that the proper foundation for interpretation of the whole pericope lies in the final assertion of the passage, namely that God is the God of the living, not of the dead, which is often overlooked or relativized in critical interpretation to the detriment of the overall evaluation of the passage.

Accordingly, it will be argued that the present life will be radically transformed in the resurrection and ultimately only that which is pleasing to God will persist. As Jesus reminded the Sadducees, God is a God of the living, not of the dead, and thus humanity’s *only* hope for life after death is to be found in the everlasting promise of God to His people. Thus in a very real sense, death is the final end of marriage, just as death is the end of all human affairs, as is expressed quite clearly in Ecclesiastes. However, for the community of faith there is a radical hope that death is not the end but rather the beginning of life in/with God in the marriage of the Lamb. Only God has the power to raise the dead to life and so the only expectation that a married Christian can have of there being a future state for marriage is to be found in the radical hope in the God of the living, not of the dead. Thereby Jesus condemned the Sadducees for their materialism, their ingrained belief that this life was all that mattered, even despite the witness of

the Torah to the contrary; thus all that they could conceive of in defining the resurrection was a simple continuation of the present life and order. Instead, Jesus showed that only in the radical hope that God is the God of the living can there be *any* continuation of *any* human relationship after death. We must, therefore, be careful about how much of our assumptions from this earthly existence we import into our notions of the resurrection wherein every tear will be wiped away and humanity will live in perfect harmony with God.

### *Paul and Corinthian Sexuality*

Although Jesus provides some important, albeit conceptually difficult, teaching concerning marriage and divorce, the Gospels offer very little specific teaching on the subject. Consequently, the letters of Paul have featured at the center of Christian sexual ethics and instruction concerning marriage as he engaged in specific controversies that go well beyond the more abstracted teachings of Christ found in the Gospels. In particular, 1 Corinthians 7 generally serves as the basis of Pauline thought in regards to the practice, role, and responsibilities of the marriage covenant. Yet many have held throughout the intervening ages that Paul viewed marriage as an essentially negative concept as merely an outlet for sexual lust, decidedly secondary and inferior to celibacy. Instead, it will be argued that Paul's instruction concerning marriage in 1 Cor 7 demonstrates a radical Christian theological ethic of sexuality that balances equality with gender differentiation and liberation with fidelity. While Paul produced highly contextualized instructions specific in certain regards to the original audience, particularly reflecting an apparent discussion concerning whether Christians could be married and sexually active at all, the underlying theological intentionality is sufficient to demonstrate a positive role for marriage in the Christian community.

Whenever approaching the topic of biblical instructions concerning sexual ethics, particularly in relation to monogamous marriage, Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 7 remains the most extended development of the topic in the New Testament. How one understands this passage will dramatically alter conceptions of the role of marriage in the Christian community, the suitability of divorce and remarriage, and whether sexual celibacy is a positive ideal or a requirement for the Christian. Yet constructing coherent theological doctrines based on Paul's teaching proves more elusive than one might expect after a surface level reading of the passage. Conceptual barriers for the modern interpreter are many and varied, including the vast linguistic distance between *Koine* Greek and modern English, the highly occasional nature of the document itself, and the historical uncertainties involved in reconstructing the situation of the original audience. These surmounting challenges can easily lead to two common avoidances of the task – either give only a surface level reading of the passage and ignore the peculiarities of the text or give up entirely and turn to other sources such as tradition or culture for instruction. Yet Scripture based Christian theology cannot accept either of these solutions. No matter the difficulty of rendering an adequate interpretation for 1 Corinthians 7, it is vital to rescue a critical understanding of the doctrine of marriage and thus this passage must feature at the center of such a theological rendering.

It will thus be argued that Paul's sexual ethics were founded on a two-fold theological formulation of equality and liberation. As all persons are made in the image of God, Paul is keen on reminding his reader that the marriage union is really a holy re-union as two are made one, but this does not erase the gendered nature of either partner. Men do not cease to be men nor women to be women, but each fills a divinely created role and total faithful submission of each to the other produces a sanctified relationship. Further, the equal but gendered union of male and

female in marriage is liberating because it offers a divinely sanctioned outlet for sexual energy. This liberation, however, must be tempered by fidelity for one's spouse produced by the same kind of engrossing love that a monotheist has for his/her God, mirroring the prophetic voice. Thus, the ultimate theological role for marriage is that it provides a holistic relationship where sexuality can be fulfilled while the unique bonding of husband and wife provides an experiential and interpersonal dimension to understanding the love of God for humanity.

So why does Paul support celibacy as preferable for Christians? There are two contextual aspects that serve to undergird his response. First, it must be remembered that Paul was a Pharisee and that in this system marriage was an absolute requirement of the Torah command to be fruitful; thus in one sense he had to defend his own right as a teacher who was, at least at the time of his ministry and correspondences, a practicing celibate. In this way, it must be realized that Paul's defense, as a Jewish teacher (messianic to be sure but no less Jewish), to practice celibacy was itself an aberration from the norm. But even beyond this, perhaps even more pertinent to the Corinthian church, was the pagan philosophical teaching concerning marriage and its acceptability for the philosopher class. By the time of Paul, the debate between Stoicism and Cynicism had been well established by centuries of tradition whereby the Stoic supported a philosopher's allowance to marry on the grounds that it benefitted him (always male) by giving him a sort of servant to take care of the needs of daily living so that his mind would be free to think. On the other hand, the Cynics rejected marriage and supported celibacy not on the basis that sexuality was wrong as such, but rather because all social conventions were generally to be rejected, and more specifically marriage was to be avoided because it invariably requires a great deal of attention that takes the philosopher away from the business of thinking.

Between the Stoic and Cynic positions, Paul thereby navigates a careful balance that both

upholds the positive value of marriage while also extolling the virtue of Christian chastity, something he considered a special gift and not to be expected from the majority. Consequently, it will be argued that a full understanding of the passage will provide a positive assertion for the basic goodness of sexuality, against the ascetics, while leaving room for the exercise of the special charism of celibacy. Marriage thereby is problematic only insofar as it distracts from Christian living, and it is on these grounds that celibacy is praised as a gift, not because it entails an avoidance of evil sexuality but rather because it liberates the individual for the totalizing service of God. While this rendering of Paul will be foundational to reply to the challenge of those that claim celibacy to be spiritually superior to marriage, it does not explicate fully why exactly marriage is to be considered sacred. On this subject Paul again provides an insight in his claim in Ephesians 5 that marriage is a *megas musterion*, a great mystery, symbolizing the union of Christ and church, and so it will be seen that it was this essential concept of *musterion* that developed into sacramental theology in the early church.

### **SACRAMENTALISM AND MARRIAGE IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY**

In order to make a positive case for the sacramentality of marriage, one must first understand the nature of the claim that is being made in such an assertion. To this end, after the critical textual study in the first half demonstrates the foundational claims about the nature of human sexuality and the evolving role of marriage in the Christian community, next the concept of sacrament must be understood in its historical context. Originally founded in the Greek concept of *musterion*, the Latin translation *sacramentum* originally functioned in the Western Church as a sign of commitment, a seal of fidelity that marks the New Covenant of Christ. While little can be maintained as monolithic in the early centuries of the Christian tradition, this line of

thinking came to its fullest formulation in the writings of Aurelius Augustine, bishop of Hippo, who argued some important facets of sacramental theology in refutation of the schismatic Donatist movement concerning their efficacy and longevity. Further, Augustine established a watershed synthesis that further established the sacrament as the central activity of the Church and the embodiment of leavening this world with the sovereignty of God whereby the Christian's life is infused with the power of Christ in every stage, including marriage. Even as the present study will primarily adopt an intentionally Augustinian interpretation of sacrament, it is also instructive to reflect upon the parallel developments in the Eastern Orthodox tradition which maintained their interpretation primarily following from the Greek *mysterion* that allowed for a more mystical approach to the topic that particularly emphasizes the encompassing nature of the resurrected state.

### *Sacramental Theology in the Early Church*

The roots of Sacramentalism are found in the prior Hebrew society which was principally defined by its covenantal status, a relationship which required a wide range of activities and prohibitions, ritual and moral. As it has already been demonstrated in the section on Christ's view of the Hebrew Torah, He agreed that it must be ratified by the continuing community of faith, but radicalized its demands so that the focus was no longer on the external aspects but rather the internal. Similarly, even as the early Christian movement shed most of the restrictions and requirements of the Jewish system, most notably the rite of circumcision, it did not reject the entire category of ritual but rather reoriented it radically. Ritual sacrifice, animal and otherwise, which was previously a principle vocation of the Jerusalem Temple, was in certain significant regards replaced by the liturgical tradition of the mass, a ritualized remembrance of Christ's

sacrifice embodied in the partaking of the flesh and blood via the elements of the Eucharist. Similarly, the Judaic requirements of ritual cleanliness that included regular washings were replaced by the singular baptism event which was prefigured by John the Baptist but came to represent quite early the ritualized crossing over from life through death to the resurrected state. These two ritual aspects served as the primary defining features of the early Christian movement, but they were supplemented by the development of a theological category, the sacramental.

Etymologically, the term sacrament is derived from the Latin *sacramentum* which was a sacred oath, particularly associated with military service, but this is in turn a translation of the Greek *mysterion* by which the English cognate term mystery is derived. While the mystery aspect of the original concept was adopted into Latin nomenclature as *mysterium*, the ritual feature was transferred to the term *sacramentum* which was in the early tradition conceived as the seal of the New Covenant in Christ. Following the same basic hermeneutic pattern as practiced by Jesus as noted above, the physical aspects of the Hebrew covenants (Abrahamic and Mosaic) were transformed into spiritual forms by the early church. Accordingly, the requirement of circumcision was dropped as it was primarily a sign of the flesh, whereas the New Covenant was ratified in the spirit thus its seal was not visible. Just so, because humanity lives currently in a physical realm, this unseen reality can be made visible through infusing the rituals of life with the power of the sacrifice of the Christ. Whereas before the Jews had to be made physically clean in order to be ritually pure, the Christian's soul was washed once and for all in the blood of the Lamb, thus the physical aspects of the rituals of baptism and Eucharist were not themselves causes but rather representations of the Grace that is offered wholly, freely, and universally to all by the singular sacrifice of Christ.

In many regards, Augustine followed the aforementioned tradition on the sacraments as being sacred oaths and visible signs of the working of invisible grace, but he also contributed further to the precise definition of this concept primarily in response to the challenges of the schismatic Donatist movement which taught that the efficacy of the sacraments, particularly baptism, was broken when a person renounced Christ, what they termed a *traditore*. It followed in Donatist teaching that if a priest or bishop were a *traditore* and were to come back into the Church without being re-baptized then anyone baptized by him would not be legitimately saved, just as priests ordained by *traditore* bishops were not actually ordained and their administration of sacraments were also thereby invalid. It was thus in the crucible of the Donatist controversy that Augustine established one of the most vital links in the historical chain of sacramental theology – namely that salvation was not effected by the activity of the priest but rather solely by the agency of Christ. Accordingly, it followed that Christians baptized by bad priests (heretics or apostates) were still saved, because it was not the merit of the priest that saves, but Christ alone. As such, a perfect understanding of the theological realities involved in salvation, vis-à-vis a precise knowledge of the instrumental nature of sacraments, was not necessary because such a requirement would leave none saved; for what mortal being can say to have a complete and exhaustive knowledge of the ways of God which ever remain a mystery to the finite mind? So too, who can be said to be morally perfect other than Christ? Accordingly, it is not the merit of the priest but rather of Christ that saves and the sacrament thereby is the sign of this eternal Covenant ratified in the blood of the cross and accepted in the faith of the individual believer.

In addition to the foundational perspective of Augustine, it is also instructive to consider how this topic developed in the Eastern Church as well. Marriage was connected from quite early with sacramental theology primarily due to its explicit connection as a *megas musterion* (great



mystery) in Ephesians 5:32 for its symbolic representation of the marriage of Christ and Church, much as it had served the prophets before. While the sacramental theology Western Church would eventuate, as demonstrated in the following chapter on the Reformation, into an instrumental view of sacramental efficacy, the Eastern Orthodox tradition continued to maintain the original Greek notion of *mysterion* as normative whereby sacraments were not analyzed in such critical scrutiny but rather were allowed a wider mystical appreciation that focused on the radical transcendence of Grace. The tremendous mystery of the divine-human relationship is particularly demonstrated in the divine liturgy of Orthodoxy which focuses primarily on the interplay between transcendence and immanence through sacred representation in physical forms. The well-known use of icons in Orthodoxy is founded on this basic liturgical orientation that the worship space is intended to create on earth a foretaste of the eternal state with the congregation physically surrounded during worship by the representations of present heavenly realities, as the icons are intended not to depict their subjects in their mortal state but rather in their heavenly figure. Marriage, it follows in this system, is a physical institution most certainly, but just as the icon reflects the heavenly, so too can a sacramental marriage go beyond the boundaries of the mortal and find its ultimate expression in the resurrected state. Accordingly, the language of death being the termination of the contract of marriage is missing from Orthodox services and indeed the hope of the eternal is made explicit, as it is the heavenly realities made manifest in the present that make marriage sacramental and will be reflected in the glory of the ultimate renewed state. This Orthodox orientation thereby avoids the kind of instrumental scrutiny that led in the West to the Scholastic movement and Canon Law tradition that came to understand sacraments as causes as well as signs of Grace.

*Augustine on Lust and Desire in Marriage*

From this foundational view of sacramental theology, a reconstruction of Augustine's particular views on marriage will follow. It is widely recognized in the Augustinian studies that concerning the nature of marriage he stood between the positions of Jovian and Jerome by supporting celibacy as spiritually superior to marriage (contra Jovian) while rescuing sexuality from being classified as wholly sinful (contra Jerome). Augustine argued that sexuality was part of the original plan of Eden thus not conferred as a punishment of humanity. However, sexuality was not completely sanitized of its sinful tendencies; here Augustine introduced the concept of lust, which he understood as universal to human sexuality as evidenced by shame, modesty, and the lack of willful control over sexual organs particularly when tempted. Thus to comprehend the nature of sexuality in the marriage covenant, one must first seek to understand how lust affects it.

In regards sexuality generally and marriage particularly, the present study will argue that Augustine represents a dialectical tension between the desire for purity and the hope for love. On the one side stands his concern for purity; Augustine's youth was lived under questionable pagan sexual morals, inherited from his father, that continued to haunt him into his career as bishop later in life. As a young man Augustine had somewhat freely explored his sexuality leaving him with a lingering sense of guilt which in turn attracted him to the Manichean system with its ascetic ideals and simplistic theodicy that relegates everything evil, including sexuality, to the evil anti-god. As the absurdities of Manichean myths were replaced in his mind by Neo-Platonist influenced Catholic Christianity, Augustine was still compelled by the idea of celibacy from a Platonic suspicion of bodily existence wed to Christian chastity. Thus Augustine's writings will continue to demonstrate a bias, sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, against sexuality as being fleshy and thus of a lower category, something to be purified even if not rejected outright.

At the same time, while Augustine viewed sexuality with great suspicion and often spoke against it in stern tones, so too did he recognize an inherent goodness there that was in need of rehabilitation. His life had, at least for a time, afforded him with an example of fulfilling romantic love. While Augustine was never properly married according to the customs of his age, he did famously take a concubine (an accepted practice during that time) which is to say that he had a prolonged monogamous (presumably) relationship with a woman (the mother of his only child) but to whom he had only limited legal and social responsibilities. While his concubine remains shaded in mystery and is only presented in faint sketches and momentary reflections in his *Confessions*, Augustine at least for a time felt the embrace of a loving and committed sexual relationship which troubled him greatly to end it as he did.

Between these points of tension, Augustine taught that marriage was instituted and ordained by God prior to the fall of humanity in Eden and therefore sexuality was not a condition of sin as some held. Rather, sin entered sexuality through lust as a universal punishment for the Fall. Thus, lust serves for Augustine as the vehicle for the dissemination of so-called “original sin” as he concluded it was universal to human sexuality in the present era, but in the eschaton lust (and sin more generally) will be ended. But to what extent the removal of lust will affect sexuality is a point upon which Augustine gives somewhat contradictory answers following the tension herein described. On the one side, Augustine’s defense of marriage against its detractors led him to claim that sexuality existed in Eden prior to the Fall and thus humans will remain in a gendered state even in the resurrection. However, his own inability to conceive of a positive role for sexual desire and preference for celibacy led Augustine to conclude that while sexuality will persist in form, it will not in function. The present study will thus challenge this assertion by using statements of Augustine, primarily taken from *Civitate Dei* (City of God), as a precedent

for a more positive evaluation of human sexuality than he was able to conceive fully.

### *Scholasticism and Protestant Refutations*

Even as the early era of the Christian Church developed a distinctive and holistic understanding of the role and nature of the sacrament, which was gradually distinguished in the West by the theories of Augustine in refutation of the Donatists, while the East maintained a more mystical conceptualization of the concept which persists to this day in contemporary Orthodoxy. In the West, however, the more original notion of sacrament as the visible sign of the work of invisible grace began to give way to a more empirical-instrumental approach which reconceived the sacrament as the vehicle or vessel whereby Grace is administered. This reconceptualization was particularly localized in the late-medieval Scholastic movement and its infusion of Aristotelean methodology which in turn led to precise formulas for the assurance of sacramental efficacy. Consequently, the Scholastic movement developed a list of seven rituals of the Church considered to be sacraments in the strict functional sense that had become normative.

In turn, the Reformers balked at many aspects of the sacramental theology of the Scholastics, and Luther in particular applied a typical Augustinian theme to the subject via the comparison of the two kingdoms, earthly and heavenly. Agreeing in outline that a proper sacrament is a vessel of Grace, while disagreeing about the conditions that make it efficacious (namely, faith), Luther narrowed the list of sacraments to only those rituals that directly contribute to the salvation of the believer. Marriage, he argued, was only an earthly institution and thereby had no direct role in salvation and was excluded. Luther thus laid the theoretical foundation which Calvin would take further and apply into civil law in his Geneva experiment whereby the first good of marriage as enumerated by Augustine, *proles* or the production of

children, was taken as the primary even sole qualifier of the marital relationship which is, following Luther, only earthly after all. Consequently, Calvin's rulings in Geneva prefigured the Protestant abandonment of marriage to the processes of secularization as seen most clearly in the increasing acceptance of divorce.

With the rise of Scholastic theology, the Catholic tradition integrated an essentially inductive mode of inquiry into its ecclesiology which rendered the sacraments as causes rather than signs of Grace. Salvation, accordingly, increasingly became understood as the possession of the Church as its singular purveyor. Even as Augustine had worked hard against the Donatists to establish that Christ works both in and out of the orthodox churches to effect Grace in the world, such that even heretics might be saved, this was effectively compromised by the Scholastic tradition through the introduction of inductive Aristotelean methodology which sought answers that were by their nature beyond empirical investigation. The conclusions of the canon legalists thereby maximalized the role of the Church in salvation in an untenable fashion by making it the sole possessor of the means of dispensing Grace, a point challenged by the Reformation.

Even while Luther challenged much of the late-medieval Catholic heritage, he also accepted, on a foundational level, certain aspects of the Scholastic tradition, particularly the assumption that a proper sacrament is a vehicle of Grace. What he challenged, rather, was the four ingredients as they were formulated by the Scholastic canon law tradition that demonstrated a preeminent role for the Church which Luther found problematic. Instead, for Luther it is faith that determines the efficacy of a sacrament as defined by two basic requirements with an implied third condition: it must be divinely instituted, its administration must transmit Grace, and, implicitly, it must be an essential feature of Christian salvation. Marriage, he argues, is an institution produced by human culture, not divinely mandated; further, it does not produce Grace

in its recipients nor is it necessary for salvation because non-married persons can be saved. Thus it is not essential for salvation and thereby not a sacrament. This early argument, laid out in his provocative *Babylonian Exile of the Church* (1520), becomes further actualized in his subsequent writings which apply the central interpretive framework inherited from Augustine of the two kingdoms to the topic of marriage. The earthly kingdom is associated with the Old Covenant Law and is meant, according to Luther, principally to restrain the wicked and sinful whereas the heavenly kingdom is the New Law, the Gospel of Christ actualized in the eternal state. In this view, marriage is an ordinance of the Old Law, of nature, and thus of the earthly realm which has only limited impact on the heavenly. Its maintenance as a social practice is primarily for the location of the practice of sexual fulfillment and the production of children thereby of family creation. But insofar as it is a spiritual reality, the third good of marriage according to Augustine is its being a *sacramentum* or sign of Grace, for Luther it is a metaphor and nothing more. It can serve as a helpful symbol of the relation of Christ and Church, but it is just that, a symbol, and thus the sign connects to the heavenly only by pointing beyond itself. In the end, for Luther, marriage is a purely this-worldly relationship which is dissolved in death.

While Luther laid the theoretical foundations for the resultant rejection in the Reformation tradition of marriage as non-sacramental, it was the civic experimentation of Calvin in Geneva that brought Luther's theories into concrete manifestation. While generally following Luther on this issue, Calvin also renewed the three goods of marriage according to Augustine with his own particular twists. The good of *proles* or children served as the basis for human culture and the locus for the creation of families which form the basic social unit of civilization. The fidelity of marriage, *fides*, was taken by Calvin as the function of marriage to contain sexuality and overcome the sinful urge to concupiscence. On the sanctity of marriage and its

identification as *sacramentum*, Calvin focused primarily on its covenantal role as a further reflection of the first two goods, as human social units are bonded through covenanting pacts and the fidelity to these pacts, as in the sexual fidelity of spouses, further actualizes and reinforces these bonds. Taken together Calvin was in broad agreement with Luther on the earthly nature of marriage and its exclusion from the list of sacraments.

Yet Calvin did not just give theoretical arguments, he also attempted a historical synthesis through governance in Geneva. While the precise relationship of Calvin to the political power structure of Geneva is complex and various, his governing practices are still detectable that reflect the practical consequences of his theoretical rejection of marriage as sacrament. As far as legal aspects of marriage were concerned Calvin was clear even if starkly so: sexual function. In his understanding both *proles* and *fides* revolve around the practice of sexuality while the sacred aspects are relegated to mere allegory reinforcing the physical and social aspects. Accordingly, in the absence of sexual function the covenant becomes nullified as it is no longer necessary. This peculiar conclusion was taken to its fullest expression in Calvin's administration which initially shunned divorce requests but after further consideration confirmed them so long as the spouse suing for divorce claimed that the marriage did not include sexual function in its current state. This would thereby include the infirm, aged, and frigid in theory and in practice allows for any unhappy married person to seek divorce considering that sexual practices are private and not open to public scrutiny thereby unprovable in a court of law. It will thus be argued that Calvin's administration of Geneva and the gradual acceptance of divorce demonstrates the trend that has become normative in Protestantism which has allowed for the secularization of marriage.

*Consequences of Desacramentalization in the Protestant Tradition*

The conceptual foundations of the Reformation established a restrictive sacramental theology which narrowly allowed only for baptism and Eucharist (or even less among Radical Reformers) was predicated on certain assumptions inherited from the Scholasticism it sought to reject. By conceiving of the sacrament as a mechanical aspect of the dispensation of grace thereby salvation then only those rituals which were determined to be essential to Christian soteriology were maintained. As a result, marriage was desacramentalized and from its earliest stages opened the door, intentionally or otherwise, to its secularization.

Even as Protestant Christians sought to maintain marriage as a spiritual and sacred rite, the loss of the language of sacrament necessitated grounds for its rejection whereby Protestant theology became almost solely negative in its disputations. This legacy of de-emphasizing the sacramental identity of marriage is clearly demonstrated rather universally among Protestant theologians, yet came to particularly relevant formulation in the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher, thereby leaving a deep imprint upon the resulting Liberal Protestant trajectory that relegates marriage entirely to the earthly realm which, in turn, resolves in its definition by secular culture. Even among Schleiermacher's critics, most notably Karl Barth, there remains the shared perspective that a sacrament effects the dispensation of grace, a scholastic import as already demonstrated, and that marriage is effectively separated from this process. Even the American Evangelical community is beholden to this general trajectory, as noted by recent examples that either ignore the topic of marriage entirely or simply relegate it to a line item on the list of desacramentalized rites. As a result, little positive evaluation has been offered by contemporary Protestant theologians concerning marriage and what exactly distinguishes Christian marriage from its secular counterpart.



## CONCLUSION

Taken together, the thesis will be defended by the present study as it advocates for the reintroduction of marriage as a sacrament in Protestant theology. In addition to summarizing the major arguments of the study and further articulating how they cohere and establish the thesis, the practical implications will also be considered and in particular how this study impacts the spiritual formation of contemporary Christians. Yet simply re-defining marriage as a sacrament is only the beginning, as the implications and applications of this claim will be far reaching and require more critical development. Further, the apologetic impact of the study will be briefly deliberated whereby future studies that carry the primary arguments of this study forward and apply them into popular as well as academic treatments of the topic. It will thus be the aim for the critical reception of this work that the topic of marriage and family will be given further development and open new dialogues that further enrich the Christian tradition into the future. In the end, it is the hope of the author that this study provides a theoretical foundation upon which marriage can be elevated as an essential discipline and celebrated for its great potential to contribute to the universal Christian hope of making it on earth as it is in heaven whereby creation will reach its perfection in the final renewed state.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MARRIAGE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*<sup>80</sup>

When examining an important theme or concept in the Christian tradition, inquiry must begin necessarily with its origins in the prior Hebrew-Israelite-Judaic culture which gave birth to Christianity (and rabbinic Judaism). Unlike the relatively concise and temporally specific writings of the New Testament, the Hebrew Bible<sup>81</sup> was developed over the course of many centuries and its origins remain in certain historical regards veiled in mystery.<sup>82</sup> Even further, due to the enormous chronological breadth of its development, the Hebrew Bible represents not a single monolithic culture, but rather a long process of social development that progressed through many stages and took many forms. Thus, when approaching the topic of marriage, it must first be remarked that the Hebrew Bible bears witness to a diversity of perspectives that should not be simply reduced to any singular definition.

Yet at the root of this diversity and plurality, there can still be detected an underlying core intentionality that pervades the Hebrew Bible and gives it a definitional perspective, namely its radical monotheism. While the vast majority of the neighboring tribes and civilizations encountered throughout the history of the Hebrew Bible were polytheists, the defining feature of

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<sup>80</sup> Gen 2:23b, ESV.

<sup>81</sup> Briefly, it should be noted that the present study will refer to the canon of the Old Testament as the Hebrew Bible principally to highlight its distinctive socio-cultural origins before applying it to Christian theology. This is not to say that it should be divorced from theology, much the opposite, but rather that it should be interpreted on its own terms through the lens of its cultural situation (*sitz im leben*) primarily and only then examined as to how this impacts the Christian tradition.

<sup>82</sup> This refers primarily to the relative lack of manuscript evidence prior to the advent of rabbinic Judaism and the consequent uncertainty about the history of authorship and redaction of many of the books therein. As mentioned in the methodological considerations, these questions and uncertainties will be set aside for the purposes of this study and focus given to the final canonical form without further reference to these debates.

the biblical society was its radical orientation toward a singular eminent deity.<sup>83</sup> This definitional orientation forms the principle basis upon which the historical persons and ages were evaluated by the biblical authors, editors, and subsequent interpreters. The health of the Hebrew civilization was directly and fundamentally linked with its participation in the covenants of the Jewish deity. This consistent emphasis on monotheistic covenantal fidelity has direct and vital implications for the Hebrew understanding of marriage, as it not only provided the civil relationship whereby the most primal command, to be fruitful and multiply, could be enacted, but even further was itself a symbolic reflection of the covenantal commitment expected of the Hebrews by their deity.

This progressive understanding of the nature of marriage in the Hebrew Bible will be developed in the present chapter in three phases. First, the Genesis account of the origins of human existence will be examined conceptually in order to understand how sexuality fits into the created paradigm by evaluating its essence, function, and distortion. Next, following from this theoretical basis, the history of marriage as a civic and religious institution in the Hebrew and Israelite societies will be enumerated to clarify the admixture of social and spiritual features involved. In particular, the challenge of historic polygamy will be addressed by demonstrating its expression as reflecting the contextual factors in these early periods which necessitated multiple simultaneous marriages by key leaders in order to produce strong lineages and prevent their bloodlines from ending, thereby ensuring the continuation of the covenant. Finally, while in the earlier social settings polygamy was accepted rather uncritically, with the rise of the latter prophetic movement polygamy became increasingly identified with polytheism and idolatry. In

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<sup>83</sup> While it should be acknowledged that scholarship includes the possibility that the Hebrews were originally polytheists practicing in the form of henotheism, the worship of a single tribal deity while acknowledging the existence of other such deities, the final product perspective of the Hebrew Bible is unequivocally monotheistic.

its stead, the prophets championed a monogamous standard that was initially primarily a spiritual metaphor but increasingly came to dominate in the civic institution as well, thereby laying the foundation for the normative acceptance of monogamous marriage further reflected in the poetic and wisdom literature of the Judaic culture.

## SEXUALITY IN THE CREATION

It is often remarked that the first attribute noticed about a newborn infant is the sex.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, cultural paradigms concerning sexuality run deep, from the color of the child's clothes to behavior patterns considered acceptable. Is this merely an accident of culture and/or biology? Is sexuality merely something that evolved to propagate the human species or is there something more essential to its nature, something intentional to the design of humanity? This vital question concerning the essence of human sexuality must first be probed on a philosophical level in relation to the claims made in the opening chapters of Genesis to demonstrate a theoretical foundation upon which human anthropology, and therefore sexuality, may be defined according to a biblical worldview. In order to demonstrate this, three aspects of human sexuality will be analyzed as definitional: its essence, function, and distortion. To begin, the nature and origin of sexuality will be articulated in regards its biblical rendering to demonstrate a basis whereby the Hebrew worldview, and its Christian interpreters, understood the essence of the human being and the role of sexuality and gender relations therein. Based on the claims of the Genesis cosmogony, sexuality will thus be determined as an essential facet of created anthropology and inseparable from humanity's identity. Beyond its created essence, the intended function will be assessed to

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<sup>84</sup> William Loader puts it rather directly: "Sex is not an optional extra. It is part of what and who we are." *Making Sense of Sex* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 1.

designate the proper role and practice of human sexuality, namely, in the marital union. Finally, this will lead into a discussion of the opposite side of created sexuality, its distortion, through examining the basis of sexual sin which will prove foundational for the social developments of Hebrew marriage and the associated sexual norms.<sup>85</sup>

### *The Created Nature of Sexuality*

In order to inquire into the ontology of sexuality, its essence must first be explored. First, the observable aspects of sexual nature and identity will be designated according to four key characteristics of sexual development: natal sex, sexual identity, sexual orientation, and gender role formation.<sup>86</sup> From this basis, it can be determined how sexuality should be construed in regards its relationship to human nature and identity. Historically, there have been many varieties of answer to this question, but among the plurality four paradigmatic positions can be enumerated: androgynism, biological essentialism, cultural constructivism, and the biblical founded position, so-termed herein as theological essentialism.<sup>87</sup>

Before engaging with the textual sources directly, it is important to clarify the definitions of sex and sexuality. For the purposes of the present study, the four-fold typological definition advanced by Balwick and Balwick in their seminal volume, *Authentic Human Sexuality*, will be adopted.<sup>88</sup> First, at conception the human being is given a set of genetic-biological features,

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<sup>85</sup> While some implications will be identified in the process, generally ethically pertinent sexual issues will be tabled for the sake of the present focus on the essence of sexuality. As Hollinger puts it so well: “We can only begin to tackle the contemporary issues once we have discerned the meaning of sex.” Dennis Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 70.

<sup>86</sup> Typology adapted from Judith Balwick and Jack Balwick, *Authentic Human Sexuality 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2008).

<sup>87</sup> Typology adapted from Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 44-57.

<sup>88</sup> Balswicks, *Authentic*, 33-54.

natal sex, which determine the physiological structures of gender and sexuality.<sup>89</sup> Even while physiology is in large extent determinative of physical sex, the broader notion of sexuality goes beyond the bounds of mere biology. The second aspect of sexual formation is the person's sexual identity, their self-defined gender; this aspect involves psychology in addition to physiology as it designates the internal and existential facets of sexual development. Third, the sexual orientation of a person refers to the romantic desire of an individual, be it for the opposite sex (hetero), same sex (homo), or, advanced more recently as a genuine orientation, both (bi). Finally, the gender role designates the cultural identification for accepted behavior patterns, including sexual acts, and gender relations. This would include aesthetic elements, like clothing and hairstyles, as well as career differentiation and family roles. While no culture has a monolithic definition for gender roles, it is clear that every person inhabits a social milieu which projects a range of expectations and taboos onto the behavior and identity of the individual.<sup>90</sup> Taken together, these four aspects designate the basic observable nature of human sexuality, as every person integrates all four elements in some form through the processes of socialization. In evaluating the potential perspectives on the nature and origin of sexuality, each view should be assessed according to its ability to account for these four elements.

Perhaps the most philosophical definition from antiquity, which has grown in popularity in the modern era, of the nature of human sexuality is the position of androgynism. The ancient

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<sup>89</sup> Granted there are permutations and abnormalities in this stage, but generally speaking the sexuality of a child is determined at, or before via technology, birth through an assessment of reproductive structures. As the Balswicks put it so clearly: "In the vast majority of cases there is consistency among all four dimensions of sexuality, resulting in a clearcut definition of gender. However, for some there is inconsistency between the four dimensions, a lack of congruence that causes confusion about gender." Balswick and Balswick, *Authentic*, 33.

<sup>90</sup> Social conflict ensues when a person's gender identity contrasts the expectations of the gender roles determined by the culture. For example, if a woman is expected to raise children by a society but instead enters the workforce, this will cause social strife – her self-identity (second aspect) determines that she can enter the workplace yet the social barriers of the cultural gender role expectations (fourth aspect) conflict and cause strife.

Greek philosophers and their poet counterparts posited that humanity was originally a single dual-sexed creature that was split apart by the gods.<sup>91</sup> This therefore accounted for the natural longing to couple as a yearning for reunification into the original perfected state.<sup>92</sup> This craving to reunite with the lost other half was expressed by what might be regarded as an early Greek expression of the marriage covenant as recorded by Plato:

If that is your craving [to be united], I am ready to fuse and weld you together in a single piece, that from being two you may be made one; that so long as you live, the pair of you, being as one, may share a single life; and that when you die you may also in Hades yonder be one instead of two, having shared a single death.<sup>93</sup>

Although the Platonic myth pertains to be a hymn to love, conceived as a divine person, it provides the conceptual foundation for androgynism by conceiving of sexual differentiation as a diminishment of human nature and even as divine punishment.<sup>94</sup> Sexual desire is thus a byproduct of the punitive bifurcation of primordial humanity reflecting a longing for existential reunification that can be only partially and imperfectly completed through sexual bonding.

While largely originating in Greek philosophy, particularly Platonism, this perspective

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<sup>91</sup> This can be clearly seen in Plato's *Symposium* 189-193; cf. Zuyan Zhou, "Androgyny" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History* ed. Bonnie Smith (New York: Oxford University, 2008), 109. It has become popular in contemporary academics to present this view of sexuality as a normative view in Greco-Roman society, but it is uncertain how widely this account was believed due to the lack of textual sources that are relevant to this inquiry. This story was certainly widely known among academically trained ancients, primarily among philosophers and poets, but how much this translated to the wider populace is more difficult to assess.

<sup>92</sup> While the resulting common tradition focused on the male-female dichotomy and the singular organism that was said to originate this division, in the myth speech of Aristophanes in *Symposium* 189e there were actually three sexes in the pre-divided state, each being essentially two persons in a single body with four arms, two heads and so forth: one doubly male, one doubly female, and one hermaphroditic. This myth therefore was actually inclusive of same-sex coupling as it was merely an expression of those persons that had "originated" in the mono-sexed double beings.

<sup>93</sup> Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 192e.

<sup>94</sup> Loader notes a point of tension in Philo between the Platonic tendency to denigrate sexuality and the Judaic view of creation as good, "but Philo remains loyal to the Genesis accounts in not surrendering to a dualism or denigration of creation itself... sexual intercourse is a model for right relationships when properly directed." *Making Sense*, 21.

had a great deal of influence over some early church thinkers, who in turn argued that Adam was originally created genderless and only after differentiation from Eve, echoing the Greek myth of the divided humanity, did gendered sexuality exist in any meaningful regard.<sup>95</sup> Further Christian support for this position is often given through reference to Jesus' answer to the Sadducees concerning the seven-time widow in the eschaton that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."<sup>96</sup> It is thereby inferred that "because angels are asexual beings, the fact that Jesus says we will be like angels means that we too will be asexual in our eschatological state."<sup>97</sup> Yet this inference is not a necessary one, particularly in light of the apparent ability of the angels, or sons of God (Heb: *bene ha'elohim*), to sire children as noted in Genesis 6:1-4.<sup>98</sup> Even further, androgynism can only account for the two-stage Edenic creation narrative of Genesis 2 whereby Eve is taken out of Adam; it must necessarily ignore or radically reinterpret the claim of Genesis 1:27-28 whereby both male and female are original to the design of creation and sexual fruition is explicitly commanded. Similarly, while Genesis 2 could be interpreted in light of the Platonic myth to define sexual desire as an urge toward a pre-sexual state, yet the "differences are telling: sexual drive in Genesis is not a punishment but an element of God's creation, something positive."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Chrysostom, for example, writes "the consummation of that intercourse occurred after the fall; up till that time they were living like angels in paradise and so were not burning with desire, not assaulted by other passions, not subject to the needs of nature." *Homilies on Genesis 15-16*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Gen 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 72.

<sup>96</sup> Matthew 22:30, ESV. This pericope will be given special attention in chapter three.

<sup>97</sup> Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 45. Cortez points out that specifically on this point the difficulty with this reading is that it is not clear in the verse what attribute of angels is being referenced precisely.

<sup>98</sup> While it is possible that this reference is to the children of Seth rather than angels, this is unlikely given the claims of the passage (the union produces a race of super-humans) and the consistent usage of the phrase to denote angels elsewhere. Cf. Robin L. Routledge, "'My Spirit' in Genesis 6.1-4." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20, no. 2 (2011): 238.

<sup>99</sup> Loader, *Making Sense*, 11. *Jubilees* 3:34 claims that Adam and Eve did not have sexual relations until



Apart from textual issues, how does androgynism hold up regarding the four sexual dimensions? As a philosophical framework, androgynism tends to denigrate sexuality by assuming that sexuality reflects a diminishment from a more perfect pre-sexed state.<sup>100</sup> In the Christian tradition, this framework is also represented by the ascetic movements and their promotion of celibacy, claiming thereby that sexuality is a negative feature of fallen humanity.<sup>101</sup> Some abstemious orientations further differentiate between the creation of biological sex and its practice, thereby claiming that while Adam and Eve were physically differentiated at creation they did not exercise any sexual behaviors until after the Fall.<sup>102</sup> Not only does androgynism fail to give a purposeful account of biological sex, making it rather a punishment or diminishment, but so too, do the social aspects become merely reflections of fractured existence.<sup>103</sup> Regardless of whether it is the gods cutting humanity into male and female or YHWH cursing the rebellious first couple, if sexuality is *only* a marker of the fallen state, then there is little hope of seeking a reconciling function for it. Indeed, the pursuit of extreme sexual asceticism is closely tied historically to the androgynist position.<sup>104</sup> If sexuality is an accidental feature of bodily

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after their expulsion from Eden thereby implicitly connecting sexuality with the fallen state.

<sup>100</sup> In the Platonic myth, humanity is split apart by the gods because they had rebelled and threatened the gods – not unlike the divine decision in Gen 11 to strike down the tower of Babel. The purpose of sexual division in this light was to diminish the power and ability of humanity so that they would not challenge the gods.

<sup>101</sup> It should also be noted that androgynism tends to denigrate women as lesser due to their (supposedly) derivative nature. This is particularly evidenced in the closing lines of the apocryphal gnostic sayings source, the *Gospel of Thomas* 114, wherein Peter claims that Mary, as a woman, is unworthy of life, to which Jesus responds that she will be made male by following him and those women that become male can enter the kingdom.

<sup>102</sup> Augustine, covered in chapter four, worked to reject this position in his later writings and supported not only the existence of sexual differentiation but also its function in the pre-fallen state.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Stanley Grenz, *Sexual Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 23-24. Note further that the Platonic view resolves in a patriarchal bias, conceiving of women as lower or inferior to men, likened to the difference between humans and animals. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 42.

<sup>104</sup> Hollinger points out that asceticism, and the androgyny position it so often assumes, “owes more to Plato and the Platonic tradition than it does to Scripture.” Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 44. Also, cf. Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 24-28.

existence, or worse a reflection of divine punishment, and the true human essence is somehow above sexual identity, then it is to be avoided as inferior or even damaging to human existence.<sup>105</sup> Further, this position fails to account for the clear biblical support for the goodness of sexuality, much less the primal command to be fruitful and multiply.<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, androgynism as a sexual perspective is unable to provide a meaningful account of human sexuality in any of its facets and generally denigrates sexuality to such a level as to make it an untenable position.<sup>107</sup> Even while androgynism has tended to be reflected primarily among academic and monastic sources, its effects are incipient in many interpretations that unconsciously import some of its assumptions, as discussed here, and should be resisted.

While the ancient and medieval eras reflected a conceptual struggle between androgynism and theological essentialism, discussed in detail below, with the advent of the modern era scientific oriented views emerged that have greatly influenced cultural perceptions of sexuality. Among them, one of the most prevalent positions argues that human sexuality is defined primarily by biology, known herein as biological essentialism. Cortez cites that biological research has designated at least six biological features determinative of the physical

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<sup>105</sup> Indeed, this thesis was advanced by the second century Encratite heretical movement that taught absolute chastity for all Christians. This was later adopted into the semi-Encratite position wherein only clergy were expected to be celibate, which is still in the case in Catholicism (see chapter four). So too the Shaker movement in American history taught that sex was inherently a sinful act and was the direct result of the fall and should therefore be avoided. Of course, historically the Shakers died out as a denomination not simply for the unpopularity of their message but the fact that their members were not producing a new generation for if they did then they would be sinning.

<sup>106</sup> Not only is sexual differentiation demonstrated clearly as prior to the fall by Genesis 1:26-29, but so too does the powerful theological support for romantic love, such as the Song of Songs and the reconciliation of Hosea with his wife (discussed later in this chapter), get overlooked or dismissed by this position. Cf. Jerome Gellman, "Gender and Sexuality in the Garden of Eden." *Theology & Sexuality* 12, no. 3 (May 1, 2006): 322-323. For a subtle and carefully articulated position essentially in support of the androgyny of Adam, cf. Leon Kass, "Man and Woman: An Old Story." *First Things* no. 17 (November 1, 1991): 17-18.

<sup>107</sup> As Bouteneff observes, "humanity is not really humanity – is not properly 'adam' – without sex distinction." Peter Bouteneff, *Beginnings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 5.

aspect of sexuality.<sup>108</sup> This position typically argues that there are essential differences between males and females on a fundamentally biological level that cannot be accounted for otherwise.<sup>109</sup> Thus sex as an essential feature of humanity is accepted by this position, but questions still arise as to *why* exactly humanity is sexually differentiated.<sup>110</sup> Increasingly in the modern era, naturalism has been advanced in association with this position as it is remarked that humans merely share this quality with the rest of our animal brethren.<sup>111</sup> Yet there have also been attempts to argue this position from a biblical perspective wherein the emphasis is placed on the differences between the sexes as mandated by creation.<sup>112</sup> This, in turn, can lead to a strong advocacy of gender differentiation and traditional social roles that often emphasize the subordination of the wife.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, while biological essence is a key facet of human sexuality, it is certainly not constitutive of the entire range of sexual identity as expressed in the four facets. Even while biological essentialism accounts readily for the first element, natal sex, it generally fails to demonstrate the social dimensions of sexual identity which are certainly

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<sup>108</sup> These include chromosomes, gonad formation, gestation hormones, fetal development, and puberty. Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>110</sup> Biology, if not rooted in a theistic framework, simply cannot entertain questions of purpose given the accidental nature of the universe posited by metaphysical naturalism.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 51-56. Biblically this is supported by the fact that both animals and humans are commanded to be fruitful and multiply; what differentiates humans is the further injunction to rule.

<sup>112</sup> For example, Craig Blomberg, while representing a theological framework, emphasizes the distinctions between the sexes as mandated by creation: "The order of creation, the process of naming this second human being, and her role as a helper thus all suggest that she is in some sense subordinate." "A Complementarian Perspective: Blomberg" in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 130.

<sup>113</sup> While this view is quite common in ancient sources, contemporary scholarship rarely advocates such a strong position of gender subordination. Popular level literature still widely echoes this, for example, addressing wives: "Your husband is the one in charge. Being in charge does not mean that he has to do everything. It does mean that he is responsible for managing his home. A part of managing is delegating responsibility to others, including you." Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife*, 52. Emphasis original.

beyond, if still connected to, biological norms. Further, it cannot be prescriptive (or proscriptive) in regards to sexual ethics, because it conceives of biological impulses as the extent of sexual practices; if a person's physiological urges are the norm then they are inherently subjective.<sup>114</sup>

The other reigning modern perspective on human sexuality, in contrast, focuses primarily on the social dimensions of sex and gender differentiation, herein referred to as cultural constructivism. Unlike biological essentialism, which fails to account for features of sexual identity, orientation, and role acculturation except as reflections of innate biology, this position focuses on these features as the primary significance of sexuality. While it is clear that genital features induce the label of "boy" or "girl" for a newborn (or prenatal) infant, the parent's choice for blanket color, clothing, hairstyle, and toys all go well beyond the purely biological features of the child.<sup>115</sup> This position is particularly effective in demonstrating the relativity of cultural norms, as a great deal of gender identity and formation is culturally determined by context, both geographical and temporal. At the same time, if not attached to a biblical worldview, cultural constructivism can quickly dissolve into cultural relativism wherein the norms of culture are taken as entirely relative and not subject to morality of any absolute or objective nature.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, the distinction between the sexes tends to become relativized in this perspective, as what is designated as male and female is largely, if not solely, just societal patterns and therefore

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<sup>114</sup> This is, of course, not the case for those arguing from a biblical perspective for this position but it still requires the addition of biblical norms outside, strictly speaking, the purview of biological essence and function. So too, it is common to encounter the claim that homosexual behavior patterns are not "against nature" because same-sex coupling is an observed phenomenon in the animal kingdom. This argument presupposes biological essentialism and demonstrates its difficulty in providing ethical proscriptions.

<sup>115</sup> Go beyond is to say that biological features still have impact on these points, such as boys playing more violently than girls and therefore desiring toys that fit these impulses, but that biology alone does not account for a great deal, such as whether to have long hair or short, blue blanket or pink, etc.

<sup>116</sup> This, in turn, leads to sexual moralities which can advocate promiscuity and non-monogamous lifestyles. If sexuality is merely a construct foisted upon me by my culture, then I should be at liberty to shirk that construct in favor of a less restrictive norm.

subject to evolution and alteration like any other facet of culture thereby allowing for non-binary gender constructs. Consequently, while cultural constructivism offers a helpful insight into the formation of sexual identity and its collective social features, if it is not integrated with biblical norms it can decline into moral relativism and the consequent acceptance of sexual deviation.

So, where does the biblical worldview fit into this discussion? In a sense, one should begin with the beginning; accordingly, the Genesis accounts of human formation should be consulted in order to draw a number of key inferences. Genesis 1 presents an orderly account for the formation of the cosmos wherein humanity is produced as the culmination of creation on the sixth day in the image and likeness of God. Genesis 2 describes a more intimate origin wherein humanity is personally crafted out of the dust of the earth, first male, and then, after he is found to be incomplete, female is created from him to be his companion and fulfillment.<sup>117</sup> From these two basic narrative starting points, a few key inferences can be drawn which demonstrate the theologically essential nature of human sexuality which is to be distinguished from the other three views enumerated above.

Perhaps the most basic feature of the biblical perspective is that humanity is created. While this may seem self-evident, it needs to be reinforced in light of the dominance of metaphysical naturalism and evolutionary theory in contemporary culture. The biblical worldview starts from a presupposition of creation; humans are created beings that inhabit a created world. Yet at the same time, humanity is also made, according to Genesis 1:27, in the image and likeness of God.<sup>118</sup> Thus in some form or fashion humanity also stands above the

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<sup>117</sup> Man Heb: *ish*; woman, Heb: *ishshah*.

<sup>118</sup> A great deal of writing has been devoted to the image of God, and while a survey of this literature would be well beyond the scope of the present inquiry, a helpful point is made by Phyllis Bird who points out that the divine image is what separates humanity from the animal world while sexuality serves to affirm the affinity between humanity and the created realm. Humans thus stand as intermediaries between the created world and the Creator which is played out through the resultant theme of humans as caretakers or stewards of creation. Phyllis Bird,

created order while remaining subservient to the Creator.<sup>119</sup> The difficulty that arises is how precisely sexuality fits into creation. The androgynist position would claim that humanity existed in a pre-sexual state at some point, either before the creation of Eve or before the fall, but there is little exegetical support for this position (not to mention its mythic origins and total lack of historical evidence for an a-sexual state). It would appear more in keeping with the plain reading of Scripture, particularly Genesis 1:26-29, that humanity was created as sexual entities from the very beginning whereby sexual activity can be understood as predating the fall and thus has a place in reconciled creation.<sup>120</sup>

In addition to being created, the biblical text designates humankind as having a distinctive purpose in creation. Indeed, rabbinic commentary cites the command to be fruitful and multiply as the first of God's commandments to humanity.<sup>121</sup> But why should humans multiply? The answer is also explicit: in order to have dominion over the earth. This clear and generally unambiguous statement that humanity is to have responsibility over creation is therefore an essential feature of human existence.<sup>122</sup> Humanity, as conceived in Genesis 1 and further explored in Genesis 2, was created as intermediaries between God and creation,

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"Genesis 1-3 as a Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality." *Ex Auditu* 3, (January 1, 1987): 40.

<sup>119</sup> Francis Schaeffer makes the keen observation that "the differences between the [creative person] and God are overwhelming, because we, being finite, can only create in the external world out of that which is already there." Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1972), 28.

<sup>120</sup> In supporting the claim that marriage predates the fall, Bernard Batto advocates this position and claims that "Sexual desire, like marriage, is part and parcel of the creation of humankind." Bernard Batto, "The Institution of Marriage in Genesis 2 and in Atrahasis." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (October 1, 2000): 63. The eschatological considerations concerning this will be discussed in chapter three.

<sup>121</sup> Gen 1:28. Cf. Loader, *Making Sense*, 10; William G. Braude, trans., *Midrash Debarim Rabbah* "A Midrash on the Growth of Population." *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 13, no. 2 (1972): 116-26.

<sup>122</sup> Clearly there are complexities involved in the precise nature of humanity's dominion, but it is generally agreed that God created humanity for some sort of responsibility over the created world.

caretakers for the natural world. In order to effectively complete this task, humans are also created to promulgate their species, and this is accomplished through sexual coupling. It is on this point that theological essentialism is both closest to and yet most distinct from biological essentialism. Though physiology is clearly determinative of structural sexuality, if biology is framed by a naturalist worldview then biological features, sexuality included, are merely accidental features of the evolutionary process, not intentional or designed. In contrast, while theological essentialism agrees that biology, including the need to procreate, is a primary originator of sexuality, it also claims that sexuality is divinely created for a purpose beyond its mere biological function. Even while sexual procreation is a mandated feature of creation in Genesis 1, it is also developed as fulfilling an existential function as well in the two-stage creation in Genesis 2. The proper function of sexuality within this paradigm will be articulated below to demonstrate a synthesis that incorporates both its procreative and existential features.

Yet there is another element of the biblical account which is vitally important to understanding the biblical meaning of sexuality – its distortion. According to the Genesis account, humanity has failed to live up to its purposes, as demonstrated in the disobedience and exile of Adam and Eve. Consequently, this aspect of biblical sexuality provides a clear response to the plurality of sexual deviations, aberrations, and perversions that have been promulgated over the course of history.<sup>123</sup> It is thus on this point that theological essentialism bears the most resemblance to cultural constructivism, as both systems seek to account for the social elements in sexuality. At the same time, the biblical perspective sharply differs with the typical presentation of cultural constructivism over the relevance of culture in relation to sexuality. According to the

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<sup>123</sup> It could also be added that the biological aberrations, such as mismatched chromosomal sex and the like, are also a product of the effects of sin on the world, even if more indirectly than sexual perversion. Cf. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 52-54.

biblical worldview, culture is the product of human community reflecting the fallen state which thereby cannot be advanced as normative because it is liable to corruption; in essence, there must be a standard above human culture. Furthermore, the relativity of human society cannot provide transcultural norms because behavior condemned by one society is praised by another; in a situation of conflicting cultural norms, cultural constructivism can only function descriptively but not pre/proscriptively. In contrast, the biblical perspective offers a definitive standard, monogamous marriage, for assessing in what regards culture upholds divinely created sexuality and in what ways societal norms serve as a vehicle for the promulgation of human sinfulness.

From these three inferences, sexuality is created, purposeful, and distorted; the biblical worldview is able to define the nature and role of sexuality. In the four faceted model of sexual development provided by Balwick and Balwick, theological essentialism is able to account readily for all four dimensions in a seamless and coherent whole. Biological sex is determined by the created order originating in the divine plan and, as a result, there are fundamental differences between the sexes which are intentional, even while these differences do not necessitate qualitative subordination, as both male and female are created fully in the divine image. Sexuality is also designed for the existential fulfillment of humanity, not merely as an accidental feature of random natural selection, so there is a rationale for human sexuality beyond simply the biological urge to procreate. Even so, because humanity currently exists in a fallen state, there are also distortions and aberrations that detract from the divine purpose for sexuality. Consequently, the other three facets of sexual development, identity, orientation, and gender role acculturation, demonstrate an ongoing dialectical tension. On the one side stands the divine purpose for humanity, but on the other side is the pervasive human proclivity to sin. As a result, sexual development constitutes a sort of tug-of-war between the poles, divine purpose on the one



hand and sinful inclination on the other. Christian sexual ethics should thus be understood as navigating this tension, defining the purpose and function of sexuality while simultaneously designating its perversions and distortions, both on the individual and communal levels. To this end, the present study will continue by defining and assessing the proper function of sexuality before turning to its negation, sexual distortion.

### *The Designed Function of Sexuality*

Given the three inferences derived from the biblical creation accounts, that human sexuality is created, purposed, and distorted, the question must be posed in regards its designed function. If sexuality is not merely an accident of evolutionary process but rather an essential element imbued by divine mandate, then why? For what purpose was sexuality created? In answering this question, a variety of Christian positions have been posited historically and recently. While an exhaustive survey is beyond the scope of the present study, at least five distinct positions are identifiable. First, perhaps the most ancient position is that sexuality was created simply for humanity to procreate; while historically dominant, more recently this view has been increasingly scrutinized and rejected in favor of other positions. It has thus been posited, second, that sexuality is one facet of a more essential aspect of human created nature reflecting the nature of the divine image: creativity. Similarly, a third position argues that sexuality bears witness to the human propensity for relationality; as essentially relational beings, entirely interdependent, sexuality is a facet of our existential identity. Yet both the second and third positions argue that sexuality is secondary to some more essential principle. A fourth position posits that sexuality represents in certain regards the problem which therefore requires an answer: marriage. Specifically, marriage in this perspective is taken as a dual reality, either

literal marriage to a spouse or spiritual marriage to holy orders. A final fifth position seeks to synthesize the options by regarding sexuality as an essential element of human bonding whereby marriage serves as the ideal archetype of interpersonal relationship as divinely intended. Taken together, the first three positions tend to relativize sexuality and conflict in substantive regards with the conclusions previously derived by the theological essentialist position. Thus, the fourth and fifth positions will be supported as the most compatible with biblically founded theological essentialism as articulated above.

First, one of the most ancient positions on the nature of human sexuality is that it was created so that humanity might propagate. This position is principally derived from the first biblical command to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion” which mirrors the command previously given to the animals, but adds the command to subdue the earth rather than only to fill it.<sup>124</sup> In this way, it was taken that the purpose of sexuality was to fulfill the purpose of humanity, to have stewardship over the created world, which required more humans.<sup>125</sup> Thus sexuality was primarily, if not solely, a vehicle for the propagation of the human species that fits into the divine purpose as the means for which humanity would spread and multiply.<sup>126</sup> This position was well known in the ancient world in philosophy, as well as in Judeo-Christianity and often was coupled with the previously detailed

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<sup>124</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>125</sup> The language of dominion has been critiqued as being too supportive of ecologically immoral behaviors and attitudes so the language of stewardship will be preferred which also highlights the intermediary role of humanity as caretakers rather than lords of the earth. Cf. Wilma Ann Bailey, “The Way the World is Meant to be: An Interpretation of Genesis 1:26-29.” *Vision* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 49.

<sup>126</sup> This is the view taken by the *Sibylline Oracles*, an apocryphal collection of Jewish-Christian teachings which eliminates sexual desire from the primal state and it is mortality, caused by the first sin, which makes sexual intercourse “an unavoidable necessity ... for reproduction of the species.” Loader, in reference to *Sib. Or. 1:26-58*, *Making Sense*, 22. Even more condemning is the *Apocalypse of Moses* which claims that the serpent poisoned the forbidden fruit with sexual desire which is explicitly defined as sinful but regrettably necessary to procreate.

androgynism.<sup>127</sup> Accordingly, sexuality functions simply to multiply the human race and is not essential but only an instrumental necessity given the conditions of mortality.<sup>128</sup>

Problems with the view that sexuality is merely the vessel for human propagation abound. Indeed, this perspective fails to account adequately for the four dimensions of sexuality as previously discussed. The reality is that a great deal of sexuality falls outside the limited purview of reproduction and intercourse. Sexuality is an ever-present essence that pervades human identity and consciousness; no relationship is untouched by it. Same-sex friendships will have quite different dynamics than friendships with the opposite sex.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, romantic relationships that are either unwilling or unable to procreate are therefore entirely outside the range of the divine plan for sexuality.<sup>130</sup> This definition of the function of sexuality would thus exclude older married couples that have undergone menopause and the infertile.<sup>131</sup> Is there no point to sexuality beyond mere reproduction? Consequently, while procreation is *a* function, vital though it may be, it cannot be determined to be *the* function of divinely ordained sexuality.

In addition to the primacy of procreation, other positions on the purpose of sexuality have emerged that claim that sexuality is a secondary principle pointing toward a more essential

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<sup>127</sup> Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 57.

<sup>128</sup> It should be noted that what is described here is the view that sexuality is *only* for the purpose of procreation – clearly most views include this as an aspect. Loader points out that thinking on sexuality has only begun to be distinguished from its procreative role in the modern era thanks to the availability of reliable contraceptives, something previously unavailable, *Making Sense*, 58.

<sup>129</sup> For example, recent research has indicated that men have a much greater tendency to project romantic desires onto their female friends than is reciprocated. Adrian Ward, “Men and Women Can’t Be “Just Friends”” *Scientific American* (Oct 23, 2012), <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=men-and-women-cant-be-just-friends> (accessed Dec 6, 2016).

<sup>130</sup> Loader notes that in the Jewish tradition intimacy and bonding remain goods of marital sexuality even beyond procreation, for example “Philo, who so often insists on procreation as the sole purpose of sex, cannot bring himself to insist that parents no longer able to fulfill that goal should cease sexual intimacy.” *Making Sense*, 57.

<sup>131</sup> As it will be discussed in chapter five, Calvin took this position in his rulings in Geneva, leading to the promulgation of marriage annulments based on the claim that the marriage was, or had become, sexless.

purpose for human nature.<sup>132</sup> Often, these theories begin with discussion of the nature of the image of God, for in answering what makes humanity like God, the exegete can better determine the purpose for human creation.<sup>133</sup> One answer to this quandary is the proposal that humanity was fashioned to be creative beings.<sup>134</sup> As intermediaries between God and the created order, humans are able to shape and craft the world; sexuality thus allows humanity to participate in creation of new humans harkening to humanity's role as stewards of creation.<sup>135</sup> While humanity is able to partake in the divine project of creation through manipulation of the natural world, there is still an infinite qualitative distance between humanity and God because humans reorganize existing materials whereas God originates all existence from no preexisting matter.<sup>136</sup>

At the same time, some limitations of the procreative view are also imported into this perspective. If sexuality is really only about being creative, then what of the myriad of sexual aspects that aren't, strictly speaking, creative, because they do not create new life? While the creative function of sexuality appears at first glance to have expanded beyond the procreative position, in the end it succumbs to the same difficulties. Even further, because sexuality is merely demonstrative of a more fundamental concept, creativity, then once again this can easily lead to an androgynous ideal for humanity because it could potentially discard its sexual identity and yet still fulfill its purpose to create. Perhaps most damaging for a Christian perspective on the subject is the near silence in regards scriptural support for this position. Not only does it require

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<sup>132</sup> Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 59.

<sup>133</sup> For an exhaustive demonstration of this methodology in action, cf. Nathan Jastram, "Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 5-96.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5-8.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Roland J. De Vries, "Wonder Between Two: An Irigarayan Reading of Genesis 2:23." *Modern Theology* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 51-74.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, 27-31.

considerable interpretive revision of the Genesis account, there is little viable textual support elsewhere to support this position.<sup>137</sup> Consequently, while an interesting interpretive option, the creative view remains nonetheless inadequate and conflicts with the previously asserted theological essentialism by divorcing the essence of humanity from its sexual nature.

Another theory that agrees with the creative position, insofar as it posits that sexuality is representative of a more fundamental principle of human nature, was held by Karl Barth and his followers.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, for Barth, human identity begins with recognition of the *imago dei*.<sup>139</sup> But rather than focusing on the creative aspect of the divine, he argued that God is a being-in-relation: the Trinity.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, the nature and purpose of humanity revolve around this central revelation: humans are beings-in-relation, with one another, individually and collectively, and with God. Sexuality thereby is merely a single aspect of this larger social-relational framework and not in any sense special or essential to the human condition:

All this takes place only in the totality and context of the life of each of the partners including the whole sphere of their encounter and co-existence: man and his fellow, Thou and I as man and woman... But it is only a single point in the line preceded and followed by others... It is not the sole or even the chief problem of their encounter and co-existence.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> It is possible to read Song of Songs through this framework, but this is primarily a hermeneutical orientation to the text rather than an exegetical product as such (this is to say that there is no direct claim in the Song that sexuality is a creative act, and indeed children, a major facet of creative procreation, are conspicuously absent from its considerations). It should be remembered too that to take a theologically essentialist position is not to deny that there is an element of creativity involved in sexuality, but rather that the essence of sexuality is not merely creativity but something more foundational to created identity.

<sup>138</sup> Notably Ray Anderson and Paul Jewett have also advocated quite similar positions in their works, Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human – Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf, 1991); Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

<sup>139</sup> For the full discussion of human sexual identity and gender relations, cf. Barth, *CD III.4*, 116-240.

<sup>140</sup> “By the divine likeness of man in Gen 1:27f there is understood the fact that God created them male and female, corresponding to the fact that God Himself exists in relationship and not in isolation.” Barth, *CD III.4*, 117.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

In this view, how does sexuality factor into creation? While not supporting the essential nature of sexuality, the relational perspective conceives of sexuality as part of the more basic drive toward interpersonal relationality and existential fulfillment. Thus sexuality features prominently as a decisive demonstration of the need for relationship, reflecting the claim of Gen 2:18 that it was not good for the man to be alone, but at the same time sexuality is not essential because it is not required for the I-Thou encounter to be fulfilled.<sup>142</sup> Accordingly, while sexuality serves an important purpose as a primary source for the expression of relationality, it yet remains in the end an ancillary feature for Barth who argues that “sex and its relationship should have no independent life... they should not constitute an independent totality, but *have their essence solely and exclusively in the freedom of man*, of male and female and their encounter and co-existence.”<sup>143</sup> Sexuality, in this view, is fundamentally an expression of existential longing but not, in itself, essential.<sup>144</sup>

There is much to be commended in the relationality position of Barth and his supporters. The incompleteness of man prior to the formation of woman is a key point in the Genesis 2 narrative and this perspective emphasizes that humanity was not created to be alone or exist in isolation. At the same time, while not actively advocating an androgynous position concerning sexual nature, any approach to sexuality which designates it as secondary to some higher purpose

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<sup>142</sup> In essence, if existential fulfillment is the sole function of sexuality then there is no reason why this fulfillment must be between different genders/sexes, or practiced in a monogamous union, thereby leaving little basis for the exclusion of deviant patterns of sexuality so long as they are felt to be existentially fulfilling. Paul Jewett puts it well: “man confirms his humanity with an unequivocal “Yes!” by the acceptance of a partner as the completion of his own humanity.” Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, 39. While Jewett does not move in this direction, if sexual activities are merely for existential fulfillment then non-traditional behaviors cannot be excluded (e.g. same-sex, multiple partners, non-committed relationships, etc.) if they are perceived as being fulfilling.

<sup>143</sup> Barth, *CD III.4*, 131. Emphasis added; note the focus on freedom, which leaves little room for sexual ethics to make any proscriptive claims since it is the existential freedom of expression which counts for Barth.

<sup>144</sup> The human being “may relate himself to [sexuality] as to everything else which concerns his human existence.” Ibid, 121.

runs the inherent risk of abstracting human nature too far. There is simply no human relational experience that is not colored by sexual nature and identity. One need only to consider a few examples, from a mother and her child to siblings to friendships, to realize that even non-romantic relationships are colored on a foundational level by sexual identity. Relationality then simply cannot be divorced, as Barth would have it, from sexual nature and purpose. Thus, while the conclusion that humanity is created for relationality is biblically valid, at the same time there can be no form of human relationship which is not on some level determined or at least conditioned by sexual identity, which indicates a more essential nature than Barth would allow. Even further, the relational model does not have an adequate foundation for indicating what *kind* of relationship humanity is supposed to achieve. The conclusion is clear, relationship with God, but the precise mechanism for getting from sexuality to relationship with God remains somewhat hesitant and obscure in this approach. This is especially true given Barth's staunch opposition to sacramental marriage which leads him to claim:

The whole [male-female] relationship is manifested in its creatureliness. Its glory, mystery and significance are disclosed in its limits. We must not blur these limits if we are truly to live out this relationship or even to perceive it. It certainly does no good, and we help neither ourselves nor others, if in some form or other we think we must declare that man and wife in union attain to divinity. This is the very thing which they do not do. We must leave them on earth under heaven.<sup>145</sup>

The complete subordination of sexuality, and thereby the marriage relationship, to the earthly realm as merely a single category of expression of relationality by Barth and his supporters simply does not account for the pervasive nature of sexuality in human relationship. In this framework, the possibility for non-sexual relationships are conceived following a subtly androgynous assumption that sexuality is not an essential feature of human nature and can be

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<sup>145</sup> Barth, *CDIII.4*, 129.

theoretically eliminated, exactly what Barth expresses here in an eschatological mode whereby sexuality is discarded in the final resurrected state. Thus, even while Barth does give some account for the function of marriage as a spiritual metaphor, his desire to reject its association as a sacrament resolves in a severe limitation of its theological worth as merely a sign that is ultimately discarded and subsumed by the reality which it signifies.<sup>146</sup>

Even as the existentialist oriented relationality model of Barth fails to provide a suitable account for the essence of human sexuality, a traditional view has received renewed attention in the twentieth century from Pope John Paul II that provides a clearer solution for the question left unanswered by the relational perspective: How does the human relationship transcend to become relationship with God?<sup>147</sup> The answer is quite simple: marriage.<sup>148</sup> While this may at first glance appear to default into the procreative position noted earlier, actually it moves well beyond it. If the marital union is posited as the purpose of human sexuality, several important consequences arise.<sup>149</sup> First, the principle of creativity is expressed in the formation of a household through the birth of children, thus satisfying the concerns of the procreative and creative perspectives. Second, reciprocity between husband and wife represents the ideal relationship wherein a person

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<sup>146</sup> “The comforting and suggestive analogy of [marriage] to that between Christ and His Church clearly fails in proportion as analogy becomes identity... If man and wife are not merely with but for each other, then in proportion as this is so they cease to be the community which lives by the fact that Christ intercedes for it.” Ibid, 125. While buried in a typically obtuse and rambling note on the issue of sacramental marriage, Barth here is claiming that insofar as marriage is perceived as a sacrament, as participating in Christian salvation, it actually has the inverse effect of separating the person from God. Clearly, this is a very serious allegation and a further indicator of the problematic trajectory established by the Reformation, which will be discussed further in chapter five.

<sup>147</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman: He Created Them A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006). In particular, see the extensive dialogue with Kant on the issue in the introduction by the translator Michael Waldstein which elaborates on the philosophical aspects involved in the study.

<sup>148</sup> John Paul II refers to this as the spousal meaning of the body.

<sup>149</sup> It has been questioned in scholarship whether Gen 2 really designates the creation of Eve as the institution of marriage, but strong support has been given for the claim that the text does intend this feature at the very least in its final, if not original, form. In particular, cf. Bernard F. Batto, “The Institution of Marriage in Genesis 2 and in Atrahasis.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (October 1, 2000): 621-631.



can share him/herself fully, thereby experiencing the existential satisfaction emphasized by Barth.<sup>150</sup> Third, the biblical mandates for marriage, particularly fidelity, become ethical imperatives as well as theological insights whereby the bonds of sacramental marriage provide the opportunity to learn about and experience the divine nature.<sup>151</sup> To remain faithful to one's spouse, even (and especially) in difficult and trying circumstances, becomes not only an opportunity for personal growth and maturation but also for theological insight, as one can only marvel at the faithfulness of God in preserving humanity despite our many and continuous failings.<sup>152</sup>

In evaluating the matrimonial view of sexuality, one must inquire whether it succumbs to the previous critique of the procreation view by defining sexuality too narrowly. In particular, the question must be posited how this model relates to those persons outside the boundaries of marriage, namely the celibate and those practicing non-traditional sexual patterns.<sup>153</sup> While it may not be fulfilling for those who would desire the expansion of marriage to include homosexual unions, this perspective provides a singular alternative to monogamous heterosexual marriage: holy orders. Marriage is thus understood in a two-fold regard: one aspect represents the traditional monogamous union of husband and wife while the other designates the

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<sup>150</sup> Christopher West, summarizing and advancing John Paul II's position on sexuality, employs a helpful, and quite biblical, metaphor – the fig leaves. In childhood, as in the early days of the Garden, humanity is unconcerned with its nakedness. It is only through the realization of sin in the world that nakedness becomes something to hide. It is thus in the confines of the marital union that persons are once again able to remove their fig leaves in the presence of another person without fear of rejection or humiliation. Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners Revised Edition* (West Chester, PN: Ascension, 2009), 19-61.

<sup>151</sup> West, *Theology of the Body*, 89-90.

<sup>152</sup> As it will be demonstrated below in the present chapter, this impulse was sublimated by the prophetic use of the marital relationship, particularly the symbolic narrative of Hosea's relationship with Gomer.

<sup>153</sup> Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 60-61.

relationship of the Church to God which can function as a spiritual equivalent.<sup>154</sup> For those that find themselves outside of the bounds of marriage for whatever reason, celibacy expressed in the taking of holy orders represents the only truly “alternative” lifestyle.<sup>155</sup> This perspective thus provides a biblical account for the purpose of sexuality which upholds its essential nature and irreducible features by advocating marriage as the pinnacle and ideal of human relationality, not as secondary and dispensable, while still providing conceptual space for a celibate alternative. What is left somewhat unclear in this perspective is the state and nature of marriage in the resurrection, a problem highlighted by the Sadducees in their inquiry to Jesus concerning the hypothetical seven-time widow in the eschaton.<sup>156</sup> If marriage is the purpose of sexuality, does that purpose bear any significance for the afterlife and the perfected state? Further, Protestants (and Orthodox Christians) may take exception to the presumption that ordination requires celibacy, which is only maintained by the Catholic Church.<sup>157</sup> It remains unclear whether Protestantism is compatible with this perspective due to this assumption and further can leave open the possibility of inverting the primacy of marriage by elevating celibacy as spiritually superior. These concerns, while not undermining in and of themselves, do represent an area of difficulty for this position which requires further consideration, particularly concerning its applicability to Protestant theology.

Quite recently, a position has been developed by Stanley Grenz, which in some regards, synthesizes the field by incorporating insights from the other positions while seeking to avoid

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<sup>154</sup> West, *Theology of the Body*, 63-73.

<sup>155</sup> 1 Corinthians 7 is a vital text in establishing this position and is developed in detail in chapter three.

<sup>156</sup> Mark 12:18-27 and parallels. Developed in chapter three.

<sup>157</sup> Orthodoxy allows for clerical marriage while still maintaining celibate monastic orders and traditionally expects episcopal leaders, metropolitans and patriarchs, to be celibate (typically as widowers or monastics).

their pitfalls. For Grenz, the essential nature of sexuality is indisputable, as has already been advocated above, and so the function of sexuality must bear witness to this reality.<sup>158</sup> Because sexuality pervades every human relationship it is therefore not reducible to some other principle but instead stands on its own as an essential quality of human nature. The key, then, is how sexuality is expressed, not just in coital acts, but in all the modes of human relationship; thus, the purpose of sexuality for Grenz is bonding. While at first glance this position may seem identical, or nearly so, with Barth's relationality view, the differences between them are vital. For Barth, human sexuality is just one facet of a larger reality, relationality. For Grenz, sexuality is the basis for bonding, not a secondary feature of it.<sup>159</sup> Sexuality is expressed universally in human relationships and is thus not solely predicated on acts of sexual intercourse. The key here is that sexuality cannot be taken out of the equation of human existence, for to do so would inexorably alter human nature to an unrecognizable extent.

This position accomplishes a clear definition of the purpose of human sexuality that is coherent and synchronistic with the biblical account. The definition is sufficiently wide enough to include the aspects of human sexuality that transcend the procreative or romantic functions while not losing the essence of sexuality to some ulterior purpose. Sexuality *is* bonding in a fundamental regard, and this can be seen in every area of life. Accordingly, marriage is given a decisive position as the ultimate expression of the divine design for humanity, as bonding is accomplished most completely in the marriage covenant.<sup>160</sup> So too, this does not merely limit sexual purpose to only those that can express it in marriage or procreation. Further, this

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<sup>158</sup> Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 22-30.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 32-36.

<sup>160</sup> Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 57-77.

perspective gives a vital insight into the nature of sexual sin, defined as any sexual activity that violates or distorts genuine bonding. It is to this next point that we now turn.

### *The Distortion of Sexuality*

Among the most difficult concepts to address in contemporary culture is the notion of sexual sin.<sup>161</sup> In light of the sexual revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Christian community has been hard pressed to maintain a definition for sexual sin that is compelling and biblical against cultural pressures to accommodate non-traditional sexual ethics.<sup>162</sup> With its roots in the ethos of the Hebrew Bible, Christianity has historically treated sexual sin primarily by proscriptions against prohibited activities, such as adultery, incest, and so forth.<sup>163</sup> Even while many of these prohibitions are maintained by contemporary legal structures, such as age limits for sexual consent and bans on incest and polygamy, at the same time, the social domination of the Christian church has been both fragmented in the wake of the Reformation and further pluralized by the separation of church and state in American society. Consequently, for the church to decree something as sinful simply does not carry the weight that it once did, for it is both diversified and lacks any civic governing authority. As a result, it is imperative that a contemporary definition of sexual sin be determined that takes account of the biblical perspective but utilizes reasoning that contemporary audiences will find compelling.

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<sup>161</sup> This is to say that in contemporary American culture it is difficult to even bring up the category of sexual sin without being branded as hateful or bigoted for its association with the condemnation of alternative sexual paradigms (homosexuality, cohabitation, adultery, etc.).

<sup>162</sup> Loader makes a keen observation that the proliferation in the twentieth century of reliable contraceptives has “enabled us more easily to separate in our thinking sex solely for pleasure and affection from sex for propagation.” *Making Sense*, 58. This can further be tied to the sexual revolution of the mid-twentieth century.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Loader, *Making Sense*, 63-74.

Regarding human sexuality, two points become apparent in both the creation narrative as well as observable human nature: humanity is incomplete and fallen.

First, sexuality represents a fundamental bifurcation of human nature to such an extent that man alone is existentially incomplete.<sup>164</sup> There is consequently an inherent yearning or longing for completion which causes human beings to seek out romantic relationships and fulfillment.<sup>165</sup> This, as has already been observed, is the basis for human bonding and community creation, the longing for otherness and completion through communion.<sup>166</sup> In the male/female coupling there are simultaneously elements of sameness and otherness which can only be found in heterosexual union. This is clearly expressed in the song of exultation offered by Adam upon seeing his newly formed bride; she was of the same kind as he, flesh and bone, but differing to such a degree that their bond makes him complete because she can be for him what he cannot be for himself.<sup>167</sup> It is thus exemplified in the simultaneous oneness and otherness of the sexual union whereby the human can be made whole. For this reason, the incompleteness of humanity provides a clue into the proper function of sexuality as well as its deviation.<sup>168</sup> Divinely ordained sexuality involves a union of same and other; as the biblical text puts it, the two become one

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, "Genesis 2: 'It is not Good for the Human to be Alone.'" *Review & Expositor* 103, no. 2 (March 1, 2006): 343-358. As it will be argued, there are two biblically accepted sexual patterns which lead to existential fulfillment: sacramental marriage and spiritual celibacy.

<sup>165</sup> To be distinguished from the Platonic myth is the fact that the bond of male and female in marriage is an enactment of divine design and not, as with the myth, of returning to a pre-differentiated state. Also, note that those persons who do not feel the urge toward sexual relationships can find existential fulfillment in spiritual celibacy, a notion especially advocated by Paul in 1 Cor 7 as discussed in chapter three.

<sup>166</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality*, 60-64.

<sup>167</sup> Genesis 2:23-24.

<sup>168</sup> The couple's recognition of their nakedness serves as a biblical metaphor which represents "the more profound recognition of vulnerability: each needs the other" and further "desire is then understood as undermining the self's autonomy". Graham Ward, "A Postmodern Version of Paradise." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* no. 65 (March 1, 1995): 11.

flesh. This fulfilment can only be accomplished through the pairing of the self to the ultimate other, either the male to the female or the individual to God through spiritual celibacy.<sup>169</sup> Sin, on the other hand, attempts to supersede the divine design by changing the ingredients of sexual satisfaction, either in number (polygamy and promiscuity), type (homosexuality and bestiality), or quality (through perversion and objectification).<sup>170</sup> Sexuality is intended to serve as the ultimate fulfillment of the human longing for bonding according to the divinely ordained pattern set forward in Genesis and supported throughout the biblical text.<sup>171</sup>

The second aspect of sexuality that is determinative of its distortion is the fact that humanity is a fallen entity. As remarked earlier, the effects of human sin are pervasive, from the individual person to the many and various historical societies.<sup>172</sup> There is no area of human existence that is not in some way touched by the effects of sin.<sup>173</sup> At the same time, the question must be addressed whether sexuality itself is inherently sinful, a product of sin, or whether there is something in sexual nature that transcends sin. As it has been argued above, sexuality should be construed as an essential element of human created nature and should not be divorced from it. Consequently, sexuality is part of the created order initially proclaimed to be good in Genesis 1

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<sup>169</sup> This is to say that celibacy must be properly understood as a special gift, or charism, not as a mandate. This will be further developed in the exegesis of 1 Cor 7 in chapter three.

<sup>170</sup> Hollinger prefers the language of distortion while the Balswicks use instead the existentialist moniker of inauthenticity for descriptions of sin. Cf. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 79-84; Balswick and Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality*, 70-73.

<sup>171</sup> It might be remarked upon that there are many instances of polygamy and sexual perversion, from Abraham to David to Solomon, recorded in the Bible, but these are clearly deviations from the original plan, even polygamy as it only began well after the fall, explored further below.

<sup>172</sup> Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 51-54

<sup>173</sup> One does not need to be a Calvinist or assert total depravity to accept that the effects of sin are pervasive.

and is supported throughout the Bible as a gift from God, even if a highly dangerous one.<sup>174</sup>

Even as sexuality is created for human enjoyment and fulfillment, the reality of freewill and the consequences of sin also loom large for the biblical worldview and demonstrate the causation of the many perversions and alternatives that deviate from the sexual norms of the biblical tradition.

The basis of sexual deviation is found in the origin of the primal disobedience. Some ancient interpreters even read the temptation of the serpent as being of sexual nature,<sup>175</sup> particularly given the morphology of the snake, an idea which has been maintained through the popular image of the “forbidden fruit” as connected to sexual taboos.<sup>176</sup> The apocryphal *Apocalypse of Moses* (or *Life of Adam and Eve*), is a good example of this connection whereby the snake poisons the fruit with lustful desire before giving it to the primal couple.<sup>177</sup> Even beyond the potential link between the first sin and sexuality, it is widely accepted that the curses resultant from the disobedience include gender dynamics that directly affect sexuality.<sup>178</sup> In particular, the statement in Gen 3:16 that the woman will be ruled over by the man and yet her desire (Heb. *teshuqah*) will be for him appears to indicate dissonance in the male-female

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<sup>174</sup> Once again, Song of Songs presents both sides of the issue, that sexuality is a wonderful gift as well as a dangerous burden. Proverbs also includes many sayings that highlight this as well. Cf. Hollinger, *Meaning of Sex*, 71-72.

<sup>175</sup> Ambrose, who had direct influence on Augustine, associates the serpent with the lusts of the flesh: “Since every creature is subject to passion, lust stole into man’s affection with the stealth of a serpent... It feeds on things of the body, and it is changed into many sorts of pleasures.” *Letters to Bishops*, 25, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Gen 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 76.

<sup>176</sup> The Septuagint uses the Gk. term *exapatao* to translate the Heb. *nasha*, to deceive, which could also refer to seduction.

<sup>177</sup> *Apoc Moses* 19. Cf. Loader, *Making Sense*, 22-23.

<sup>178</sup> Susan Foh argues that sexual domination is a product of the fall and part of the curse pronounced on Eve, a thesis which is similarly upheld by Mary Van Leeuwen. Susan T. Foh, “What is the Woman’s Desire?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37, no. 3 (March 1, 1975): 376-383; Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, “The Christian Mind and the Challenge of Gender Relations.” *Reformed Journal* 37, no. 9 (September 1, 1987): 17-23. Westermann comments, “the domination of the husband and consequent subordination of the wife is seen as something which is not normal (hence as punishment).” Westermann, *Genesis*, 262.

relationship likely including romantic attraction by women to cruel men and implications of social patriarchy.<sup>179</sup> Regardless of the precise nature, it is rather clear that the divine curse of Genesis 3:16 indicates the male-female relationship as being tainted by sin to some significant degree, though the extent of this distortion and the possibility of its renewal are less certain.

Taken together, these two poles, that sexuality is both a good aspect of creation yet is tarnished by sin and disobedience, form the essential dialectic upon which Christian sexual theory must be built. Humans are pulled at once in two directions. On the one side, our divinely designed nature impels us toward bonding and the fulfillment of existential completion in the intimacy of covenantal communion. Yet this good nature is not alone in its control over us, as humanity is also created as free beings capable of either accepting the divine ordination for creation or rejecting it. Scripture upholds both of these principles simultaneously and it is in navigating between these two impulses that human sexuality is played out. While this theory may seem overly abstract, it can be succinctly boiled down to two directional impulses: communion and consumption. Normative biblical sexuality is derived from the basis that humans are created as sexual beings in covenanted community to be in communion with one another and with God.<sup>180</sup> In the only two mandated forms of biblical sexuality, marriage and spiritual celibacy, communion is the primary goal, either with one's spouse, and together with God, or with God directly as an individual. It is precisely this orientation to the "other" that allows for the

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<sup>179</sup> Loader claims the most likely reading of this passage is that the woman's desire "will keep leading her to become pregnant and suffering the pain of childbirth again and again. Her subordination to him ("he shall rule over you") appears to be a consequence of her changed state of vulnerability." *Making Sense*, 12-13.

<sup>180</sup> And, as it has been argued, this sexual aspect is not secondary or accidental but rather foundational to human nature. Rather than something disposable, as supposed by Barth above, "sexual intercourse is a model for right relationships when properly directed." Loader, describing Philo's view as based on the biblical ethos, *Making Sense*, 21.



rich fulfillment of the self; in losing the self, one finds the self.<sup>181</sup> On the other hand, often culture reinforces the distortions of sexuality through promoting the impulse toward consumptive objectification and selfish gratification.<sup>182</sup> Sexuality has many deviations, but the common thread among them is distortion of true sexual communion by viewing sexuality as something to be consumed and partners discarded accordingly.<sup>183</sup>

The key for determining sexual distortion for a biblical worldview as has been advanced in the present study is to reckon whether the behavior is in keeping with the divinely created order and consequently whether it represents sexuality as communion or merely as consumption. By understanding sexual behaviors in these terms, the basis for why sin is sin can be demonstrated to modern audiences without merely having to fall back on the assertion ‘because God (or the Church) said so’. There is an order and harmony presented in the biblical creation narratives that can be restored through the covenant of marriage (or charismatic celibacy) which provides deep existential fulfillment as well as healthy sexual practices. This isn’t simply because some arbitrary voice of religious authority said as much, but rather because it is the nature of reality as God intended it to be.<sup>184</sup> As a result, the biblical sexual ethos will ultimately

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. Matt 6:25, 10:39.

<sup>182</sup> Hollinger begins and concludes with an observation that our contemporary culture is sex-crazed, gone wild with turning sexuality into a commodity and consumable. Hollinger, *Meaning of Sex*, 11-14, 223-246.

<sup>183</sup> This applies equally to promiscuity, adultery, pederasty, rape, and so forth. It is somewhat more problematic to identify homosexuality as a distortion at this level if it is conceived of in a monogamous and committed fashion. It can be claimed that sexuality distorts the basic drive to bonding as it is essentially a desire for same rather than other which is the biblical mandate. However, as the Balswicks carefully point out, “Even those who oppose homosexual behaviors... may sympathize with gays who want to form a committed relationship. It is more in keeping with Christian values to be in a lifelong committed relationship rather than engage in the emotional emptiness, to say nothing of about the dangers, of promiscuous sexual encounters.” Balswick and Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality*, 125.

<sup>184</sup> The teleological elements of sexual design should be emphasized once again. By way of analogy, a tool is most functional when it is used according to its design – a hammer makes a poor wrench and vice versa. This is the basic logic undergirding Paul’s rejection of homosexuality in Romans 1:18-32 for which a full accounting falls outside the purview of the present study though I have already written it and intend to publish it post-dissertation.

prove to be vindicated by experience, as any attempt at sexual fulfillment outside the divinely ordained plan will result in distortion and existential anguish.

### *Human Sexuality – Between Communion and Consumption*

To summarize the argument thus far, it has been advanced that human sexuality according to a biblical worldview is theologically essential by demonstrating its essence, function, and distortion in light of the Genesis account and the resulting implications. There is no way to divorce human nature and experience from the realities of sexual differentiation and any attempt to do so runs against both textual and conceptual difficulties. Alternative explanations for the nature of sexuality do not provide adequate accounting for the four observable features of human sexuality and consequently should be rejected in favor of a theological essentialist model that interprets all facets of sexuality through reference to the biblical creation narratives. Humanity is created by God, given purpose by divine providence to promote communion, and yet also lives in a fractured state of existence due to the effects of sin caused by the nature of human freewill that leads to consumptive sexual practices.

Accordingly, it has been proposed that sexuality is best understood in light of the biblical narratives as either a direct mandate toward marriage or, more broadly, as the basis of human bonding. Sexuality is a purposeful element of human existence that predates the fall and is best understood as essential to human nature, thereby irreducible. At the same time, while humans are given a clear plan for sexuality, covenantal communion, the reality of the fallen world introduces the complexities of sin into the equation, including the proclivity to treat sex as a commodity to be consumed. Consequently, sexual sin is best understood as a distortion of the divinely mandated plan for sexuality through abuse of its inter-relational design by focusing on selfish

fulfilment and/or violent domination. Any sexual behavior or attitude that objectifies the partner, seeks personal gratification at the expense of others, and is not committed to covenantal communion distorts the true nature and purpose of sexuality. Ultimately, it has been argued on the basis of the biblical worldview, as established in Genesis, that human sexuality is an essential component of human existence that serves as the basis for the completion of the divine plan for humanity – community building through the bonds of covenantal love. Having established this theoretical foundation, the historical actualization and practice of the covenant of marriage in the Hebrew Bible will next be explored to explicate the evolution of the marital union in its historical formulations and paradigmatic narratives.

### **THE HEBREW MARRIAGE COVENANT AS SOCIAL AND SACRED**

Having demonstrated the essential theoretical foundations for the realization of sexuality in the bonds of covenanted marital communion as established by the Hebrew cosmogony, the historical realization of this paradigm in the annals of the Hebrew Bible witnesses to how this concept was lived out. It has been argued that the two designed purposes for human sexuality as properly expressed in marriage are the production of children and the fulfillment of existential bonding; it will now be proposed that the history of the Hebrew Bible demonstrates these concerns as realized in the dual nature of the marriage covenant as an intermingling of social and sacred aspects. While there were certainly a range of civic concerns played out in the negotiation and fulfilment of marital covenants, these were not merely social business arrangements but also contained a spiritual essence that was for the descendants of Abraham intimately connected to the covenantal promises of their progenitor.

The need to produce heirs to continue the covenantal lineage was paramount to the early Hebrews and consequently polygamy, which is assumed by Scripture but initially not directly evaluated either positively or negatively, became a normative practice. This was driven, at least partially, by the Hebrew belief in a singular afterlife, *Sheol*, which was differentiated primarily on the basis of whether a person had living descendants to carry on the family name and remember the dead. Particularly important men who were able to afford it hedged themselves against the possibility of dying without heirs by marrying multiple wives, often including both land-owning class ladies<sup>185</sup> and servant/slave class women, concubines (Heb: *pylegesh*).<sup>186</sup> Sexual sins in this early phase were often defined by their inability to produce children which was interpreted as a purposeful violation of the divine order. This procreative emphasis was further demonstrated in the Abrahamic covenant which highlights the connection between the promises of children and the gift of land. Indeed, this foundational correlation is seen particularly in the practice of levirate marriage which both provided a social support system for widows and also insured that the land would be maintained in the proper family and tribe.

Yet even as the elaborate contractual obligations involved in Hebrew marriage were focused on the material functions of the union, there remained a theological core going back to the foundations of the Genesis cosmogony that entailed spiritual as well as social commitments. This theological aspect of Hebrew marriage can be seen most clearly reflected in the long-standing debate over intermarriage, which could be interpreted in literal-ethnic or spiritual-covenantal terms. The negative effects of intermarriage to non-Jews was particularly noted in the saga of Solomon and his many foreign wives, which induced him to allow pagan idolatry in the

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<sup>185</sup> To help differentiate, the moniker “lady” will be used to refer to landowning-class women.

<sup>186</sup> Strong’s 6370.

city of Jerusalem and was consequently interpreted by the Deuteronomic History as the basis of his decline. Increasingly, the practice of polygamy, which had originally been intended to promote the production of children to ensure the successful transference of the Abrahamic covenant, was equated with the polytheistic paganism of the surrounding cultures and thereby critiqued, particularly by the prophetic tradition.

### *Marriage in the Hebrew Social Setting*

Before examining the various historical features of the Hebrew-Israelite-Judaic understanding(s) of marriage, it is important first to realize the tremendous social differentiation between contemporary persons and the time periods under review. It is relatively easy to import or impose upon the ancient systems ideas and evaluative criteria which are simply anachronistic and illegitimate standards. In particular, in seeking to understand the social setting of the Hebrew Bible it must be recognized that contemporary notions of autonomous individuals are entirely foreign to the worldview of the ancients. Instead, the “individual’s legal status, then, far from deriving from an abstract universal notion of personhood, was rather a function of one’s concrete particular position or role within the household.”<sup>187</sup> Full recognition of this feature of Hebrew society is paramount to locating the relative function and role of the marriage union therein. The expansive genealogies found variously in the Hebrew Bible, but particularly in Genesis, are clear indicators of the importance of the tribal and familial associations.<sup>188</sup> To be of worth in such a

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<sup>187</sup> Robert S. Kawashima, “Could a Woman Say ‘No’ in Biblical Israel?: On the Genealogy of Legal Status in Biblical Law and Literature.” *AJS Review* 35, no. 1 (April 2011): 6.

<sup>188</sup> Genealogies feature prominently in Genesis including not only the special line of Abraham but also the offshoots and cousins, such as the Ishmaelites and Edomites. Cf. Gen 5:1-32; 10:1-32; 11:10-32; 25:1-20; 29:31-30:24; 36:1-43. Gen 49 is a poetic genealogy describing the sons of Jacob as the tribes of Israel and was greatly expanded upon by the various apocryphal *Testaments of the Patriarchs*.

setting depended vitally, if not entirely, on these social connections, thereby the covenants that formed the basis of this web of relationships were foundational to the health of the individual, family, community, and culture.<sup>189</sup>

Accordingly, a major component of the biblical exposition on marriage concerns how women should be organized and integrated into the tribal structures. While it should be reiterated that there is no monolithic definition to be attained here, some general contours of the marriage practice in Hebrew culture are observable. It appears that it was common practice in the Hebrew-Israelite society for women to be associated with a man who served as the determining relationship for her tribal affiliation. Initially, the woman's father was tasked with preserving her chastity in order to procure a proper marriage for her,<sup>190</sup> whereby she would pass from her father's household (clan and tribe) into her husband's, a practice still echoed by the common adoption of a husband's surname by the wife. While the arranged nature of the marriage may run against contemporary notions of autonomy and choice, it must be realized that marriages were not primarily for romance but rather for the health and flourishing of the family, both by raising daughters to marry away into other families, and accepting new women into one's family through weddings to sons. Loader remarks:

Marriage was not a private affair as it has become in the western world. It was a concern of the local community, and especially of the extended family. The welfare of the family was at stake. It was in everyone's interests to ensure that the marriage would work and households be viable... So marriages were arranged between families, normally within the extended family. Wise heads could assess compatibility and likely future prospects.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> "For this reason, the biblical category of the poor and the helpless - those who must be defended from injustice -specifically consists of widows, orphans, and aliens (Exodus 22:20-21; Deuteronomy 10:18, 14:29; Jeremiah 7:6; Ezekiel 22:7, etc.), that is, those not belonging to a legitimate household and thus without status, without recourse to normal protections, legal, social, material, and so on." Kawashima, "Could a Woman Say 'No' in Biblical Israel?", 6.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Loader, *Making Sense*, 34, 45-46.

<sup>191</sup> Loader, *Making Sense*, 40.

Even as romantic love was poeticized as a proper and noble good of the marriage union, it was functionally an alliance between two families, and often included additional covenants whereby the families united more or less formally.<sup>192</sup> For landowning-class families this would typically include exchanges of gifts, often in the form of dowries and so-called bride-prices. Dowries were given by the wife's family, typically from the father to the husband, for boosting the household to ensure its viability and would often require repayment if the marriage ended in divorce.<sup>193</sup> While the term "bride-price" might evoke images of abject patriarchy and treating women as mere property, in reality the practice in the early Hebrew-Israelite context was primarily "making a contribution to the cost of the festivities surrounding the wedding, which would have been substantial."<sup>194</sup> Wedding feasts would often last days, as long as a week, including many meals served to the extended families of both betrothed. Even as these practices might appear foreign and restrictive in comparison to contemporary standards of romance, the primary ideal remained the health of the community.<sup>195</sup>

An instructive, even if horrifying, example of the collectivist mentality involved in sexual and thereby marital unions can be seen in the rape of Dinah by Shechem in Genesis 34, wherein their resulting marriage also involved his family becoming circumcised, which left the men vulnerable to attack allowing the Hebrews to slaughter them. Even as it was the deed of Shechem

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<sup>192</sup> The apocryphal work *Joseph and Aseneth* (ca. 200 BC – AD 100) is a prime example of Hebrew (or perhaps early Jewish-Christian) literature that lauds romantic love in the marriage relationship. The canonical Song of Songs will be discussed below in the next section as reflective of a subtle and complex view of sexuality.

<sup>193</sup> Loader, *Making Sense*, 43.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 43-44.

<sup>195</sup> Even while romance was not the primary goal of marriage unions, Loader points out that "marriage was usually more than utilitarian and minders often succeeded in producing matches which generated love" and "the ideal was to have a coupling which matched attraction already felt." *Ibid*, 55.

as an individual that was cause of the offense, his whole family was held accountable, a perspective that is seen variously throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>196</sup> This collectivist mentality was foundational to the Hebrew worldview and must therefore be accounted in any survey of biblical marital practices. Marriage was, first and foremost, a bond not just between two individuals but between two families, and thus to be enacted with the utmost seriousness. Again, it was not merely the satisfaction of romantic notions that guided marital practices, but rather the establishment of stable homes, families, clans, tribes, and of society at large. Accordingly, the aim to procreate was a central concern in the ancient Hebrew institution of marriage and was of further importance given both the mandate to multiply and the need to maintain an inheritance which led to the practice of polygamy.

#### *The First Commandment – Procreation and the Origins of Polygamy*

Even if, as it has been argued above in the theoretical considerations, procreation is not the *only* function or purpose for human sexuality, it is beyond dispute that it is an essential element. The primacy of the command (*mitzvah*) to multiply and fill the earth in the Genesis account is a foundational social structure for the historical development of the Hebrew Bible. To be distinguished from contemporary notions of autonomous individuality, the collectivist ethos of the Hebrew culture, and indeed of most ancient societies, perceived marriage as the functional building block of civilization. Individuals were first and foremost members of families, clans, and tribes, and thereby earned their worth according to their ability to enhance the flourishing of the social units they inhabited. Although romantic love was encouraged and celebrated between

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<sup>196</sup> Another instructive example is the sin of Achan in Joshua 7:10-26 which eventuates in not only his death but his entire household, including his children, slaves, and even his livestock.



spouses, the primary aim of marriage covenants was the bonding of two families and the creation of new members.

For the family of Abraham, the need to procreate was particularly reinforced by the early conception of the afterlife, *Sheol*,<sup>197</sup> which, from what can be reconstructed in the Hebrew Bible, appears to be a place where souls (or perhaps shades/ghosts is a better rendering) persist after death.<sup>198</sup> Given the ancient penchant for elaborate descriptions of the afterlife, such as found in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, for example, it is of interest how little is said of *Sheol* in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>199</sup> The earliest usage of the term is found in Genesis in the saga of Joseph and is associated with lamentation, in this case of Jacob for his beloved son when he believed him to be dead.<sup>200</sup> Although the concept of *Sheol* developed to include moral elements, such as the claims of Proverbs 7:27 and 9:18 wherein the personified wicked woman, Folly, beguiles and seduces foolish men to their destruction in *Sheol*, thereby leaving the potential implication that this fate is to be avoided by living a wise life according to the Law, in the earlier formulations there appears to be very little to distinguish persons in this afterlife state.<sup>201</sup> Job questions whether it is part of God's justice for the wicked to "spend their days in prosperity, and in peace go down to *Sheol*" while the pauper "dies in bitterness of soul, never having tasted of prosperity. They lie down alike in the dust, and the worms cover them."<sup>202</sup> Similarly, the rather infamous statement in

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<sup>197</sup> Strong's 7585.

<sup>198</sup> For a full discussion of the conceptual evolution of *Sheol* cf. Bar, Shaul. "Grave Matters: Sheol in the Hebrew Bible." *The Jewish Bible Quarterly* 43, no.3 (September 2015): 145-153.

<sup>199</sup> The term is used 66 times in the HB with the greatest frequency in the Wisdom Literature, namely Job (x8), Psalms (x15), and Proverbs (x9).

<sup>200</sup> Genesis 42:38. Also cf. Genesis 44:29-31.

<sup>201</sup> Bar argues for a moralizing direction of *Sheol* whereby it becomes not just death but a bad death reserved for the wicked. Bar, "Grave Matters," 145-149.

<sup>202</sup> Job 21:13, 25-26.

Isaiah 14 about the morning star falling, which historically contributed to the Lucifer narrative of the primal fallen angel, was in its original context an oracle explicitly taunting the king of Babylon, and implicitly the Babylonian people who believed him to be divine. Instead of divinity, the king was just as mortal as any other person: “Your pomp is brought down to *Sheol*, the sound of your harps; maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers.”<sup>203</sup> The fall envisioned here is of a mighty king pretending to be a god that is cast down to the same pit in the afterlife as everyone else. The speculative wisdom of Ecclesiastes declares that “It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.”<sup>204</sup> There is little hope for those who have fallen into the pit of the afterlife, “the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten” therefore the only hope is for “he who is joined with all the living”.<sup>205</sup> The *Jewish Study Bible* refers to this section as “Death is the final equalizer” and observes that “being alive is better than being dead, because in the netherworld (*Sheol*), no labor, reward, emotions, or thought is possible.”<sup>206</sup> The determining factor, according to this view, of one’s qualitative existence in the afterlife depended primarily, if not completely, on the continuation of one’s family through descendants.

The need to produce children was therefore not only founded on the *mitzvah* of Genesis but further reinforced by the early view of *Sheol*, which necessitated the production of strong lineages in order to maintain a continued existence vicariously through descendants after one’s

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<sup>203</sup> Isaiah 14:11.

<sup>204</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:2.

<sup>205</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:4b, 5b.

<sup>206</sup> Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, ed., *Jewish Study Bible*, (New York: Oxford, 2014), 1613.

death.<sup>207</sup> In light of this, it is not hard to see how the practice of polygamy came into early expression in the Hebrew society.<sup>208</sup> The production of heirs through multiple women was a widespread practice in antiquity and was of particular importance to the Hebrews given their emphasis on genealogy and the remembrance of the dead. This was achieved in a variety of ways, sometimes involving one full-status wife augmented by one or more concubines, who would have had limited legal rights to the husband and his inheritance. The earliest biblical example of this can be found in the narrative of Abraham whereby he and Sarah decide for him to impregnate the Egyptian servant Hagar to produce the heir they were promised.<sup>209</sup> It was also possible to have multiple full-status wives as well as concubines, as demonstrated by Jacob's union to his cousins, Leah and Rachel, as well as their servants, Zilpah and Bilhah. As with Sarah seeking an heir through Hagar, Rachel's initial barrenness induces her to give her servant Bilhah to Jacob "so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children [lit. be built up] through her."<sup>210</sup> Yet, it is likely that these unions were not simply isolated acts of copulation for the propagation of children, but full marital relationships, even if on a decidedly different social footing than what the full-wives enjoyed (such as not having a dowry or taking a bride-price). Concubines were wives and would have likely been maintained in their own

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<sup>207</sup> In this context for a man to die without a male heir "would have meant the extinction of his family and his own annihilation". Eryl W. Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage Part 1." *Vetus Testamentum* 31, no. 2 (April 1981): 140.

<sup>208</sup> Loader uses the term polygyny which is more accurate, meaning "many wives/women" rather than more generically "many spouses" of polygamy. I maintain the usage of the term polygamy herein mainly because it is the more typical term used for this practice, though it should be noted that in the Hebrew context Loader is correct that it only applies to polygynous and not polyandrous (multiple husbands) unions. Loader, *Making Sense*, 49.

<sup>209</sup> Hagar clearly fits the concubine role and is referred to as wife (lit. woman, *ishshah*) in Gen 16:3, though Sarah convinces Abraham to banish her and Ishmael after Isaac's birth demonstrating Hagar's tenuous status.

<sup>210</sup> Gen 30:3b.

households even if their children were legally inheritors of their ladies.<sup>211</sup> The fact that multiple wives would require the upkeep of multiple households would have meant that polygamy was an economic privilege of the landowning class primarily if not solely.<sup>212</sup> Thus, even as it may appear that polygamy was a widespread phenomenon given its precedence in the sagas of the Abrahamic family and later in the chronicles of the monarchy, it must be recognized that these persons inhabited the highest echelons of Hebrew society and should not be considered typical.

While the emphasized need to produce heirs appears to be a primary motivator for the practice of polygamous unions in early Hebrew society, it also shaped a significant portion of the early teachings on sexual sins. Even though it is not inclusive of all the sexual prohibitions, as with incest and adultery, sexual unions that could not produce children, such as with the same-sex and with animals, appear to violate the created order for sexuality and are condemned accordingly. Well before the systematization of Hebrew sexual ethics in the Sinai covenant, the refusal of Onan to produce an heir for his deceased brother, Er, by not inseminating his widow, Tamar, for which Onan is also killed by God for his wickedness like his brother before him, demonstrates this principle clearly.<sup>213</sup> This narrative likely indicates an early date for the practice of levirate marriage, detailed below, as the emphasis is on the fact that the deceased brother, Er, died without an heir, whereby Onan is commanded by their father to produce one. Realizing that the production of an heir with Tamar would not be considered his, he refuses to inseminate her

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<sup>211</sup> The ancient practice of concubinage was gradually replaced after the normative acceptance of monogamy by the pattern of taking mistresses and producing illegitimate children that could, if needed, replace legitimate heirs, which was common practice in the noble class through the medieval era. Currently, this social apparatus has been replaced by consecutive marriages (sometimes referred to as serial monogamy), whereby the man (typically) pays to maintain the households of prior wives while remarrying and establishing new households.

<sup>212</sup> Even in nomadic tribes there were social differentiations of a similar standard; Abraham, for example, would be considered of the landowning class as the leader or chieftain of his extended family.

<sup>213</sup> Genesis 38:6-10.

(though he still takes her sexually), a point which the rabbinic tradition claims was an act of greed by Onan, who wanted to selfishly keep Er's inheritance portion for himself which would have passed to the heir produced with Tamar, if their union was successful.<sup>214</sup> Regardless of Onan's precise motivation, it seems clear from the narrative, that the production of heirs was of paramount importance and indicates at least one more manner in which a man might come to marry multiple women, for it was possible to be necessitated by the practice of levirate marriage to marry a brother's widow, even if the man already had a wife.<sup>215</sup> Taken together, polygamy is closely connected to the mandate to produce children for the establishment of lasting legacies and was thus an accepted practice in the earlier texts of the Hebrew Bible. Yet even while the production of children for familial alliances and theological assurance was central to Hebrew marriage, the Abrahamic line also maintained a distinctive divine covenant which further augmented the social institution with spiritual elements.

### *Marriage and the Abrahamic Covenant*

It has already been demonstrated that the social elements of marriage were vital to the promotion of culture in the ancient world and among the Hebrew-Israelite tribes. Contemporary conceptions of autonomous individuality must not be imposed on the ancient worldview which was decidedly collectivist. Accordingly, marriage was not simply the union of two individuals in love but rather the bonding of two families, two social groups, together. While arranged marriages might appear arbitrary and domineering by current cultural standards, in the ancient

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<sup>214</sup> Cf. Eryl W. Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage Part 2." *Vetus Testamentum* 31, no. 3 (July 1981): 258.

<sup>215</sup> The levirate marriage was not an absolute requirement and included a peculiar ceremony of release whereby a man could refuse the duty and be publicly shamed. Deuteronomy 25:7-10.

context such arrangements were essential to the stability of the extended family and were carefully orchestrated for the promotion of the common social good. Producing children was not only a divine mandate, but also necessary for social and spiritual security, as the new generations would both care for their elders and continue their legacies after death. For those with the means, it was advantageous to maintain multiple households via wives of both full and partial legal standing to ensure a strong lineage. Yet wives were not merely chattel to be traded, as they are sometimes envisioned; they were vital members of the community that oversaw the establishment of their homes and the development of their children. While their social standing was undoubtedly subordinate to their husbands, women were no less members of the community and essential to its health. The choice of a bride was a very serious consideration which not only included social and economic aspects, but also spiritual elements.

In evaluating the development of marriage in the Hebrew-Israelite tradition, it is vital to recognize its relationship to the foundational covenant of the Hebrew people in the saga of Abraham. While in a certain regard the *mitzvah* to be fruitful applies to all people, as the radical monotheism of the Hebrews mandates that all of creation originates from the one true God, the descendants of Abraham recognized themselves as special and chosen to fulfill a specific role by whom “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”<sup>216</sup> The dual nature of the divine promises to Abraham are manifest in the bequeathing of the Promised Land, which was given as an area of nomadic sojourn for Abraham’s immediate family but would not be fully acquired until after the Exodus, and of descendants, who would proliferate to become many nations. This covenant was specifically stated to be everlasting (Heb. *olam*) and was sealed by the sign of male

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<sup>216</sup> Genesis 12:3b.

circumcision.<sup>217</sup> Even as the wider progeny of Abraham were involved in this covenant,<sup>218</sup> there also developed a special legacy of spiritual inheritance that quickly became distinguished from the material birthright of physical succession.

This dual inheritance of Abraham is seen most clearly in the struggle between the twins, Esau and Jacob, beginning even before their birth in the divine revelation to their mother, Rebekah, that “two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided.”<sup>219</sup> The household itself is portrayed as subtly divided, as their father, Isaac, prefers the more masculine Esau while Jacob “was a quiet man, dwelling in tents”, likely indicating his connection to his mother, as the proper role for men in this society was after the pattern of Esau, out hunting.<sup>220</sup> These differing roles and characterizations follow through to the narrative of Esau trading his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew, as Esau is exhausted from a day of adventuring while Jacob was at home cooking, presumably spending time with his beloved mother. What might be taken as a playful interaction between twin brothers is treated in the biblical text with a decided lack of frivolity and appears to be entirely serious, concluding summarily with the claim “Thus Esau despised his birthright.”<sup>221</sup> The Hebrew term translated as birthright, *bekorah*,<sup>222</sup> is rare, occurring only ten times in the Hebrew Bible, half of which are in reference to this episode.<sup>223</sup> The other usage in Genesis 43:33 helps to clarify it, depicting a royal banquet in

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<sup>217</sup> Genesis 17:1-14.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Genesis 25:1-6.

<sup>219</sup> Genesis 25:23b.

<sup>220</sup> Genesis 25:27.

<sup>221</sup> Genesis 25:34.

<sup>222</sup> Strong's 1062.

<sup>223</sup> Genesis 25:31-34; 27:36.

Egypt during the life of Joseph whereby the guests are seated “according to his *bekorah*” in descent from eldest to youngest.<sup>224</sup> Thus what Esau sells to Jacob in exchange for soup is the material inheritance according to the assumed practice of primogeniture, the primacy of the eldest son.<sup>225</sup> Even while Jacob may appear severe in maintaining a pledge made in such haste as depicted in this narrative, the key point is that the material inheritance, while treated here, appears rather trivial in comparison to the exchange involved in Jacob’s assumption of the spiritual inheritance of the Abrahamic covenant that follows.

While the material inheritance, which would have included many social and financial privileges, are taken by Jacob through an unusual and perhaps unfair trade with his apparently slow-witted twin, the spiritual inheritance of Abraham is treated much more seriously and in greater detail in Genesis 27. Having grown blind in his old age, Isaac summons Esau and requests that he procure some of the wild game that he enjoyed so much, so that “my soul may bless you before I die.”<sup>226</sup> After Esau leaves, Rebekah, who overheard the conversation, summons Jacob and explains an alternative plan, whereby they slaughter one of the herd for the meal and disguise Jacob as his brother. Even while Isaac appears on some level to realize the ruse, stating outright “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau”, he proceeds with the blessing even still.<sup>227</sup> After Esau returns with the meal of wild game, Isaac gives him a lesser, secondary blessing imbued with strife which fills Esau with rage, swearing that after grieving for the passing of their father that he would kill his brother.<sup>228</sup> It is only by the

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<sup>224</sup> This is further attested in the post-exilic era in 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 and Nehemiah 10:36.

<sup>225</sup> The struggle for primacy is also indicated in the peculiar circumstances of the twins’ birth, whereby Esau is born first but Jacob comes out grabbing his heel, providing the etymology for his naming. Genesis 25:24-26.

<sup>226</sup> Genesis 27:4b.

<sup>227</sup> Genesis 27:22b.



intervention of their mother in sending Jacob away that the murderous plot is foiled.<sup>229</sup> The dual narratives of the inheritances of Esau stolen by Jacob illustrates a developing duality in the Abrahamic tradition, which included both material and spiritual aspects. Indeed, it is notable that while Esau laments that Jacob is rightly named, heel-grabber, meaning idiomatically a deceiver, for stealing his birthright, it is only after the theft of the blessing that Esau becomes vengeful.

Even while the special promise of Abraham was conceived as a sort of spiritual legacy parallel, although distinctive, to the physical inheritance, and practiced in accord with primogeniture, the Israelite culture regarded the tribes of Israel as the culmination of this lineage, from Abraham through Isaac to Jacob and his twelve sons. The emphasis therefore was not on the physical inheritance, which was assimilated into the tradition through the dispensations of the Promised Land in Joshua, but rather on the spiritual legacy of the covenantal blessings. This is likely the reason for why the biblical account gives so little attention to the purchase of the material birthright and so much, in contrast, to the theft of the blessing. Marriage, as the essential building block of community including tribal and covenantal affiliations, would have in the Hebrew-Israelite tradition therefore included both aspects, material and spiritual. As it has already been demonstrated above, marriage in this context was not simply the union of two individuals but two social groups, and was treated with the utmost seriousness.

To unite one's family by marriage with a suspicious or immoral person was to leave the family open to scorn and ruin. One of the ways in which the ancients worked to overcome this danger was to choose spouses for their children from within the extended family. Indeed, as Isaac

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<sup>228</sup> Genesis 27:39-41.

<sup>229</sup> Genesis 27:42-45.

aged past his thirties, the typical time in the Hebrew culture for a man to find a wife,<sup>230</sup> Abraham took matters into his own hands by sending the anonymous servant back to his homeland to secure a proper marriage, resulting in the negotiation with Rebekah and her betrothal.<sup>231</sup> So too, when Rebekah sends Jacob away to live with her brother, Laban, after Esau declares his murderous intent, she gives the pretext that it is time for him to find a bride because she could not bear the idea of his marrying one of the local women.<sup>232</sup> Even while ethnic purity may have been a part of the motivation, it seems likely that contemporary conceptions of ethnicity are anachronistic to the period. Rather than racial markers typically associated with ethnic purity, such as skin color, the key considerations in pursuing potential spouses for one's children in this context would have been the stability of the union and its probability for a successful match. This would have included a range of socio-cultural issues but also spiritual concerns, which were in this context intimately connected. Indeed, there is a tension within the larger witness of the Hebrew Bible concerning intermarriage with non-Hebrews/Israelites which highlights the precedence of theological and spiritual concerns over those of ethnic purity.

### *The Problem of Intermarriage and the Levirate Union*

As the inheritors of the Abrahamic covenant, the successive generations of Hebrews conceived of their relationship with the one true God as special among the peoples of the world. Even as the material birthright of Esau is given little attention, the special blessing stolen by Jacob is central to the saga of the development of the tribes of Israel. As marriage was the

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<sup>230</sup> Cf. Loader, *Making Sense*, 33.

<sup>231</sup> Genesis 24. Cf. Aitken, Kenneth T. "The Wooing of Rebekah: A Study in the Development of the Tradition." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30, (October 1984): 3-23.

<sup>232</sup> Genesis 27:46.

essential social mechanism for the joining of families, the choice of spouse for one's children was of paramount importance. There were, to be sure, material concerns involved as well, such as the necessity to maintain the family estate, and social issues, such as cultural barriers of language and custom, but for the Hebrew-Israelites there was also a theological issue at stake in marriage unions. To unite in marriage was to bond families and that included, necessarily, covenantal commitments, both to other persons and groups but also to their deities. The intimate blending of cultural and spiritual activities, including rites of purification, sacrifices, feasts, and so forth, meant that to participate in the culture of another tribe was consequently to be involved with their religious devotion as well.<sup>233</sup>

The earliest specific injunction against intermarriage to non-Hebrews is found in Deuteronomy 7, which indicates that when the land of Canaan is given to the Israelites in conquest, the native tribes should be wiped out completely and not taken in marriage, "for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods."<sup>234</sup> This prohibition is taken up again centuries later by the Persian appointed scribe Ezra, who is tasked initially with the cleansing and beautification of the Temple, but ends up becoming embroiled in the cultural crisis of intermarriage by the returning exiles with the peoples of the land (*amme ha aretz*).<sup>235</sup> It is particularly instructive to note the term here used for intermarriage, *arab*,<sup>236</sup> means to exchange pledges and carries the connotation of taking responsibility for or pledging for another. To

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<sup>233</sup> This is the cultural background undergirding Paul's interesting balancing between radical monotheism and the warning against participating in the pagan festivals of false deities in 1 Corinthians 8.

<sup>234</sup> Deuteronomy 7:4a. There are, of course, serious scholarly challenges to Mosaic authorship, so it is possible that this injunction is a later product, but this consideration doesn't alter the present study significantly.

<sup>235</sup> Ezra 9-10.

<sup>236</sup> Strong's 6148.

integrate another family into the covenant of Israel by means of marriage is thereby a serious consideration that, if one is not careful in making such a pledge, could lead the family to ruination and covenantal exclusion.<sup>237</sup>

Even as such concerns may on their face appear to be ethnically motivated, as the stark condemnations of Ezra against taking foreign wives might suggest, the Hebrew Bible demonstrates an important corrective in the small but influential book of Ruth. There is a great deal of scholarly debate concerning the precise nature of the marriage union depicted between the titular character, Ruth, and the man identified as her redeemer (Heb. *go'el*), Boaz.<sup>238</sup> While it is widely recognized that there is a definite element involved in Ruth's example that appears to connect substantively to the mandates of Deuteronomy 25,<sup>239</sup> there yet remains uncertainty over the precise relationship between them.<sup>240</sup> The Deuteronomic levirate law dictates that in the case of an Israelite man dying without an heir, that his widow should be given to his closest brother, specifically one who dwells on the same land (likely in this context involving a family estate including multiple households), so "that his name may not be blotted out of Israel."<sup>241</sup> While this

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<sup>237</sup> A peculiar instance of this notion can be seen in the final narrative of Judges 21 which depicts the slaughter of the tribe of Benjamin and the resultant problem of its potential destruction via depopulation. What is particularly odd about the episode is that the other tribes had taken an oath not to give their daughters in marriage to the men of Benjamin, which causes great lamentation until the solution is made of slaughtering Jabesh-gilead, which had not participated in the war, and taking their virgins, as well as stealing virgins from the annual festival at Shiloh.

<sup>238</sup> This is relevant to the present study for its expression of the idea of the covenantal promise, its inheritance, and how one becomes a member of it. The present aim is to reconstruct the sociological aspects of the text and how marriage functioned therein, which will bear significantly on the theological commentary to follow.

<sup>239</sup> The term levirate is derived from the Latin *levir* for brother-in-law, and is a widespread practice in various forms throughout the ancient world. For a survey of comparative practices, cf. Josh Ketchum, "The Go'el Custom in Ruth: A Comparative Study." *Restoration Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2010): 237-245.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Dale W. Manor, "A Brief History of Levirate Marriage as it Relates to the Bible." *Restoration Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1984): 129-142.

<sup>241</sup> Deuteronomy 25:6b.

connects readily with Boaz's claim that the marriage to Ruth was intended "in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance", even still, significant differences remain.<sup>242</sup>

The precise relationship of Boaz to Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, is uncertain, so too with the anonymous redeemer who forfeits his rights to Boaz without undergoing the shaming ceremony as mandated by Deuteronomy 25:7-10. But of more importance is the fact that Ruth is not an Israelite; as the text repeatedly reminds the reader, she is a foreigner from Moab.<sup>243</sup> While it is possible that Naomi in some form had passed her rights of inheritance on to Ruth, it is still uncertain how this transpired or if it was an accepted practice.<sup>244</sup> Even further, while the purpose of perpetuating the name of the dead is specified by Boaz in his negotiation with the anonymous redeemer, it is of interest to note that in the genealogies of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels, Matthew and Luke, Boaz and Ruth are listed specifically, not Ruth's deceased first husband, Chilion.<sup>245</sup> Further, there is a complex interweaving of a second tradition into the practice of levirate marriage concerning the inheritance of the tribal lands as mandated in Leviticus 25.<sup>246</sup> It would appear that Boaz simultaneously acts as redeemer of the land while taking Ruth in marriage, purportedly to continue the lineage of the deceased family of Naomi and maintain her inheritance in the tribal dispensation.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Ruth 3:5b.

<sup>243</sup> As she makes explicit in her conversation with Boaz concerning his kindness to her, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner." Ruth 2:10b.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Ketchum, "Go'el Custom", 241.

<sup>245</sup> Matthew 1:5; Luke 3:32. The Davidic genealogy of 1 Chronicles 2 significantly omits this detail.

<sup>246</sup> "This suggests that the application of the laws of land redemption and levirate marriage in the Torah were fluid and flexible and were adapted by Israelite society to the changing context of everyday life. The intrinsic principles of both laws are reflected in the go 'el custom of Ruth, yet both laws are expanded in their usage and application in the ancient Israelite society." Ketchum, "Go'el Custom," 237. Also cf. Jack M. Sasson, "The Issue of ge'ullāh in Ruth." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 5, (January 1978): 52-68.

<sup>247</sup> Davies argues that the reason why the anonymous redeemer would initially accept the offer and then

Beyond the importance of the narrative as an historical representation of the complex social circumstances involved in the maintenance of the literal and symbolic inheritance of Israel, Ruth also demonstrates the circumstances whereby a non-Hebrew could be inducted into the covenantal community. After the death of both her husband and sons, Naomi releases her daughters-in-law from their familial obligations to her, a compassionate and selfless choice given the dire circumstances she faced as an unattached widow in such a context.<sup>248</sup> While the other daughter-in-law, Orpah, accepts the offer, Ruth stays with Naomi and consequently gives a covenantal promise to follow her wherever she went so that “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”<sup>249</sup> The social obligations of the original marriage covenant were thereby released by Naomi, yet Ruth supervenes her marital obligations by continuing her association with Naomi, presumably, given the narrative that follows, as her caregiver.<sup>250</sup> In the resulting interactions with Boaz, it is emphasized that Ruth’s devotion and fidelity to Naomi has become known, and while the narrator repeatedly refers to Ruth as a Moabite, she is never judged by Boaz according to her ethnicity but instead by her dutiful fulfilment of her covenantal responsibilities in caring for Naomi. Brad Embry further notes the linguistic-conceptual pairing of redemption and acquisition language in the text demonstrates an imbedded theological tradition connecting Ruth’s redemption and overall reception into the Israelite covenant to the

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refuse it has to do with his initial perception that the process would involve him marrying Naomi, who was past child-bearing age, thereby allowing him (and his family) to acquire her inheritance. The prospect of marrying Ruth, who was young and fertile, would be less promising as it would likely produce an heir and divide his inheritance further along with the added requirements of maintaining a second household, which is what convinces him not to accept the offer and acquiesce. Eryl W. Davies, “Ruth 4:5 and the Duties of the *gō’ēl*.” *Vetus Testamentum* 33, no. 2 (April 1983): 231-234.

<sup>248</sup> Ruth 1:8-14.

<sup>249</sup> Ruth 1:16b.

<sup>250</sup> Ruth 2 depicts the practice of leaving the gleanings for the poor as mandated in Leviticus 19:9-10, after which she returns to Naomi with her bounty leading to the conversation about their relationship to Boaz.

redemption of Israel by God in the Exodus.<sup>251</sup> Not only does Ruth's characterization as a faithful convert to the Hebrew covenant reinforce what mattered was fidelity rather than ethnicity, but the ultimate punchline of her concise narrative resolves in the genealogy of the exalted covenantal king of Israel, David.<sup>252</sup> Ruth's narrative thus provides a corrective to the policies of Ezra by depicting a positive counterexample, indeed one that was a direct antecedent of the Davidic line, which was central to the self-identity of the returning exiles as demonstrated in the genealogies of First Chronicles.<sup>253</sup> The covenantal fidelity of Ruth thereby gives an affirming demonstration of the Hebrew-Israelite covenant being trans-ethnic, based not on one's bloodline but rather on one's faithful enacting of covenantal responsibilities. In contrast, the abuses of the monarchy and, in particular, the connection between political marriages and the induction of idolatry in Jerusalem became a vital element of the developed critique of polygamous unions and consequent normalization of monogamous marriage.

### *Connecting Polygamy and Polytheism*

Given the essential importance of the marriage union to the continuation and welfare of the community and society, it is no surprise to find that the topic is of great importance to the development of the Israelite monarchy. Considering that the king served as the highest leader of

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<sup>251</sup> Brad Embry, "Redemption-Acquisition': The Marriage of Ruth as a Theological Commentary on Yahweh and Yahweh's people." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7, no. 2 (September 2013): 257-273.

<sup>252</sup> Ruth 4:17-22, which indicates twice Ruth's connection to David, in both narrative and genealogy. David is central to both genealogies of Jesus in the NT. Further, Rahab is identified as Boaz's mother in Matt 1:5, another non-Hebrew woman accepted into the covenant.

<sup>253</sup> To be sure, Ruth and Ezra were separated by at least six centuries, but it has been widely remarked in critical scholarship that thematically the two works are in significant tension. Particularly in light of the predominance of David in the post-exilic genealogies, it is highly significant that another canonical book, one which pertains to predate Ezra by a considerable margin, narrates the life of a woman, the titular character no less, who is a Moabite and yet is openly (even warmly) embraced into the Hebrew community through marriage, the very act that Ezra attempted to invalidate.

society and thereby was viewed as a paternal figure, both guiding and disciplining the people as the members of his household, the question of his marital union(s) was a vital issue. Not only did the position of king itself represent a dangerous role liable to idolatry if misrepresented, as noted by the initial use of the term prince to refer to Saul, which was almost immediately forgotten in favor of kingship nomenclature, but further, the union of the king in marriage typically meant far-reaching political alliances. In the ancient near eastern context of the Israelite monarchy, to unite to a foreign kingdom meant a spiritual, as well as social union. This issue came to the fore of the Israelite society as a consequence of Solomon's eager empire building, which involved hundreds of marital unions according to the textual records of his reign.<sup>254</sup> The great sin of Solomon, even despite his great wisdom, stemmed from these polygamous unions which necessarily equated to acceptance of polytheistic, and therefore idolatrous, practices. This explicit association of polygamy and polytheism in turn laid the foundation for the latter prophetic movements counter-association of monogamy and monotheism.

In order to understand the role of the king in the Israelite society, it is important to recognize the deep theological tension that the office elicits from the developed Hebrew Bible. The vision of the acquisition of the Promised Land projected the expectation that the people could enjoy abundance in the land and only needed the divine law espoused by Moses. After the climax farewell discourse of Joshua at Shechem in the closing chapters of his book, the amalgamated narratives of the Judges that follow demonstrate social degeneration that is closely tied to the idolatrous practices of the surrounding polytheistic tribes. While the original plan was for these tribes to be driven out entirely, because of the failings of the Israelites they were cursed, "So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides,

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<sup>254</sup> 1 Kings 11:3.



and their gods shall be a snare to you.”<sup>255</sup> The fears behind the prohibition of intermarriage, namely the theological idolatry it is almost certain to involve, came to fruition as each successive generation of Israelites succumbed to idolatry; “they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them.”<sup>256</sup> This pattern, known as the cycle of apostasy, forms the basic narrative structure of Judges and is paradigmatic for the cycles of the monarchs that follow as well. As a result of their punishment, the Israelites cry out and repent, thereby inducing God to relent and, in the time of the Judges, send a charismatic leader to liberate the people from foreign domination.<sup>257</sup> The role that marriage served in this cycle is explicated: “their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods.”<sup>258</sup> The connection between the social blending involved in marriage and the theological ramifications are thereby made clear.

With each new generation of Israelites, the idolatry and moral degeneration worsened: “whenever a judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers.”<sup>259</sup> The conclusion of the work depicts the Levites, the priestly tribe, engaged in making idols and the horrifying tale of the gang-rape and murder of a Levite’s concubine while traveling in the land of Benjamin, which resolves in the slaughter of the tribe and its near annihilation. The end of the book describes the methods whereby the Benjaminites were provided with wives by taking them

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<sup>255</sup> Judges 2:3.

<sup>256</sup> Judges 2:12.

<sup>257</sup> Judges is really quite brilliant in how it sets up the pattern in abstract first, 2:11-23, and then gives a concrete yet brief example that clearly demonstrates the pattern with Othniel, 3:7-11, before moving into the more elaborate tales such as with Ehud who follows.

<sup>258</sup> Judges 3:6.

<sup>259</sup> Judges 2:19.

from the conquest of Jabesh-gilead and stealing them from a virginal festival at Shiloh.<sup>260</sup> In light of these atrocities, a sobering editorial remark closes the book: “in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”<sup>261</sup> Even while the people of Israel should have been able to inhabit the land in peace and enjoy its abundance, their evil inclinations led them to ignore the divine mandates and mix themselves with the native tribes to the extent of accepting their idolatrous ways. While modern persons may consider themselves able to distinguish between theological and moral concerns, in this context they were absolutely interwoven and inseparable. Thus, to mix one’s family with an idolatrous tribe through marriage was not just to bond individuals and families in social customs but also in sacred rituals, and the rituals in turn demonstrate the kind of deity who they are intended to honor.<sup>262</sup>

Given this context, the establishment of the kingship in Israel was itself critiqued based on its propensity for abuse and association with idolatry. Even with the editorial remarks in Judges connecting the lack of a king with the moral degeneration of the age, the inception of the monarchy is presented in highly suspicious and unfavorable terms.<sup>263</sup> Samuel, the only biblical character to combine the offices of priest, prophet, and judge, provides a biting monologue in response to the Israelites’ desire for him to select a king to reign and establish a dynasty concluding with the chilling prediction: “and you will be his slaves. And in that day you will cry

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<sup>260</sup> Judges 21.

<sup>261</sup> Judges 21:25. Also 17:6.

<sup>262</sup> The clearest mixture of theological and moral concerns that demonstrates the dangers of idolatry and polytheism is in the practice of human sacrifice, particularly of child sacrifice. While it is widely considered an essential element in the Hebrew tradition that Abraham was spared from having to sacrifice his children thereby abolishing it, it is beyond refute that it is explicitly prohibited in the Torah. Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5.

<sup>263</sup> Given the ancient historiographical tendency to laud the establishment of dynasties with univocal panegyric, the Hebrew Bible gives a surprisingly sober and critical assessment of the office even despite its overall tendency to raise up David and his covenant.

out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”<sup>264</sup> In light of the definitional role of the Exodus in the self-identity of the Israelite tribes, the claim that the king would become as pharaoh and enslave the people, but this time God won’t come to their rescue, is astonishing in its force. To choose a king was thus in itself an act of idolatry and a subtle dismissal of the covenant promises; because God had played the role of king, protecting and providing for the people, to ask for a human was to replace God with a mere man.

Even despite the forceful warnings of Samuel, the people chose to ignore his counsel and nominate a king, which led to the tragic life of Saul who serves as a case-study in the corrosive influence that power can have on a person. As a young man he actively resisted Samuel’s initial attempts to anoint and coronate him,<sup>265</sup> rather humorously hiding behind the luggage to avoid the crowd’s attempt to crown him,<sup>266</sup> but after his two blunders, whereby his dynasty is broken and his kingship revoked,<sup>267</sup> he refuses to step down and becomes a power hungry tyrant who attempts repeatedly to kill young David despite his repeated reminders that he does not seek Saul any harm.<sup>268</sup> While Saul’s marital situation is less clear, with David the practice of polygamy is certain and began with his early marriage to Michal, Saul’s daughter, given to him as a prize for vanquishing Goliath.<sup>269</sup> After the disastrous effects of the power-rape of Bathsheba and the

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<sup>264</sup> 1 Samuel 8:17b-18.

<sup>265</sup> 1 Samuel 9:16.

<sup>266</sup> 1 Samuel 10:22.

<sup>267</sup> 1 Samuel 13; 15.

<sup>268</sup> 1 Samuel 24; 26.

<sup>269</sup> Derby argues that Saul’s choice of David involved a political maneuver as he intended this to solidify his authority over Judah, and when he sent David away to collect the Philistine foreskins as bride-price, since he was the eighth son of a shepherd and could not afford a proper one, then David’s death would have provided a martyr to unite Judah to Saul as well. Derby further claims that David realized this maneuver, which likely also involved

consequent political murder of her husband, the loyal lieutenant Uriah, David's house fell into civil war with his son Absalom.<sup>270</sup> Having chased his father out of his capital city, Absalom's entrance into his father's home included bringing out David's harem of concubines and sexually assaulting them in the sight of the city.<sup>271</sup> This violent act of sexuality served as a public demonstration of his mastery over his father and his domination of the kingship, for a time at least, until his death in battle shortly thereafter.<sup>272</sup> The ability of a king to maintain and protect many wives and provide for their households was a marker of his prowess as well as his political abilities, as the inclusion of foreign wives would allow alliances, which would become a vital feature of the reign of David's son, Solomon.

Despite the rather brutal circumstances of the ascension of Solomon, given the legitimacy of his elder brother, Adonijah, in his claims to the throne in the wake of the deaths of the eldest princes, Absalom and Amnon, after the machinations of Bathsheba and Nathan, the court prophet, Solomon was declared to be the crown prince by David.<sup>273</sup> Despite Adonijah's abdication of his royal claims, his seemingly humble request to take Abishag, David's nursemaid in his old age, as his wife leads Solomon to order not only his execution, but of all his notable

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Michal's attraction to him as another motivator for the union, and was repelled by it thereby causing Michal to be despised and childless. Derby, Josiah. "David's marriage to Michal." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1991): 79-83.

<sup>270</sup> The terminology of "power-rape" here is intended to emphasize David's position as king in calling for her to be brought to his bedchambers. As the king, his word and action were literal law, so it was impossible for him to violate it (in theory, of course in actuality God was watching and was displeased). While some interpreters have projected seductive characterizations onto Bathsheba, the text gives no credence to such speculations; her act of ritual cleansing on the roof was only seen by David because of his literally elevated position as king in his palace and thereby should not be taken as an indication that she was purposefully exposing herself.

<sup>271</sup> 1 Samuel 16:21-22.

<sup>272</sup> 1 Samuel 18, which includes the report made to David and his subsequent lamentation.

<sup>273</sup> 1 Kings 1.

supporters, by his trusty lieutenant Benaiah, only sparing the priest, Abiathar.<sup>274</sup> After the series of brutal murders, the text states summarily, “So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.”<sup>275</sup> Even while this leads to a rather stark and ruthless portrayal of Solomon, who is never characterized with the more personal narratives as his father was before him, it fits with his larger saga as an empire builder. Saul and David had both struggled to unite the tribes into a cohesive nation, but for Solomon this work was already complete and so he turned to building projects, the Jerusalem Temple, his own palatial residence (which was considerably larger than the Temple), and the power of the nation through various means, military and political. The warnings of Samuel appear to come to full fruition in the reign of Solomon, whereby to fulfill these grand tasks the populace was conscripted and taxed to the breaking point, leading to insurrectionists like Jeroboam, who had to flee to Egypt (ironically) to avoid persecution at the hands of Solomon, ultimately dividing the Israelite monarchy. Thus, while political and economic power were dominant elements in the degradation of Solomon from a wise, if ruthless, king into a bitter tyrant, the biblical narrative also highlights the root issue: idolatry.

Not only did the kings of Israel need to remember that to take such a position was itself an act of idolatry, wherein a mere human stands in for God, but also that the covenant which promised the land and its abundance included obligations as well as rewards. For an Israelite to marry another person included the mandate that the potential spouse be part of the covenanted community (or, as in the case of Ruth, willing to join and accept its conditions). But the king was not just any citizen; in an important social regard, he stood in as the father of the nation, and thus

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<sup>274</sup> 1 Kings 2:13-46.

<sup>275</sup> 1 Kings 2:46.

the issue of his marital relationship(s) would have been of vital importance to the nation.<sup>276</sup> Given not only the social implications of royal marriage but also the added spiritual elements involved in the Hebrew-Israelite covenants, the marriages of the king were understood as having effects on the entire nation and its covenantal standing as a collective before God. It is for this reason that the Deuteronomic History is so explicit in its condemnation of his intermarriages, as they were in direct violation of the mandate against intermarriage discussed above, which is explicitly quoted in Solomon's saga.<sup>277</sup> Indeed, there is little ambiguity in the account: "And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father."<sup>278</sup> The narrative even indicates, after listing his various idolatrous behaviors, that God appeared twice to Solomon to warn him against such activities, which he ignored.<sup>279</sup> Even while Solomon's son, Rehoboam, must bear some significant share of the blame for his failure to negotiate terms to maintain the united tribes, still it is clear in the prophet Aijah's oracle to Jeroboam that it is because of Solomon's idolatry that the kingdom would be torn apart.<sup>280</sup> This close association between polygamy, particularly monarchical, and polytheistic idolatry was thereby historically established by Solomon and would provide a conceptual foundation for the latter prophetic movement which would uphold monogamous fidelity as reflective of the singular devotion required of the one true God.

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<sup>276</sup> Echoes of this principle can still be seen in the manner in which nations that have maintained their monarchs, such as England, spend so much attention on news regarding the marital situations of their royals.

<sup>277</sup> 1 Kings 11:1-2.

<sup>278</sup> 1 Kings 11:3b-4.

<sup>279</sup> 1 Kings 11:9-10.

<sup>280</sup> 1 Kings 11:30-39. The oracle also claims that the only reason the Davidic lineage will continue at all, even if greatly diminished by the secession of ten of the twelve tribes, was on account of David's faithfulness.

## MARITAL FIDELITY IN THE NEVI'IM AND KETUVIM

It has been argued that the origins of marriage in the Hebrew Bible reflect a dual emphasis on both the goodness intended by the creation of sexual union, as well as the fractured realities of the present order. From this theoretical basis, the historical development of marriage in the Hebrew culture reflected both social and spiritual elements which were deeply interwoven. While never a topic of explicit teaching, polygamous unions were accepted from an early pre-Abrahamic cultural framework that allowed important (male) individuals, especially tribal leaders, to ensure strong lineages through unions with multiple wives of various standing. The allowance of polygamy was thereby founded on the function of sexual union as the decisive procreative act. However, a critique of the polygamous union also developed that linked it with the idolatrous practices of the polytheistic cultures surrounding the Hebrew-Israelites. This implicit assessment was explicated in the reign of Solomon who, despite his great wisdom and legacy as a teacher of the Law, fell from divine favor by not only marrying many foreign wives (hundreds, per the Deuteronomic History) but also by allowing them to bring their many gods with them into Jerusalem to establish their own shrines and altars. This historical connection between polytheism and polygamy was therefore cemented in the biblical record, but it would be the latter prophets that further intimated the corollary equation of monotheism and monogamy.

While there are a host of issues covered by the latter prophets, some rather explicitly, while others remain veiled in the poetic language of symbolism, it can be observed that there are two primary thematic poles upon which their teachings hinged: justice and fidelity.<sup>281</sup> In essence,

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<sup>281</sup> This is not an innovative thesis and is generally regarded among prophetic scholarship. Premnath points out that despite the typical portrayal of Amos as being the social justice prophet while Hosea is directed toward idolatry, in reality “Hosea is just as concerned with social injustice as Amos but simply expresses it differently.” D N. Premnath, “Amos and Hosea: sociohistorical background and prophetic critique.” *Word & World* 28, no. 2 (2008): 125-126.

Israel (and Judah) were judged according to two models, distinctive yet deeply related: by the cultural treatment of the lowly and by the maintenance of covenantal loyalty to YHWH alone.<sup>282</sup>

Even while there are lingering scholarly debates concerning the specific historical reflections in the book of Hosea, it is beyond doubt that his prophetic ministry emphasized the breach of the marital covenant as reflective of the infidelities of Israel by seeking after other (false) gods.

While contemporary scholars can critique the patriarchal patterns implied by the theological narrative, the fundamental correlation between marital fidelity and covenantal loyalty is made clear by Hosea and further emphasized by the proceeding prophets, particularly Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The shift in perception toward the normative acceptance of monogamy can be seen as well in the wisdom literature of the Ketuvim which elevates the goodness of sexuality and emphasizes the importance of finding a good spouse. Taken together, it will be demonstrated that while polygamy is never outright sanctioned in the Hebrew Bible, the thematic and theological move toward monogamous standards can be seen as arising from historical roots in the prophetic ministries that were further sublimated in the Judaic tradition through poetic and philosophical works thereby establishing the precedent for the monogamous social patterns that set the background for the Christian perspective on marriage.

### *Betrayal and Reconciliation in the Ministry of Hosea*

Even as the connection between polygamy and polytheism is generally observed in the prophetic tradition, the most important expression for study is found in the ministry of Hosea and the problematic relationship with his wife, Gomer, which served as a basis for his rather

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<sup>282</sup> Brueggemann observes poetically, “Prophecy is born precisely in that moment when the emergence of social political reality is so radical and inexplicable that it has nothing less than a theological cause.” Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 6.



extensive oracles. Although the precise nature of the marriage with Gomer, including such issues as when exactly she became adulterous and if the relationship was historical or purely figurative, has been debated by the academic community, the theological importance of their union is rather explicit. Breaking the covenantal fidelity of marriage was likened by Hosea to the breaches of faith committed by the people of Israel in seeking after other gods which would result in consequences: shame and exile. “And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the LORD.”<sup>283</sup> Despite the harshness of this rebuke, there was still an openness to reconciliation as evidenced by Hosea being led to reunite with Gomer, but this would require a renewed commitment to the covenantal union including rejecting her other lovers, just as Israel would have to recommit to its union with God and reject its idols. “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”<sup>284</sup> While the social patterns involved in this prophetic narrative can certainly be critiqued by contemporary scholars, the danger of worldview anachronism looms large in such evaluations. Further, while the emphasis on monogamy is definitely a major aspect of Hosea’s teaching, at the same time interpreters must be careful to recognize the metaphor for what it is and avoid literalizing it, just as Hosea also likens Israel’s relationship to YHWH as a child to a parent. Even so, the symbolic importance of Hosea’s relationship to Gomer provides

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<sup>283</sup> Hosea 2:13. Baal, here in the plural (*Baalim*), was the Canaanite prince god (son of El) who served as the male fertility deity (as the originator of storms, wherein the symbolism of the rain was likened to the semination involved in coitus) and was often depicted as tall with a phallic hat and raised spear. Though there were not multiple Baals in the Canaanite pantheon, the plurality indicated here is an indicator of their prophetic use in a paradigmatic fashion – the sexually charged imagery of Baal is equated to Gomer’s various lovers in a symbolic equation.

<sup>284</sup> Hosea 3:3b.

further theoretical validation for the social shift away from polygamous unions and the gradual acceptance of normative monogamy.

Hosea bears the distinction of being among the earliest of the latter prophets and further is regarded with special interest due to his unique identity as the only canonical prophet from and to the Kingdom of Israel.<sup>285</sup> Despite the relative clarity of dating the ministry of Hosea, very little is known about him personally and most scholarship that has been produced to fill in these details amounts to little more than artistic conjecture.<sup>286</sup> This lack is certainly not unique to Hosea, as few of the *Nevi'im* texts provide much by way of biographical details concerning their subjects, particularly so in the Scroll of the Twelve (otherwise known as the Minor Prophets). Even still, it is relatively easy to set aside such discussions for reading oracles such as Nahum or Joel, while Hosea invites such conjecture due to the central place of a series of very personal narratives that occupy the first three chapters of the text. Accordingly, questions have circulated in biblical scholarship over the precise relationship of Hosea to his wife, Gomer, who is depicted as being unfaithful and sent away, as well as how this narrative relates to the reconciliation passage of the third chapter.

Although most scholarship today agrees that the depiction of the marriage union with Gomer is indeed literal-historical and not intended to be merely figurative, earlier commentators often maintained purely allegorical renderings of the passage due to the apparent command by God to perform an immoral act, namely the willing union with a promiscuous woman as wife.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Hosea is commonly dated to the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, ca. 750-735, likely before the Syro-Ephraimitic War in 734. For a concise explanation of chronological context, cf. John H. Johansen, "The Prophet Hosea: His Marriage and Message." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14, no. 3 (1971): 179.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, 180.

<sup>287</sup> Gordis, Robert. "Hosea's Marriage and Message: A New Approach." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 25, (1954): 10-11.

In light of the general academic dismissal of the (purely) allegorical approach to the text, various theories have thereby been proposed to lessen the burden of the apparent immoral divine command by positing that at the time of the initial union Gomer was not promiscuous but rather this behavior developed subsequently which, in turn, led Hosea to conclude that this was all part of the divine plan and constitutive of his calling as a prophet.<sup>288</sup> The role and relation of the symbolically named children also poses a challenge for reconstruction, as the rejections indicated by their names correlate to the breach of covenant by Gomer and her looming dismissal, yet Hosea is clearly called to continue with her despite the apparent infidelity which would also call into question their legitimacy as his children. Even further, complexity arises in the relation of Gomer to the unnamed woman of reconciliation in chapter three.<sup>289</sup> Because of the ambiguity arising from the restored woman's identity, who is never explicitly named, some have questioned whether this is a different woman altogether. Yet this thesis is broadly rejected as a sort of argument from silence; simply because the woman is not named does not support her identification as anyone other than Gomer. Even more important is the interpretive problem this dissociation would produce, as it would thereby indicate that Gomer is not, in fact, restored by Hosea, which would, in turn, damage the restoration aspects of the resulting oracles. Despite the difficulties involved in reconstructing the historic life of Hosea, the symbolic import of the sequence is rather clear: infidelity results in divorce just as idolatry resolves in exile; yet, like an ever-loving husband, YHWH prepares for reconciliation and reunion.

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<sup>288</sup> Cf. Gordis, "Hosea's Marriage," 15-16; Bowman, Craig D. "Prophetic Grief, Divine Grace: The Marriage of Hosea." *Restoration Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2001): 236.

<sup>289</sup> Gordis, "Hosea's Marriage," 28-30. Also cf. Louis O. Dorn, "Is Gomer the Woman in Hosea 3." *The Bible Translator* 51, no. 4 (October 2000): 424-430.

Although the specifics of Hosea's life are far from certain, there is general scholarly agreement that the situation symbolized by Gomer's infidelity referred to the ongoing acceptance of idolatrous practices in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. While there remains conjecture concerning the specifics of the rites and idols involved, particularly whether there in fact existed a fertility cult of Baal that performed sexual acts as part of its ritual observances,<sup>290</sup> even so the framework of Hosea's logic remains clear: idolatry is equivalent to infidelity.<sup>291</sup> "And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal."<sup>292</sup> YHWH is depicted here as a dutiful husband providing for his wife, yet she takes the gifts and offers them to her lover instead. Even while veiled in metaphor, the teaching is rather explicit and names Baal specifically as the lover, thereby establishing clearly the connection between infidelity and idolatry.

The consequences of the adultery/idolatry are materialized in the divorce proceedings whereby Hosea prosecutes Gomer; in the original social setting the husband had the exclusive rights to sue for divorce, so YHWH acting in the role of the husband could unilaterally nullify the covenant if it were breached by Israel as wife.<sup>293</sup> Nevertheless, despite the dire situation, grace infuses the text, as Hosea seeks for his children to plead with their mother to turn from her immoral ways, indicating grief and horror at the ruination that will befall her if she does not

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<sup>290</sup> Clements argues for the sexual fertility cult as the basis of Hosea's message, while Adams rejects this thesis and claims instead the existence of a female-oriented sect that was perceived to conflict with the Yahwist religion. Ronald E. Clements, "Understanding the book of Hosea." *Review & Expositor* 72, no. 4 (September 1975): 405-423; Karin Adams, "Metaphor and Dissonance: A Reinterpretation of Hosea 4:13-14." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 2 (2008): 291-305.

<sup>291</sup> Cf. David B. Wyrzten, "The Theological Center of the Book of Hosea." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141, no. 564 (October 1984): 323-325.

<sup>292</sup> Hosea 2:8.

<sup>293</sup> Marriage was mutual, but "[d]ivorce, contrariwise, was unilateral; and, accordingly, the husband alone pronounced a double formula: "You are not my wife, and I am not your husband."" Mordechai A. Friedman, "Israel's response in Hosea 2:17b: 'You are my husband'." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, no. 2 (June 1980): 202.

repent.<sup>294</sup> This likely represents the social situation of the time whereby a woman charged with adultery faced dire consequences if the accusation was proven or otherwise uncontested, although it also seems to indicate that there might have been some leniency for repentant adulterers as the severity of Gomer's sentence appears connected to her willingness to repent.<sup>295</sup> The loving grace of the husband is further accentuated by the following narrative of chapter three whereby Hosea is called to remarry Gomer (presuming this is the same woman from the first two chapters, which appears the most consistent approach to the passage). Even though she is required to undergo a period of cleansing and purification to be restored to the marital union, the passage clearly represents the hope of Israel that it will not be in exile from YHWH forever.

Rallis summarizes this well:

The conjugal union of husband and wife is their personal, exclusive, shared possession which neither of the parties can share with a third person. There exists an indissoluble element in this union (Gen 2:24); it is this exclusivity and indissolubility which Hosea strove to portray in Yahweh's marriage to Israel. Anything which violated the unity of this bond he condemned. Forgiveness, however, does not result in indifference towards the guilt of the partner; on the contrary, it manifests the suffering love and lamentation of the spurned partner. There is no commandment in the Bible concerning monogamy, but in view of the metaphor of Yahweh's marriage to Israel, it was clearly held in high esteem.<sup>296</sup>

Even so, there are lingering issues with the move from the equation of infidelity to idolatry and the further association of monogamy and monotheism. Even if it is suggested, there is, it should be observed, no explicit claim that Hosea was only to have one wife; indeed, some

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<sup>294</sup> "'Plead with your mother, plead-- for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband-- that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts.'" Hosea 2:2.

<sup>295</sup> "If she repents, she will not be punished as an adulteress. But if she remains unrepentant, Yahweh will "strip her naked" (2:3a), which was a part of the ancient Near Eastern divorce procedure (cf. Ezekiel 16:38-40 and also the Nuzi Tablets, circa 1400 BC). This "stripping naked" indicated the husband's freedom from obligation to clothe his wife, which he had assumed legally in the covenant of marriage (Ex 21:10)." Irene Kerasote Rallis, "Nuptial imagery in the book of Hosea: Israel as the bride of Yahweh." *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 34, no. 2-3 (1990): 206.

<sup>296</sup> Rallis, "Nuptial Imagery," 218.

commentators have suggested that the woman of the third chapter is not actually Gomer, though this is questionable as noted above. There is a hint, small though it may be, toward acceptance of monogamous standards for both spouses, as Hosea states as part of the instructions to the wayward woman in the process of cleansing that she would be required to “not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”<sup>297</sup> There is some conceptual ambiguity in translating the closing phrase, *elayak ani wegam* (אֲנִי וְגַם לְךָ), literally “and also I for” with ‘you’ implied, so the precise nature of the reciprocity involved in the comparison is unclear. It could mean that Hosea also was off-limits to her sexually as were other men although, presumably, only for the time of purification.<sup>298</sup> But this would be odd given that the prohibition, when lifted, would apply unequally, given the presupposition that eventually the woman would belong to Hosea as wife but only to him.<sup>299</sup> It is therefore possible, if not likely, that the passage at least implies a mutual covenantal vow by Hosea that he will treat her as she treats him, as his only lover, and the reciprocity of the phrasing could potentially reflect ancient rites of remarriage whereby one forsakes all others including, presumably, former lovers. Regardless, the fidelity of the wife to the husband is the primary emphasis in Hosea, and while there is no explicit commentary on the notion of a husband as taking multiple wives as being a breach of the

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<sup>297</sup> Hosea 3:3b. There is a potential connection to the instructions for treatment of a woman captured in war in Deuteronomy 21:13 and the process of purification involved, but the connection is far from certain.

<sup>298</sup> While most translations, particularly more literal oriented ones, maintain the more ambiguous phrasing, some translations interpret the phrase explicitly, in particular the NRSV which translates the phrase as “you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you.” This was altered from the RSV, which maintained the more enigmatic phrasing “so will I also be to you” and thereby indicates a purposeful interpretive rendering of this passage which is not necessary, though it has subsequently been followed by the CEB it was rejected by the ESV.

<sup>299</sup> Klein emphasizes here the Exodus theme of being purchased/redeemed out of slavery, that after her enslavement Gomer’s purchase and rededication as wife is conceptually commensurate with the liberation from Egyptian bondage, which further provides the basis of hope for restoration from (coming) exile. George L. Klein, “Hos 3:1-3--background to 1 Cor 6:19b-20.” *Criswell Theological Review* 3, (1989): 373-375.

monotheistic covenant, yet the suggestion does remain and the association with mutual monogamy, while not entirely explicit, is at least implied.<sup>300</sup>

While many, if not most, interpretations of Hosea assume a positive hermeneutic for the role of YHWH as husband, there have also been some recent interpreters that have called into question the patriarchal assumptions behind the text, particularly the presupposition that the husband is justified in his behaviors towards the wife which are rather brutal.<sup>301</sup> YHWH, in the role of husband, is presented as having total control over the process of divorce, and the threats of violence associated with the accusation of infidelity are certainly confronting to contemporary audiences.<sup>302</sup> Most certainly, the *sitz im leben* of eighth century Israel was quite different than modern cultural patterns, and while the uncritical acceptance of the right of the husband to abuse his straying wife should be challenged, the anachronistic application of current ethical standards onto the ancient text should also be carefully avoided. Despite the frightening threats associated with ancient customs of divorce and the charge of adultery,<sup>303</sup> the text maintains that ultimately the time of punishment is part of the process of healing which in the end will return the wayward and restore the broken relationship.<sup>304</sup> Despite the patriarchal patterns involved, the intentionality

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<sup>300</sup> This is particularly so in light of the Jewish self-identity as being special or chosen due to their covenantal status. Even while radical monotheism requires that the Jewish YHWH is the God of all persons and people groups, at the same time the Abrahamic-Mosaic covenants designated the tribes of Israel as distinctive. The imagery in Hosea suggests that the Exodus event was the moment when Israel became the bride of YHWH, with the Wilderness depicted as a sort of honeymoon period wherein Israel had to rely solely and directly on divine grace.

<sup>301</sup> Cf. Linda Day, "Teaching the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor." *Teaching Theology & Religion* 2, no. 3 (October 1999): 173-179; Renita Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 45-51.

<sup>302</sup> Renita J. Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?." *Semeia* 47, (1989): 87-104.

<sup>303</sup> Lev 20:10 designates that adultery, namely a married woman having sex with a man other than her husband, is punishable by death. Note also the problematic rites in the test of the jealous husband in Numbers 5:11-31 which involve a priestly concoction mysteriously referred to as water of "bitterness" (Heb: *mar*), notably the name that Naomi takes in Ruth to reflect her bitter life situation (Ruth 1:20), that brings the "curse" (Heb: *arar*).

<sup>304</sup> Cf. Rallis, "Nuptial Imagery," 211.

of the text is clearly aimed toward reconciliation and not necessarily supportive of abusive gender relations as some commentators have charged. Thus, while these patterns may be legitimately critiqued, the positive intentions of the text should still be brought forward.

A final interpretive warning in the study of Hosea's marital metaphor should be maintained against the possibility of the symbol being literalized such that the covenantal relationship of YHWH and Israel is taken to be not just analogous of but equivalent to the marriage union.<sup>305</sup> Thankfully, Hosea provides a helpful corrective against this tendency through the often overlooked use of the parent-child relationship: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."<sup>306</sup> Accordingly, YHWH is depicted as caring for the wayward son, teaching the beloved child to walk, and healing his wounds despite his ignorance of the care being provided. This additional metaphorical insight provides clear substantiation to the polyvalence of the divine-human relationship which cannot be solely based on a single analogue. Renita Weems represents this clearly:

Biblical metaphors are not simply examples of grandiloquence, not just instances of literary embellishment where the prophet rather naively or in a moment of inspiration expressed somewhat overdramatically what could have been stated more directly. Instead, they are explicitly what all human language is implicitly, analogical, and therefore limited. Although already doomed to failure, religious language represents human beings' desperate attempts to comprehend and articulate what is in fact beyond comprehension and articulation, the Divine and our experience of it.<sup>307</sup>

Thus, while the marriage metaphor is indeed vital to the prophetic legacy, and central to Hosea in particular, it remains symbolic and should not be literalized or given exclusive domain.

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<sup>305</sup> It is precisely this sort of literalizing echoed in the idolatrous Canaanite rituals whereby the creation is honored as creator, a consistent condemnation of the prophetic tradition.

<sup>306</sup> Hosea 11:1. Matthew connects this with the infancy narrative of Jesus and the sojourn in Egypt.

<sup>307</sup> Weems, "Gomer," 101.



Even so, the precedent of the symbolism in establishing the connection between polytheism and polygamy, and the further corollary of monotheism and monogamy, was also reinforced by other latter prophets, and with special emphasis by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

### *The Marriage Metaphor in Jeremiah and Ezekiel*

Just as the marriage metaphor was used by Hosea to great effect, it is notable that Jeremiah's recorded prophecies open with a further corroboration of the analogy between marriage and the covenant of YHWH to Israel.<sup>308</sup> As with Hosea, the Exodus and Sinai theophany are symbolized here as the wedding ritual followed by a time of intimacy and devotion reminiscent of the 'honeymoon' stage in marriage: "Thus says the LORD, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.""<sup>309</sup> The culmination of the wilderness sojourn was the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises through bequeathing of the Promised Land; yet all was not well. "And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination."<sup>310</sup> Despite divine fidelity and care, Israel turned from her Lord and gave herself to lovers; the prostration involved in ritual observance is graphically depicted by Jeremiah as the act of a woman offering herself sexually.<sup>311</sup> "For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said, 'I will not serve.'

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<sup>308</sup> Abel observes that it "is significant that YHWH's pleas and warnings through Jeremiah seem undergirded by the same marriage metaphor underlying the book of Hosea, and it is also significant that the oracle placed in introductory position in Jeremiah begins with this imagery and relies heavily upon it." Douglas Stephen Abel, "The Marriage Metaphor in Hosea 4 and Jeremiah 2: how prophetic speech 'kills two birds with one stone'." *Proceedings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.) 29, (2009): 20.

<sup>309</sup> Jeremiah 2:2b.

<sup>310</sup> Jeremiah 2:7.

<sup>311</sup> The textual location of 2:4-13 is less than certain, leading some to conclude it is an interpolation. Moshe

Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore.”<sup>312</sup> The intimacy of sexual intercourse is thereby likened to devotional rituals indicating a deeply personal bond created by the act which compels commitment and fidelity. Even worse than the initial breach for Jeremiah was the ongoing claim to innocence, depicted as an adulterous wife cleaning and anointing herself to hide her infidelities from her husband: “Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord GOD.”<sup>313</sup> Even as Israel was punished and shamed for the covenantal breaches, nothing was learned; meanwhile, she continued to protest her innocence, something that would result in her condemnation and exile.

Following this initial accounting of the sins of Israel, Jeremiah continues the marital metaphor by asking, “If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her? Would not that land be greatly polluted? You have played the whore with many lovers; and would you return to me?”<sup>314</sup> At this point, Jeremiah extends the metaphor by depicting Judah and Israel as sisters both married to YHWH, whereby Israel had become adulterous and was sent away in divorce.<sup>315</sup> While it is unclear whether the situation depicted should be considered polygamy or serial monogamy, and even though the former is

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A. Zipor, “Scenes from a Marriage’--According to Jeremiah.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 65, (March 1995): 86-87. Conceptually, the inclusion of the cistern versus living waters symbolism appears abrupt and while not incompatible with the surrounding text, does not appear to derive clearly from it. For a brief survey of the scholarship concerning the water symbolism in this section cf. Michael DeRoche, “Israel's 'two evils' in Jeremiah 2:13.” *Vetus Testamentum* 31, no. 3 (July 1981): 369-371.

<sup>312</sup> Jeremiah 2:20.

<sup>313</sup> Jeremiah 2:22.

<sup>314</sup> Jeremiah 3:1.

<sup>315</sup> Initially, in the second chapter, Jeremiah makes no distinction between Israel and Judah, and appears to conjoin them by the statement of 2:4 directed to the “house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel.”

more likely, it does not appear to alter the symbolism significantly. Theologically, the point is clearly made: Israel lost her privilege with the Lord due to polytheistic idolatry, and Judah was guilty of the same breach. Knowing that divorce and rebuke were imminent, the only possibility for Judah to escape such harsh fate was to acknowledge her sin and repent of her misdeeds. Just as there remained hope for Israel, for the Lord is full of mercy and “will not be angry forever”,<sup>316</sup> so too was there hope even through the process of exile, symbolized as divorce, that the wayward bride would once again return to her rightful husband.

Even while the compared marriage covenants of Israel and Judah form a potential problem for the development of the monogamous standard, the emphasis is primarily on the fidelity of the wife to her husband whereby polytheism is directly associated with infidelity. Once again, the metaphor should not be overtly literalized but retains, as symbolic language requires, a certain amount of fluidity in expression and interpretation. Just as Hosea also likened the divine-human relationship to that of parent-child, so too does Jeremiah incorporate this additional symbolism in his oracles variously. Not only is the call for mercy embodied as a child reaching out to a parent, “My father, you are the friend of my youth - will he be angry forever, will he be indignant to the end?”<sup>317</sup> but even further, the divine call to repentance is similarly framed, “Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness.”<sup>318</sup> The fluidity between the marital and parental metaphors should inform interpretation to resist overt literalization of the symbolic. Even so, the persistence of familial relationships in framing the issue is important to note as it represents key theological insights. Accordingly, both the marital and parental

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<sup>316</sup> Jeremiah 3:12b.

<sup>317</sup> Jeremiah 3:4b-5a.

<sup>318</sup> Jeremiah 3:22a.

metaphors function to define the divine-human relationship “which, though clearly hierarchical, should nonetheless be characterized by loyalty, love and intimacy for both parties” over and against merely legal or business agreements.<sup>319</sup> Family systems, rooted in the male-female marriage union, present a tangible link between the ultimate and the transient which thereby characterizes a foundational insight of the Hebrew Bible: God is not merely an aloof deity reigning in some far off transcendence, but rather an intimate personal Lord. Just as one’s relationship with a parent or a spouse, whether good or otherwise, is foundational to his/her identity, so too is the covenantal relationship to YHWH foundational to the identity of Israel, for better or worse depending on their response to the covenant.<sup>320</sup> The culmination of this foundational oracle concludes in the call for covenant renewal by invoking the paradigmatic rite of circumcision while innovating it as a spiritual rather than (purely) physical act, to “remove the foreskin of your hearts” establishing a vital focus of Jeremiah, the new covenant of the heart.<sup>321</sup>

Another peculiar aspect of Jeremiah concerns the divine requirement not to take a wife: “You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place.”<sup>322</sup> Although not directly connected to the usage of the marriage metaphor in the oracles, it does raise the concern of the divine reasoning for such a mandate which remains somewhat ambiguous internal to the text. There persists scholarly discussion over the nature of the passage and particularly when it should be located exactly in Jeremiah’s life, considering his oracles are not entirely organized chronologically, nor is the historic context of this specific oracle given by the author/editor(s).

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<sup>319</sup> Abel, “Marriage Metaphor,” 16.

<sup>320</sup> Cf. Ibid,” 19.

<sup>321</sup> Jeremiah 4:4b, further extended in 31:31-40.

<sup>322</sup> Jeremiah 16:2.

Some have advocated that this command came later in Jeremiah's life such that he would be socially beyond the expected age for marrying, yet this would blunt the effect of the prohibition by requiring something already implied. There are instead two potential interpretive options, either this is a genuine recording of an early command to Jeremiah that caused him to avoid marriage and family life, or it was a post-dated prophecy included, either by Baruch or the further editorial tradition, to explain Jeremiah's choice not to take a wife.<sup>323</sup> Considering that the first *mitzvah* is the requirement to be fruitful and multiply, consequently to be married and have a family, Jewish tradition could easily interpret Jeremiah's lack of a wife as a failure to attain this standard, hence the prophetic explanation.

Regardless of the contextual origin of the command, the best interpretive option for its usage in the passage is through the connection to the coming destruction to be visited on the land, and the dire circumstances for those with young, who will be subjected to disease, war, and famine.<sup>324</sup> This concept is similarly expressed in the New Testament in the apocalyptic sermon of Jesus recorded in Mark, "And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!"<sup>325</sup> Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that the command to Jeremiah not to marry is not connected to the promotion of a celibate standard for prophetic (or priestly) office (which did not exist historically except among sectarians), but rather reflects in contrast the social expectation that marriage is a covenantal requirement that may only under

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<sup>323</sup> Zipor, "Scenes from a Marriage," 85-86.

<sup>324</sup> Jeremiah 16:4.

<sup>325</sup> Mark 13:17. Many, perhaps most, contemporary scholars think this is a reference to the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Jewish Temple in AD 70.

particular circumstances be left unfulfilled, in this instance a divine command in the context of coming cataclysm.<sup>326</sup>

While not attaining the central symbolic status as found in both Hosea and Jeremiah, the prophet Ezekiel also included the marital metaphor in his oracles, though his usage of the concept was decidedly darker and left less room for hope than his predecessors. Given the dire situation as one of the early Judean exiles and his task as a prophetic watchman to warn of the impending doom for Jerusalem, the oracles of chapters sixteen and twenty-three demonstrate a visceral, even horrifying, portrayal of corporeal punishments against an adulterous wife. What makes the scenes of rebuke all the more terrible is the prolonged narrative of the relationship between YHWH and personified Jerusalem who is born as an unwanted child of the Canaanites and discarded only to be rescued by divine mercy.<sup>327</sup> After maturing, the abandoned child is taken by YHWH as wife, which involved the exchange of vows and her enthronement, likely symbolic of the Exodus, wilderness sojourn, and attainment of the Promised Land.<sup>328</sup> Yet all was not well; she took pride in her beauty and gave herself to lovers, fashioning altars and idols out of the gifts she received in the marriage, even offering her own children in fiery sacrifices.<sup>329</sup> As a consequence, enemies such as the Philistines had been stirred up to execute wrath, but this accomplished nothing; she grew worse in her perversity, lavishing gifts upon her lovers rather

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<sup>326</sup> Indeed, both the priestly and prophetic offices were founded on hereditary succession, which requires implicitly that priests and prophets would as normal practice take wives and have families. The priest Eli, in First Samuel, demonstrates both that his sons were expected to continue in his line and that by their incompetence and immorality were replaced by an adopted heir, Samuel, who experiences the same problem with worthless sons, thereby demonstrating both the normalcy of hereditary succession as well as offering an implicit critique.

<sup>327</sup> Ezekiel 16:3-6.

<sup>328</sup> Ezekiel 16:7-14.

<sup>329</sup> Ezekiel 16:15-26.

than receiving them in exchange for sexual favors.<sup>330</sup> This resolves in a series of graphic depictions of violence: the woman is stripped naked by a mob, stoned, and dismembered.<sup>331</sup>

While, once again, contemporary interpreters should be wary of imposing anachronistic standards of evaluation against the text, caution must equally be maintained against the violent tendencies of the narrative prophetic episode. Certainly, the text intends for the husband figure to be understood as the victim of an adulterous wife, as previously indicated in Hosea and Jeremiah, but this has led many interpreters to adopt uncritically the perspective of the husband without recognizing the patriarchal assumptions involved in such a move. Peggy Day observes:

The respective metaphorical descriptions of Yahweh as magnanimous husband and Jerusalem as ignominious infant and outsider wife serve to reinforce for the intended audience, which was overwhelmingly if not exclusively male, their choice of subject position, as both gender and ethnicity, among other factors, function to unite that audience and compel it to identify with husband Yahweh.<sup>332</sup>

While there remain sociological issues concerning whether the punishments visited on the wife are indeed reflective of actual historic practices against adulterous wives or rather depictions of brutal acts of war, the symbolic association remains clear even if the violent tendencies should be evaluated critically.<sup>333</sup> While some authors may resolve to “reading against” this passage due to such connotations,<sup>334</sup> the theological connection between infidelity and

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<sup>330</sup> Ezekiel 16:27-34. This seems to imply that a prostitute is held less accountable for her sexual immorality than a wife who takes lovers, particularly one who spends her husband’s money on gifts for them.

<sup>331</sup> Ezekiel 16:39-40. This same basic progression is also indicated in Ezekiel 23.

<sup>332</sup> Peggy L. Day, “The Bitch Had It Coming to Her: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Ezekiel 16.” *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 3 (2000): 235.

<sup>333</sup> Linda Day compares the depictions of violence in Ezekiel 16 to contemporary patterns of domestic violence, following the tradition set by Weems and others. “Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16.” *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 3 (2000): 205-230.

<sup>334</sup> Cf. Bibb, Bryan D. “There’s No Sex in your Violence: Patriarchal Translation in Ezekiel 16 and 23.” *Review & Expositor* 111, no. 4 (December 2014): 337-345.

idolatry is maintained no less.<sup>335</sup> Further, while the social patterns set forward by the text clearly conflict with modern standards and should not be maintained as normative for contemporary audiences, understanding the original context aids in understanding the metaphor as it is presented and intended. By likening Jerusalem to both an abandoned infant and an unattached young woman, the emphasis is on the reality that in such a historical setting both of these social positions were at the gravest risk with little hope of survival. While contemporary readers may chafe against the patriarchal patterns of the ancient social setting, the point of the text is that just as the abandoned child or the homeless youth had no chance at life, God graciously raised Israel up from destitution and elevated the homeless pauper to crowned royalty. What Day fails to observe in the quote above is that the text is subtly requiring a dramatic role reversal: the audience is supposed to take the role of the adulterous woman, *not* the righteous husband, even if their inclinations would have striven against such identification; yet that is precisely the aim of the prophetic rebuke. While the natural starting point for the male recipients of Ezekiel's oracle would have been to empathize with the perspective of the husband, instead they were compelled to realize that they were in fact occupying the social position of the (adulterous) woman, *not* the (faithful) man, in the divine-human relationship. The proper response to the oracle then is not pride, but humility and repentance. In this regard, while the violent imagery of Ezekiel should indeed be resisted in any normative capacity, the social dynamic undergirding the prophetic rebuke may instead be read positively as a challenge against those occupying elevated social positions to consider their own culpabilities and recognize how their position is granted entirely at the mercy of the divine Lord.

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<sup>335</sup> As P. Day states, "Rather, the terminology of sexual transgression must be supplied with implicit tenors (i.e., apostasy and improper foreign relations) and understood metaphorically in order correctly to perceive [the] intended meaning." Day, "Had It Coming", 236.



Even while the latter prophetic movement did not explicitly reject polygamous marriage nor command monogamous standards, the rhetorical and theological tendencies observed herein provide at least a clear conceptual movement in this direction. The effects of this progression of ideas was further demonstrated in the wisdom literature texts of the Ketuvim which further conceived of the goodness of marriage and subtly continued the move toward a monogamous social pattern.

### *Praise of Marriage and the Excellent Wife in the Ketuvim*

Having established both the theoretical foundations upon which marriage and sexuality are to be considered in a biblical worldview and evaluated the historical evolution of the social customs involved in marriage in the Hebrew-Israelite-Judean culture, the last stage of canonical development in the Hebrew Bible provides further insights into perceptions of marriage through its representations in wisdom literature. Even while the Ketuvim (typically translated as the Writings) of the Hebrew Bible comprises a generally loose collection of texts, they provide a helpful conceptual link between the pre-exilic culture of Israel/Judah through the Second Temple Period to the social background of the New Testament. Among this diverse canon, two texts stand out as particularly relevant to the present discussion: Proverbs and the Song of Songs. While exemplary women/wives are clearly demonstrated in the narrative texts of Ruth and Esther, both of which involve redemption and liberation motifs, neither text explicates marriage in any specific manner but rather relies on it as a narrative device. Thus, while these examples are important, and indeed Ruth's narrative aids in reconstructing pre-monarchial Israelite social customs as discussed above, Proverbs and Song of Songs provide direct assessments of sexuality and marriage in both conceptual and aesthetic modes which thereby demonstrate a rich

developing tradition that framed the background of the New Testament.

Even as modern scholarship has thrown significant doubt on the traditional attribution of Solomon as the author of both Proverbs and the Song, these concerns can for the present inquiry be set aside. Regardless of the precise historical relationship to Solomon and the complex history of redaction involved, the presentation of ideas internal to the texts is sufficient to the present task of establishing the final link in the cultural-conceptual history of marriage in the Hebrew Bible. There are two significant sections of Proverbs that further elucidate Judaic perceptions of women and their respective role in marriage. In contrast to the aphorisms of the rest of the book, the first nine chapters of Proverbs offers an extended discourse on wisdom framed as instruction from a father to a son. While there are many facets of this didactic monologue, such as the praise of virtues and warning against vices, the overarching framework of the passage follows an extended comparison between two female personifications: Wisdom and Folly. In essence, the father counsels the son that in life there are two choices, two paths, represented by the choice between two women in the context of courting. The good woman Wisdom always leads towards truth; she offers correction and requires discipline in response:

Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you."<sup>336</sup>

Meanwhile, the wicked woman Folly also calls out in the streets; her message is not one of reproof and discipline, but rather soothing lies and sensuous fantasies:

So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed, none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Proverbs 1:20-23.

While the value of the good lady Wisdom “is more precious than jewels” and “a tree of life to those who lay hold of her” in contrast “the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood.”<sup>338</sup> The didactic discourse concludes in chapter nine with a final prolonged comparison of the two personified women whereby Wisdom, living in a sturdy seven pillared home, invites the simple to a feast with promises of gaining insight whilst the wicked Folly beckons foolish men to their doom.

Even while marriage is never made entirely explicit in the Wisdom discourse, the gendered context of the instruction should not be overlooked. The framing of the passage is clearly advice from a father to a son, and it is no accident that the choices in life are personified as women which indicates something that orients many (perhaps most) young men: sexual relationship. The essence of the passage is that life itself can be understood as analogous to the process of courting whereby one must choose between potential mates/spouses and pursue that choice. Life, therefore, is like a young man choosing between two women: one is characterized by truth, fidelity, and understanding, the other appears seductive but in reality leads only to death and destruction. While in the discourse itself the connection between personified Wisdom and the ideal wife is not entirely explicit, though heavily implied, it is connected in the aphorisms that occupy the remainder of the text, particularly in the concluding chapter.<sup>339</sup>

While the opening discourse is framed as instruction from father to son, the concluding chapter is indicated rather mysteriously to be “The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his

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<sup>337</sup> Proverbs 2:16-19.

<sup>338</sup> Proverbs 3:15a, 18a, 5:3-4a.

<sup>339</sup> For example, “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.” Proverbs 12:4.

mother taught him.”<sup>340</sup> Even as this figure remains historically uncertain, the organizing motif of the final passage praises the characteristics of a good wife, who is described in terms clearly reminiscent of the descriptions of personified Wisdom:

An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain... Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue... Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.<sup>341</sup>

Even while the description of the excellent wife also includes apparently mundane aspects like providing food and clothing for her family, thereby grounding the description in practical concerns, the overarching motif is generally clear: a woman who embodies divine Wisdom is the best kind of woman to be married to (and the best kind of woman to have as mother).<sup>342</sup> Further, the counsel is clear that what matters in a spouse is not good looks or a charismatic personality, but rather the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom and is characterized by thoughtful observance of the covenantal commandments. In sum, the value of a wife is not in her body but in her heart, soul, and mind, in her spiritual virtues not her physical endowments.

While academic interpretations may vary concerning the precise relationship between the personified Wisdom of the opening discourse and the excellent wife of the conclusion, their connection is beyond dispute. Furthermore, despite the longstanding association of Solomon and extreme polygamy, there is no mention of its practice in Proverbs. While, to be sure, there is neither any explicit condemnation of polygamy, the corollary of adultery and idolatry is developed in the personification of Folly as the promiscuous/idolatrous woman, contrasted with

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<sup>340</sup> Proverbs 31:1.

<sup>341</sup> Proverbs 31:10-11, 25-26, 30.

<sup>342</sup> Cf. Tom R. Hawkins, “The Wife of Noble Character in Proverbs 31:10-31.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 609 (January 1996): 13-15.

the chaste and faithful Wisdom.<sup>343</sup> Even as the crass practicality of the apparent support for prostitution as a better alternative to adultery in 6:26 reflects a very different social setting and perspective, yet it is also not a ringing endorsement of prostitution but rather simply the recognition that it is not as bad as adultery.<sup>344</sup> So too, while not a clear commendation of monogamy, there is no suggestion in the praise of the excellent wife that more than one wife is to be sought or preferred. Taken together, the personification of Wisdom as the faithful woman and the praise of the excellent wife provide clear didactic evidence for the promotion of virtue in the practice of marriage and the further connection between covenantal and marital fidelity. Even so, marriage and sexuality are left in Proverbs mainly at the theoretical level, albeit with practical implications such as those noted in the combination of mundane duties mixed in to the description of the excellent wife. Yet Proverbs is not in isolation in engaging with these motifs, which are broadened and complexified further by the dramatic and yet subtle portrayal of sexuality in the Song of Songs.<sup>345</sup>

The Song of Songs, also known as the Song (or Canticle) of Solomon, occupies a peculiar space in the Judeo-Christian tradition due to its romantic, even erotic, portrayals infused with sexually charged euphemisms. The overtly sexual imagery of the Song has long been cause for interpretive consternation, particularly given there is in the entire work only a single (possible) reference to the divine in 8:6 which the ESV translates “the very flame of the LORD”

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<sup>343</sup> “Do not forsake her [Wisdom], and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you... Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.” Proverbs 3:6, 8. Chaste here is not meant as somehow asexual, much the opposite; Wisdom is greatly desirable for those willing to accept her reproof.

<sup>344</sup> “For a prostitute is a deep pit; an adulteress is a narrow well. She lies in wait like a robber and increases the traitors among mankind.” Proverbs 23:27-28.

<sup>345</sup> “What is explicit in Proverbs is implicit in the Song, and what is enjoined by way of instruction in Proverbs is celebrated as an experienced reality in the Song.” Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Apollos, 2000), 30.

though there is scholarly conjecture concerning whether the Hebrew phrase is indeed referencing God at all.<sup>346</sup> Partly as a reaction to the highly charged sexual imagery and partly in order to highlight the theological nature of the text, the dominant history of interpretation in both rabbinic and Christian traditions has emphasized the Song as an extended allegory on divine love.<sup>347</sup> Even as veneration for this interpretative approach should be maintained, scholarship has generally set aside the purely metaphorical approach in exchange for a more literal rendering that recognizes the romantic and sexual aspects of the Song for what they are.<sup>348</sup> The modernist move toward comparing the Hebrew Bible to Ancient Near Eastern analogues has also colored trends in scholarship concerning the Song, which has tended to view the Song as a reflection of the broader cultural milieu and thereby as a collection of love poems, rather than a cohesive (theological) narrative. Instead of attempting to reconstruct the story of the Song, recent academic interpretations have tended instead to emphasize thematic elements that pervade the various poems, which are taken otherwise in isolation, rather than a core structural narrative. Even so, there remain strong reasons to affirm the unitary perspective of the Song, as demonstrated by Webb:

The expression ‘Song of Songs’ (1:1) has the same form in Hebrew as the better-known ‘Holy of Holies’. It does not mean ‘the song consisting of many songs’, but ‘the song to end all songs’, ‘the greatest song’. The title tells us that what lies before us is a single song. Therefore, if we wish to read the Song as Holy

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<sup>346</sup> “Translations are divided over whether to take the abbreviation *yah* as shorthand for the divine name (ESV; NASV) or simply as a superlative (‘a mighty flame’; NIV; HCSB). This would be the only reference to the divine name in the entire book, but since this is the climax of the Song, such a reference cannot be ruled out. There are plenty of more direct ways of expressing a superlative in Hebrew that would not evoke the Lord’s name in quite the same way.” Iain M. Duguid, *The Song of Songs TOTC vol. 19* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 155.

<sup>347</sup> Cf. Boyd Luter, “Love in a fallen world: further toward a theology of the Song of Songs.” *Criswell Theological Review* 10, no. 1 (September 2012): 53-54.

<sup>348</sup> For the most extensive review of interpretive options, including an extensive chronological bibliography, cf. Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs Anchor Bible vol. 7C* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1977), 89-288.

Scripture – as part of the canon – we must first discipline our minds to read it as a single poem, for the title itself is part of the canonical form of the Song.<sup>349</sup>

In addition to the title (which, it should be remembered, is in the Hebrew tradition the first word or phrase of the scroll, which is in this case *sir hassirim aser lislomoh*, or “the song of all-songs that is Solomon’s”), Webb further points to the use of a consistent refrain (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) that unites the text, the apparent climax and coda in the last chapter, and the doubled nighttime search narrative.<sup>350</sup> Even if the Song is to be taken as a unified perspective rather than simply as a collection of romantic poems, there remain difficulties in trying to parse out the precise narrative therein.

Perhaps one of the greatest complications for offering a positive argument for a narrative reconstruction of the Song is that its symbolic and poetic structure inherently allows for a diversity of interpretation.<sup>351</sup> In some respects, the limits of interpretation are loosed by the lyrical quality of the work that inherently allows for a broad range of reflections with little hope to establish specific criterion with which to judge between competing interpretations apart from basic correspondence to the text itself and logical coherence.<sup>352</sup> As a systematic review of the

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<sup>349</sup> Webb, *Festal Garments*, 22.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, 22-26.

<sup>351</sup> An implication of the academic trend toward purely contextual approaches to the Song (comparing it to ANE analogues) is that in such studies typically little theological value remains, for to move in this direction is to embrace the symbolic nature of the language against a purely historical-sociological rendering. While not dismissing the value of these studies, for theology they offer little of value as their primary intent tends to be demonstrating that the Song is romantic poetry, which was not unique in the ancient world, but this insight does little to provide rationale for why the Song was not just left as a work of secular (if such a thing could be said to exist in the ancient world) poetry – in essence, why is it Holy Scripture? Or, why is it a work of theology as well as poetry?

<sup>352</sup> Discussion of the precise genre of the Song is also generally unhelpful, as such attempts tend to emphasize one aspect of the Song while neglecting others. For example, a recurring thesis has circulated that the Song represents a divine drama, a reenactment of a ritual sacred marriage (originating, it is postulated, in a hypothetical polytheistic background and massaged into a monotheistic framework). Cf. G. Lloyd Carr, “Is the Song of Songs a 'sacred marriage' drama.” *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 22, no. 2 (June 1979): 103-114. Even if there are echoes of this background, it does little to indicate how it should function as a part of the Hebrew Bible canon much less in Christian theology. Thus, while helpful in some regards, the debate over genre too easily sidesteps the key issues and will thus be set aside.

wide range of interpretive options is surely beyond the scope of the present study (as indicated by Pope's exhaustive tome covering the historical range through to the 1970s), instead the key interpretive questions that define the crucial distinctions will be enumerated, and, briefly, a positive reconstruction will be offered as an interpretive option while maintaining the need for broad hermeneutic horizons.

The first interpretive issue has already been indicated, whether the Song should be taken in a singular or plural form. While contextual oriented studies have tended to read the Song as a collection of poems, as indicated above, theological scholarship instead inclines toward the unity of the text to demonstrate a core narrative underlying the whole, as Webb argues. Assuming this essential unity, the next issue concerns how many characters are involved in the narrative; while often the assumption is simply two (discounting the apparent intermittent voice of a chorus) it is possible that there are as many as four main characters, two men, Solomon and a shepherd boy, and two women, one rural and the other urban. Yet this distinction mainly follows the transitions variously indicated between rural and urban settings, and so hinges interpretation on the possibility of rivalries between the different hypothetical characters which is both unnecessary and speculative. Rather, it is most natural to read the entire Song as an extended dialogue between two main characters (with the literary interpolation of the chorus noted as a feature of the liturgical and dramatic character of the work).

Another interpretive decision concerns the nighttime journeys of the female character in chapters three and five and whether these are to be taken as literal narratives (that is, describing actual events in the storyline) or whether they are dreams, either during sleep or as a waking fantasy (or perhaps nightmare, given the apparent violence of 5:7). Unfortunately, no definitive evidence exists to determine categorically whether these events are intended as literal or not;



both episodes begin while the woman is in bed thinking about her beloved, so it is entirely possible they are dreams. Yet while the implication of the nocturnal bedroom setting may tend towards a fictive/fantastical conclusion, this is not necessitated, as it is entirely possible to read both accounts as beginning with desirous fantasies that actualize in real departures, the first ending well, the second ending (very) badly.

Finally, and perhaps of most ultimate import to the overall narrative, is whether the characters are married before, during, or at the end of the Song (or at all), an issue that has produced a spectrum of possible solutions. Without exploring the breadth of interpretations on this issue, a single cohesive account of the narrative structure will be given with primary reference to internal evidence that offers a vivid and complex evaluation of human sexuality. While many interpretations assume that the lead characters are married at some point in the narrative, this is primarily predicated on reading 3:6-11 as a description of the ceremonial parade for the royal wedding of Solomon and the female lead. The problem with this assumption lies both in the grammar and content of the description of the parade wherein Solomon is isolated from the female lead, who appears to be among the crowd, on his royal carriage surrounded by guards and potentially his harem, if the phrase “its interior inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem” is a reference to this.<sup>353</sup> The climactic conclusion of the scene appears laced with bitterness rather than the exultation expected of a blushing bride: “Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him, on the day of *his* wedding, on the day of the gladness of *his* heart.”<sup>354</sup> The peculiar reference to Solomon’s mother, which appears to reference that Bathsheba was instrumental in his contentious rise to the

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<sup>353</sup> Song 3:10.

<sup>354</sup> Song 3:11. Italics added for emphasis.

throne over the legitimate heir Adonijah as depicted in 1 Kings 1-2, and the fact that the wedding is in the third person singular, *his*, rather than first plural, *our*, at least opens the possibility that the claim that this scene depicts a wedding between the main characters should be challenged. In light of this, consider the following narrative reconstruction as a live interpretive option that, it will be argued, provides an enhanced theological meditation on the nature of sexuality and the spiritual superiority of the monogamous union.

Rather than the description of love between spouses in the traditional sense (legally married), there is significant reason to read the Song as an illegitimate (in regards social realities) relationship between Solomon and the true love of his life, who he will only be reunited with in death. In life, their social locations made it impossible for them to live as man and wife, because the cultural barriers that stood between them could only be erased in death. The presentation of this relationship provides a complex model of romantic love embedded with a subtle critique of polygamy and further movement toward monogamous norms, socially and theologically.

To begin, the female lead is self-described in the first chapter in somewhat unusual terms, “I am very dark, but lovely... Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me.”<sup>355</sup> The description of the woman as dark indicates not her race but rather her social location; she is dark meaning she is tanned from the sun because she tends vineyards (though she does not own them, but rather is forced to work them by her brothers). Theories that claim that the Song reflects a royal wedding simply cannot account for this description of the woman, as she is clearly no princess. Thus, it requires dissociating the rural woman from the urban to avoid this clear inference, which is otherwise not suggested and in fact damages the overarching relationship between the two lovers.

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<sup>355</sup> Song 1:5a, 6a.

Next, it has widely been noted that there is a reflective framing device in the structure of the Song, especially clear in the two nocturnal dreams/sojourns, but also in the move between rural and urban environments. Setting aside the thesis that these different locations require different characters, the structure of the Song moves from a rural setting in the first two chapters, echoing paradisiacal themes of innocence and carefree love, to an urban one, which becomes associated with a cycle of the loss of innocence followed by reconciliation. After moving through the two loss and reconciliation cycles (3-4, 5-6), there is an emphatic move to a rural setting once again before the climactic claims of the final chapter. The structure can be represented thus:

- A. Begins in Rural Innocence (1-2) \*First warning refrain 2:7
- B. First Loss of Innocence (3)
  - 1. First Nocturnal Sojourn (3:1-5) \*Second warning 3:5
  - 2. Solomon's Royal Wedding (3:6-11)
- C. First Reconciliation (4) consummated in 4:16d, where she accepts his apology
- D. Second Loss of Innocence (5)
  - 1. Second Nocturnal Sojourn (5:2-9) \*Third warning 5:8
  - 2. Focuses on her beloved (5:10-16)
- E. Second Reconciliation (6) consummated in 6:13, where she is called to return
- F. Return to Rural Innocence (7)
- G. Love conquers death (8) \*Fourth warning 8:4

Given this structure, the following narrative is suggested: Solomon grew up around the female lead, called the Shulammite (6:13), and they were childhood friends, almost like siblings, "Oh that you were like a brother to me who nursed at my mother's breasts!"<sup>356</sup> This friendship blossomed into romantic love of their youth, represented in the innocence of the initial rural setting, which is nearly Edenic. There is an apparent shift in chapter three to the urban environment, whereby the young woman takes her first nocturnal sojourn and succeeds in finding her love, "I held him and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me."<sup>357</sup> What is puzzling is that immediately

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<sup>356</sup> Song 8:1a. This is suggestive that perhaps her mother was Solomon's nursemaid as an infant.

following this apparent romantic moment is the warning refrain, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem... that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”<sup>358</sup> What follows is the crucial wedding parade scene and the only explicit mention of marriage in the Song. Given both the above noted issues with this description and that there is no clear indication of an actual ceremony (though an argument from silence, it is a pretty significant lack), in conjunction with the woman’s self-description as tanned and working in vineyards, the scene appears most understandable if the situation is that after sharing a night of passion (in her mother’s bed no less) with Solomon, she sees him subsequently riding through the crowd “on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.”<sup>359</sup> The first cycle of loss of innocence centers around the woman’s decision to give herself sexually to Solomon (in fantasy or reality), only to see him being married off to one of the many women he would be joined to for political gain. The response to this loss of innocence is a reaffirmation of love by Solomon which is accepted by the woman: “Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits.”<sup>360</sup> If this reading of the situation is correct, then Solomon’s romantic reply is an affirmation of his continued love for her despite his requirement as king to marry other women.

After the first loss and reconciliation cycle is completed, the second loss of innocence occurs as the woman awaits the arrival of her beloved. Having given her affirming reply, to which he further confirms in 5:1, she lays trying to sleep but her “heart was awake” and stirs at a sound that she takes to be Solomon’s arrival, but is merely a phantasm: “I opened to my beloved,

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<sup>357</sup> Song 3:4b.

<sup>358</sup> Song 3:5.

<sup>359</sup> Song 3:11b.

<sup>360</sup> Song 4:16c.

but my beloved had turned and gone.”<sup>361</sup> Mirroring the first nocturnal sojourn, the woman goes out into the night and once again encounters the night watch, but this time they abuse her: “The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls.”<sup>362</sup> This is further accentuated by the lovesickness that frames the passage (5:1, 8), and, if indeed this scene is intended to reflect an act of sexual violence, could be reflected in the peculiar question by the chorus, “What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women?” The peculiar and sudden shift, and this strange choral inquiry, may further support the idea that this scene reflects rape from the perspective of the victim, which is a horrible act to endure given the peculiar mixture of violence with sexual stimulation and the attendant feelings of guilt and shame.

Perhaps, and this is by no means a necessary reading, the sudden turn to praise of her true love might reflect the coping mechanism involved in surviving the abusive actions of the watchmen, as the passage ends with another peculiar question by the chorus, “Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women?”<sup>363</sup> As with the loss of innocence involved in seeing her beloved paraded off to be married to other women in the first narrative cycle, here once again the loss, in this case the lovesick journey that resulted in horrible sexual abuse, is followed by reconciliation whereby Solomon reasserts his love for her, even if there is a potential hint of shame near the beginning of the reconciliation: “Turn your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me.”<sup>364</sup> Perhaps this is just more desirous longing, but the phrase suggests his own shame at the situation, which is potentially an attendant feeling of spouses/lovers of rape

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<sup>361</sup> Song 5:6a.

<sup>362</sup> Song 5:7.

<sup>363</sup> Song 6:1.

<sup>364</sup> Song 6:5a.

victims.<sup>365</sup> Solomon's reconciliatory reply emphasizes that he feels that same about her, via verbatim repeated descriptions in 6:5b-7 that echo the idyllic opening, and further reinforces that despite the many women he was associated with, "sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number" that she "is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her."<sup>366</sup> He consoles her by accentuating his singular love for her despite his role as a polygamous king, and in particular highlights her purity, a sentiment that would bring much healing if indeed the second nocturnal sojourn had ended in sexual victimization.

After the second reconciliation, the chorus enjoins the woman to "Return, return, O Shulammite, return, return that we may look upon you."<sup>367</sup> At this point, the narrative begins its shift back to a rural setting, with a series of repeated descriptions of the woman emphasizing that after everything Solomon still feels the same way about her that he did when they were young innocent lovers. In reply, the woman enjoins him to come with her to the rural setting of their youth, "Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages... and beside our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my

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<sup>365</sup> While the topic of spouse-rape (rape by a spouse) is widely studied in psychological research, it appears that the psychological effects of sexual violence on the victim's spouse has not been critically assessed. Although it does not hold the empirical power of a social-scientific study, a recent article by a rape-victim's husband highlights the difficulty in even acknowledging the role of the victim's spouse in such a situation. Speaking of the shame and guilt that he experienced, he writes: "At times, when the emotional wreckage seemed insurmountable, maybe you considered, 'Should I leave?' But then you felt terrible guilt for even thinking that, knowing that what happened wasn't her fault. You then felt ashamed to have even considered abandoning such a hurt soul (even if she was ostensibly pushing you away afterward), and you realized that to actively love her is probably the only answer, just as to actively love is probably the only real answer to anything and everything." "What It's Really Like To Be The SPOUSE Of A Sex Abuse Victim", accessed September 20, 2017, <http://www.yourtango.com/200935314/ripple-effected-souls>. Counseling resources do voice the emotional strain on spouse's of rape victims, such as "Effects of Sexual Violence", accessed September 20, 2017 <https://www.rapevictimadvocates.org/what-you-need-to-know/effects-of-sexual-violence/>. It is of interest that Solomon's response embodies good psychological technique by reaffirming his love and support for her.

<sup>366</sup> Song 6:9.

<sup>367</sup> Song 6:13a.

beloved.”<sup>368</sup> The undergirding issue that their relationship is not condoned or sanctioned by their social location reappears at the start of the final climactic poem; after referring to him being as a brother and nursing from her mother, she exclaims, “If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me.”<sup>369</sup> If they were legitimate spouses, why would anyone despise them for kissing? Thus, it appears to suggest that her longing is for a context where she can love him openly and without scorn, something which can only come to pass in the resurrected state.

It has been noted by scholarship that the form of the final poem bears significant similarity to ancient funerary inscriptions and dirges, and the thematic centrality of death gives the impression that the narrative of the Song reflects an entire lifetime, starting in the innocence of youth, and concluding on the eve of death in nostalgic remembrance of the paradise lost as well as the attendant hope that it will be once again regained.<sup>370</sup> Echoing the image of Solomon’s royal litter “coming up from the wilderness” that bore him off to his royal wedding(s) and thereby officially separated him from his true love, at least in the eyes of the world, the same image is invoked in the consummation of the conclusion:

Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved? Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in labor with you; there she who bore you was in labor. Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy as fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.<sup>371</sup>

Taken together, the Song provides a subtle and complex vision of love and sexuality that transcends simple categories. While interpretation of poetry is inevitably in some regards a

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<sup>368</sup> Song 7:11, 13b.

<sup>369</sup> Song 8:1b.

<sup>370</sup> Cf. Pope, *Song*, 210-229.

<sup>371</sup> Song 8:5-7.

reflection of the beholder, even still the rendering of the Song given herein provides a cohesive, if unconventional, reading of the passage that highlights significant theological themes. The love of the two lovers, said to be the “very flame of the LORD”, unites them despite their social location which tears them apart. The Edenic beginning together with the concluding meditations on the power of love over death itself suggests a parabolic framing whereby the love shared by the lovers does indeed reflect, as the allegorical interpretations would have it, divine love, yet not as a rejection of the literal but rather predicated on it. The innocence of youth is inevitably lost, and the visions of paradise in the minds of adolescence become tempered by the harsh realities of brokenness, a fundamental legacy of primal disobedience. Even while love may be tarnished in the present, divine love persists through to the end, and even if the lovers of the Song may never have been legally married, their souls were yet still intertwined; this culminates in the hope of the final poem and the expectation of the woman sitting in her own vineyard awaiting the arrival of her beloved, which could be understood as a reference to the resurrected state. Despite the failings and fractures of the present reality, the hopeful love of the faithful endures to the end.

While the reading of the Song given herein is certainly not typical, and indeed to my knowledge this precise reconstruction has not yet been offered in scholarship, it is not claimed to be a singularly authoritative reading, but rather a suggestive one. Regardless of the exact interpretation of the Song, whether it does indeed depict the marriage of the main characters or not, the overarching celebration of love, albeit tempered by a recognition of the fractured nature of present reality, offers a complex and polyvalent view of sexuality that emphasizes the love of romantic coupling over and even against the practical and social realities of the world. The kind of love expressed in the Song is not merely the lust of the flesh nor the simple desire for companionship; it is the longing for a love that transcends death itself, a love that is eternal and



unquenchable, a love that is divine. Thus, the traditional allegorical interpretation was not wrong to emphasize the theological aspects of the text, though to do so in isolation of the complex sexual imagery is to cheapen and undermine the subtlety of its presentation. Once again, the emphasis on the singular nature of love, in this case directly contrasted with the many queens and concubines that attended Solomon in his role as king, appears to provide another conceptual link in the chain from uncritical acceptance of polygamy to its exclusion in favor of monogamous norms which were fundamental to the background of the New Testament.

### *From Present Covenantal Blessings to Future Expectations*

This chapter has explored the breadth of the Hebrew Bible to provide a coherent conceptual trajectory that explains how a universal social institution, marriage, took on in the Jewish tradition further sacred aspects. From the divine dictates to multiply and the existential fulfillment of the primal couple in Genesis to the passionate love poetry expressed by Solomon to his beloved in hopes of their reunion in the hereafter, marriage has been demonstrated as a fundamental spiritual element of the Hebrew ethos that transcends the merely material and social aspects of its practice. So too, the historic prevalence of polygamy in the Hebrew culture challenged the monogamous pattern but its association with polytheism and idolatry contributed to its negative assessments in the *Nevi'im*. Although the specific language of sacrament will not be developed until the early Christian period, covered in chapter four, the concept of a sacred covenant which partakes in divine blessings can be clearly seen as vital to the Judaic ethos. Further, this covenantal blessing, it has been shown, transcends the present (while certainly including it) and points towards its ultimate fulfillment in the resurrection, which, it shall be shown in the next chapter, undergirds the Christian ethos as expressed in the New Testament.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MARRIAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

*Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ...  
He who loves his wife loves himself.*<sup>372</sup>

By the time of the New Testament, the prior Israelite-Judean acceptance of polygamy had largely faded and been replaced by a monogamous cultural norm that echoed the teachings of the latter prophets, as demonstrated in the prior chapter.<sup>373</sup> The early rabbinic tradition, with its emphasis on personal observance of the Torah, widely held that to be an elder of the community, a teacher of the Law, one must be married and producing children which was the first divine command (Gen 1:28).<sup>374</sup> Amidst the Second-Temple religious-cultural background, the ministry of Jesus and writings of the early Christian community provide a collection of relevant teachings on sexual norms that developed out of a particular understanding of the Torah as being actualized and radicalized in the life of the Christ. Accordingly, this chapter will begin by considering the theological position of supersessionism and its damaging effects on Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. From this initial starting point, a basic sketch will be drawn of the relationship of the Christian movement to the Torah as reflected in the New Testament writings. It will be demonstrated that, while the canonical teachings of Jesus rarely broach the issue of marriage directly, and only then to reject its annulment in divorce, the hermeneutical approach to the Torah can be discerned sufficiently to indicate a positive and progressive orientation. Against common tendencies in

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<sup>372</sup> Ephesians 5:25, 28b, ESV.

<sup>373</sup> While not universal, the practice had largely fallen out of cultural favor in Palestine, particular reflected in the *Damascus Document* as well as the DSS *Temple Scroll* (11QT) though the latter's mandate was limited to the king, it still reflects the wider social transition to a purely monogamous standard.

<sup>374</sup> This emphasis on elders also being husbands and fathers is also reflected in the Pastoral epistles directives on qualifications for ecclesial authorities, cf. 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9.

Christian hermeneutics toward supersessionism, the present study will instead advocate a paradigm, which strongly reinforces the historical legitimacy of the Torah as a foundational precursor to the Christian Gospel.

After establishing this hermeneutical framework, it will be applied to the Synoptic controversy with a Sadducee concerning the relation of a widow to her various husbands in the resurrected state. This inquiry prompted a mysterious and complex response from Jesus that demonstrates the difficulty of translating present social norms into the eternal incorruptible state, but also indicates the radical hope of the resurrection. Yet the precise reasoning for drawing this conclusion is often left vague in critical literature, so the present study will reconstruct the rhetorical and conceptual intentionality of the passage as a prophetic rebuke against the Sadducees that demonstrates a fundamental trust in the eternal promises of the Almighty. This trust in the covenantal fulfillment of the resurrection was the ultimate foundation of the Christian Gospel, particularly as argued by Paul in First Corinthians 15, which provides an interpretive framework that indicates both a radical transformation, as well as a substantive continuity between the present and resurrected states. In light of these hermeneutical considerations, it will be demonstrated that the passage is misused to support a vague androgynous position, whereby the reference to angels is taken to mean sexless; instead, the reference, if positioned correctly in its historical context, in the early rabbinic tradition, suggested that the eschatological resurrected state was a place of absolute abundance untarnished by rivalry or loss. The Sadducees, it will be argued, were wrong because their view of God was so limited that they could not conceive of the perfected eternal realm where the scarcities of present will be forgotten, where every tear will be wiped away. Accordingly, Jesus was not making a proclamation about the nature of sexuality in the eschaton nor intending a view of marriage that dismissed its endurance into the eternal state,

but rather was challenging the Sadducees to recognize the deficiencies of their theology. Their imaginations were simply too narrow and restricted by the concerns of the present world to recognize the radical abundance of the resurrection, and took it to be absurd; but, in the end, it was their limited theology which was the absurdity, especially given the fact that they claimed to believe in the God of the Torah.

After assessing the implications of Jesus' answer to the Sadducean resurrection controversy, the study will shift focus to Paul, who gave the most extensive canonical teaching on marriage in his interactions with the Corinthian church concerning sexual matters and the married state. The text is particularly vital, even central, to the present study as it is often read in the Western tradition to relegate marriage as a necessary aspect of the present order that allows for the expression of sexuality as a biological necessity.<sup>375</sup> Even while this sentiment is derived from Paul to some degree, it is often taken further to claim that celibacy, which Paul demonstrated preference for, is spiritually superior to marriage, and thereby marriage is denigrated as inferior or even as a concession to sin. Reflecting the Stoic-Cynic debate concerning the viability of marriage for philosophers, Paul's indication that celibacy is superior was practical, insofar as marriage brings with it worldly cares that, for those with the gift of celibacy, may be avoided. It will be argued that with the proper critical rendering, Paul's apparent support of celibacy does not disparage marriage, but points toward the resurrection hope, by supporting the right of widows to not remarry and connecting physical sexuality with spiritual identity by rejecting the use of prostitutes by Christians. Further, Paul's argumentation should be recognized as a mediating position which expanded the acceptable lifestyles for the

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<sup>375</sup> As it will be discussed below, there is certainly a truth that marriage provides an outlet for sexual energies which are biologically driven (though in greater or lesser extents variously), the problem is when this observation becomes definitional for marriage to such an extent that it becomes reductionistic.

Christian community to include spiritual celibacy. In light of this reconstruction of Pauline thought, the teachings of Ephesians concerning the sacred symbolism of the marital union further demonstrates a bridge between the writings of the New Testament and the early Christian movement, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Taken together, it will be argued that the New Testament reinforces the essential norms set forward by the preceding Hebrew-Judaic socio-religious tradition, as discussed in the prior chapter, but fully transformed them by the vital hope of the resurrection.

### ACTUALIZATION OF THE TORAH

In order to evaluate how Jesus, and the early Christian community that followed, interpreted the nature of marriage, it is imperative to understand His teachings on the norms of the prior Hebrew society contained in the Torah. In particular, the present study will push against the widespread tendency known as supersessionism, particularly notable in Protestant theological circles, to sweep aside summarily the strictures of the Hebrew Torah in the name of abrogation of the Old Covenant. This interpretive legacy can be clearly demonstrated in Classical Protestantism, particularly so with Martin Luther, who regularly contrasted Law and Gospel, claiming that the former had been rendered null in light of the latter. This is clearly indicated in a 1532 sermon emphasizing the distinction:

It is therefore urgent that these two words, different in kind, be rightly and properly distinguished. Where that is not done, neither the Law nor the Gospel can be understood, and consciences must perish in blindness and error. *For the Law has its terminus*, defining how far it is to go and what it is to achieve, namely, to terrify the impenitent with the wrath and displeasure of God and drive them to Christ. Likewise, the Gospel has its unique office and function: to preach the forgiveness of sins to troubled consciences. Let doctrine then not be falsified, either by mingling these two into one, or by mistaking the one for the other. For the Law and the Gospel are indeed both God's word; but they are *not the same*

*kind of doctrine.*<sup>376</sup>

Although Luther later clarifies that the moral categories of the Law are not abrogated by Christ, “the Law or the Ten Commandments have not been annulled so that we are exempt from them”,<sup>377</sup> even still, his sharp bifurcation between Law and Gospel potentially does damage to the direct teaching of Christ who repeatedly upheld the mandates of the Torah and even increased their obligations. Indeed, Jesus, as reflected in the canonical Gospels, demonstrated a consistent interpretive framework (although nuanced by each evangelist), whereby He challenged the literalistic practices required of the Pharisaic disciplines by healing on the Sabbath and eating with the ritually unclean. Even while challenging restrictive norms, Jesus also simultaneously increased the demands of the Torah, by claiming that it is not enough to not commit outright behavioral breaches, such as adultery and murder, but rather that these external acts demonstrate a deeper spiritual reality which corresponds to a higher standard than merely behavioral patterns. Accordingly, it will be argued that Christ followed the basic conceptual duality demonstrated by the Hebrew Bible which viewed of marriage as both social and sacred, physical and spiritual, and that, as a whole, the ministry of Jesus and the early Christian community demonstrates powerfully in support of marriage as a theologically important relationship grounded in the revelations of the Hebrew Scriptures.

To this end, the present section will progress through four stages. First, the historical problem of supersessionism, briefly introduced above in the citation from Luther, will be assessed in more critical detail to demonstrate the problems with this approach and in particular its anti-Semitic tendencies which should be guarded against. Second, having rejected

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<sup>376</sup> Martin Luther, “The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel: A Sermon by Martin Luther, January 1, 1532”, trans. Willard L. Burce. *Concordia Journal* 18, no. 2 (1992): 154. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, 160.

supersessionism as an interpretive framework, a positive view of the Torah will be reconstructed with special emphasis given to the Sermon on the Mount and the hermeneutical perspective it demonstrates. Third, with this positive approach to the Torah in place, the Synoptic divorce controversy will be assessed which provides strong evidential support for a progressive understanding of the Torah that is entirely consistent with Matthew's portrayal and can therefore be strongly claimed to originate in the historical ministry of Jesus. Together, it will be demonstrated that the supersessionist view should be critiqued and a progressive hermeneutical approach to the Torah should be supported.

### *Christian Supersessionism and the Fate of Israel*

Even as there were many major shifts in theological and exegetical scholarship in the twentieth century, one of the most wide-ranging paradigm alterations concerned the ongoing relationship of the Christian tradition to its Jewish heritage in the wake of the Holocaust.<sup>378</sup> Given the extensive list of maxims and strictures in the Hebrew Scriptures, the question of whether Christians are bound to maintain these observances lies at the heart of the Christian community, going back at least to the apostles themselves as described in Acts 15, the so-called Jerusalem Council, which reduced the specific obligations of the Hebrew Law to four prohibitions.<sup>379</sup> Even while this early apostolic consensus established a broad ranging precedent,

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<sup>378</sup> While there are a range of important events in the historical relationship of Christianity and Judaism, for contemporary academic assessments of such the Holocaust features centrally for paradigm shifts regarding Jewish-Christian dialogue that continue to resonate. Many authors writing on Jewish-Christian theological relations in contemporary scholarship tend to do so in the shadow of the Holocaust and regularly indicate its prevalence in the conceptual shifts involved. Cf. Jean-Pierre Fortin, *Grace in Auschwitz: A Holocaust Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2016), 3-6.

<sup>379</sup> Once again, historical questions concerning the accuracy of this portrayal may be left to the side for present, as it is beyond dispute that the canonical remembrances of the first century maintained clearly that there was an apostolic conference on the topic and the debate was functionally settled with the majority view emerging that the Gentiles would not have to follow the social mandates of the Jewish Law, particularly circumcision. This is further

the wider issue of the relationship of Christianity to its originating tradition did not so easily resolve. Though the specifics are beyond the scope of the present study, it is widely recognized by contemporary scholarship that the claiming abrogation of the Jewish Torah led, in turn, to the belief that Judaism itself had been equally abrogated, even explicitly rejected by God, and replaced by the Christian Church.<sup>380</sup> This view, which has become known in academic circles as ‘supersessionism’, contributed to the various waves of Christian anti-Semitism and ultimately to the events of the Holocaust.<sup>381</sup> With the radical consequences of the Nazi movement laid bare to global view, Christian scholars have since wrestled with the causes and implications of supersessionism and have, as a result, offered considerable argumentation to support its rejection based in the historical roots of the Christian tradition and specifically the canonical teachings of Jesus.<sup>382</sup>

To begin, it is essential to understand the nature of the concept itself and its range of meaning. As Azar rightly notes in his opening remarks concerning the topic:

“Supersessionism”... is not entirely without basis in ancient literature, but as a term not actually employed by ancient authors, it nonetheless regularly runs the risk of overreach, that is, of grouping too many complex writings, practices, and ideas under a term easy to describe and – at least in contemporary theology –

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corroborated by Paul’s writings, particularly Galatians, which focuses on this issue and is universally considered both genuine and early.

<sup>380</sup> This was also often coupled with charges of deicide (the slaying of a deity, namely Jesus) against the Jewish people, something which the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* (1965) denounced categorically: “True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.” Pope Paul VI, (October 28, 1965), accessed June 6, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html).

<sup>381</sup> A keen example of this trajectory is established by Michael McGarry, *Christology after Auschwitz* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977). More recently, Jean-Pierre Fortin, *Grace in Auschwitz: A Holocaust Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016).

<sup>382</sup> Cf. Breidenthal, Thomas E. “Neighbor-Christology: Reconstructing Christianity before Supersessionism.” *Cross Currents* 49, no. 3 (September 1999): 319-348.



condemn. In other words, the term functions as a convenient tool of our own heresiological discourse not unlike those invented by the fathers.<sup>383</sup>

The insight here is genuine and should be heeded by contemporary scholarship, as there is a danger of an easy-made consensus that condemns a straw-man figure, a simplistic specter easily slain. Even despite this important warning, the ability to identify and catalogue trends of theological argument is essential to the task and should not be avoided despite the necessity of (over)simplification involved in typological reconstruction. Although the concept may easily become a caricature, supersessionism remains an important issue for discussion and refutation in ongoing theological dialogue.

Given these conditional remarks, what is the generalized essence of the supersessionist perspective? While the emphasis may vary considerably, the primary defining feature concerns the relationship of the Christian Church to the pre-existing Hebrew-Jewish community, which, in turn, is foundational for continued relations between these traditions. According to those views broadly categorized as supersessionist, the election of Israel has been replaced by the Christian Church which then resolves, in some form, in the rejection of ongoing Israel (Judaism).<sup>384</sup> This tendency is certainly early and can be traced to the New Testament writings which radically reinterpreted the Torah, discussed in more detail in the following section, thereby dissolving many of the social and ritual mandates which had for centuries been definitive of Jewish praxis.<sup>385</sup> As Bloesch remarks, “Given the radical discontinuity between rabbinic teachings and

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<sup>383</sup> Michael G. Azar, “Origen, Scripture, and the Imprecision of ‘Supersessionism’.” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10, no. 2 (September 2016): 157-158.

<sup>384</sup> For a brief and informative historical overview of the terminology, cf. Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 10-22.

<sup>385</sup> James Sanders argues that the covenant consists of two parts, ethos and mythos, defined by cultural norms and narrative respectively; the division, in this view, between contemporary Judaism and Christianity originates in the difference of emphasis, “Torah and Christ.” *Interpretation* 29, no. 4 (October 1975): 372-390.

the teaching of the new covenant, it is not surprising that the supersessionist idea arose that Christianity had replaced Judaism in the plan of salvation.”<sup>386</sup> Perhaps the most extreme form of supersessionism came to the fore in the early heretical movement Marcionism which entirely rejected the Hebrew Scriptures as the forgeries of a demonic deity, whilst the New Testament (at least, its censored version of it) represented the true God who sought to break the illusions of the material world so that the precious souls of humanity could return to their supernatural source. Even as Marcionism, and the broader range of Gnostic movements which similarly tended to suppress the Jewish origins of Christianity in an antithetical relationship, was ultimately rejected by the majority orthodox tradition, the more moderate forms of supersessionism remained widespread and might even be considered normative for the medieval church.<sup>387</sup>

While recognizing the limitations of the terminology, supersessionism can be recognized as a significant thread in the Christian theological tradition that remains a vital topic for relations between Christianity and Judaism. Contemporary scholarship has widely demonstrated and attested the historical connection between supersessionism and anti-Semitism, particularly coming to the fore in the wake of the Holocaust,<sup>388</sup> but perhaps none have argued its relationship

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<sup>386</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, “‘All Israel will be saved’: supersessionism and the biblical witness.” *Interpretation* 43, no. 2 (April 1989): 137. This can be seen variously in early Christian writings, but is particularly clear in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* which is an apologetic debate with a Jewish teacher about why Judaism has been abrogated by Christ and Jews must repent (specifically of their role in Christ’s death) to become saved. In particular, Justin states in ch. 82: “And hence you ought to understand that [the gifts] formerly among your nation have been transferred to us.” Accessed September 21, 2017, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html>.

<sup>387</sup> Tapie attempts to justify and sympathize with Aquinas on this issue and provides some positive considerations while quietly overlooking overtly antagonistic evidence thereby giving a rather rose-colored presentation of the topic. Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014.

<sup>388</sup> Daniel Joslyn-Siemiakoski indicates specifically that he is motivated by the Holocaust, “Moses received the Torah at Sinai and Handed it on’ (*Mishnah Avot* 1:1): the relevance of the written and oral Torah for Christians.” *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 3 (2009): 443-445.

as forcefully as R. Kendall Soulen. In many regards, Soulen has demonstrated that supersessionism, and the anti-Semitism which often follows in its wake, is a definitional sin of the historical Christian movement and is based off of a mis-reading of certain New Testament texts that renders on-going Judaism null and void. As he writes:

Simply put, supersessionism is a specifically theological problem because it threatens to render the existence of the Jewish people a matter of indifference to the God of Israel. Just in this way, supersessionism introduces a profound note of incoherence into the heart of Christian reflection about God. While it may be possible to imagine a god who is indifferent to the existence of the Jewish people, it is impossible so to imagine the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, the God of Israel. If Christians nevertheless claim to worship the God of Israel while teaching God's indifference toward the people Israel, they are engaging in a massive theological contradiction. Moreover, they throw the credibility of the Christian confession itself into doubt.<sup>389</sup>

Contemporary Jewish literature is certainly not oblivious of this conceptual linkage, and this awareness is particularly acute in the interpretation of Paul offered by Talmudic scholar Daniel Boyarin in his text *A Radical Jew* (1994). The central concern of Boyarin's midrashic study is that the universalizing paradigm of Paul, most succinctly codified in Galatians 3:28, essentially erases the Jewish religious-cultural markers thereby rendering Judaism itself nullified:

On my reading, then, it is totally inappropriate to think of Paul's thought as anti-Semitic, or even anti-Judaic... Paul loves his relatives according to the flesh, anguishes over them, and is convinced that in the end they will be saved. This salvation, however, is precisely for those Jews a bitter gospel not a sweet one, because it is conditional precisely on abandoning that to which we hold so dearly, our separate cultural, religious identity, our own fleshy and historical practice, our existence according to the flesh, our Law, our difference. Paul has simply allegorized our difference quite out of existence.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Kendall R. Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 4.

<sup>390</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 152. Further, "The Jews as concrete signifier of the fulfilled spiritual signified, the body of Christ, the Church, had simply outlived their usefulness." 156.

Even as Boyarin defends Paul against claims of anti-Semitism, he still conceives of Paul as dissolving the essence of Judaism whereby Christ's gospel becomes bitter and eradicating.<sup>391</sup> Whether Boyarin's Pauline theology is correct or not, the reality is that his very careful and well-researched study of Paul and his Christian interpreters led to this conclusion. This would appear to substantiate Soulen's claim that supersessionism, real or imagined, does damage to the efficacy of the Christian gospel and thereby erodes Jewish-Christian relations. If Israel, as a people, and Judaism, as a religion, are eradicated and replaced by the Christian Church, as supersessionism broadly construed would hold, then the only hope for contemporary non-messianic Jews, from a Christian perspective, would be that they turn and accept Christ, that is, become Christian.<sup>392</sup> In reflecting on the Pauline imagery of vines and grafting, Boyarin remarks:

The branches that have been removed are, of course, those Jews who "refuse" to believe in Christ; that is, those Jews who constituted what used to be called Israel. It follows that the grafted Israel – including both Jewish and gentile believers in Christ – is now the true, living Israel and the rejected branches are at best vestiges, at worst simply dead... Paul holds out to the Jews the possibility of reinclusion [sic] in the community of faith by renouncing their "difference" and becoming the same and one with the grafted Israel of gentile and Jewish believers in Christ, but if they do not, they can only be figured as the dead and discarded branches of the original olive tree... those humans who choose difference end up effectively non-human.<sup>393</sup>

It is precisely the underlying supersessionist claim that Paul considered Judaism as replaced and thereby, functionally nullified, which has been challenged by scholars such as Soulen, who argue that Christianity is an *extension* of Judaism while not replacing it, in either

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<sup>391</sup> Boyarin also defends against Pauline supersessionism in its stronger form, namely a full rejection of Israel in sum, something he pertains to detect in the Gospel of John, while still maintaining "that from a Jewish perspective his theology is nevertheless supersessionist" because it necessitates the dissolution of historic Israel. Ibid, 202-203.

<sup>392</sup> "If the only value and promise afforded the Jews, even in Romans 11, is that in the end they will see the error of their ways, one cannot claim that there is a role for Jewish existence in Paul." Ibid, 151.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 204.

form or function.<sup>394</sup> In this approach, Paul's considerations about Israel as being pruned and grafted can be reinterpreted such that the exclusion involved is self-separation precipitated by the Jewish unwillingness to allow the entry of the nations into the covenant of Israel via Christ. Their salvation as covenantal Jews is not impinged, as such, by this hardness of heart, but rather they are excluded from the fullness of on-going community of the God of Israel because they are unwilling to allow Christians entry into their covenant. In this way, for a Jew to accept Christ does not mean that s/he becomes necessarily Christian, but rather that s/he recognizes the Christian as being equally saved by a shared deity. This alternative understanding and its implications for Jewish-Christian dialogue is expressed clearly by Soulen:

It is possible from the vantage point of Jews, who continue to observe the Mosaic law in light of Jesus' messianic interpretation of the same. And it is possible from the vantage point of Gentiles, who, without first becoming Jews and hence without incurring obligation to the Torah, nevertheless live in obedience to Jesus as Gentiles. The fundamental vision of the church is one in which difference is *preserved* in a table fellowship of common blessing rather than overcome.<sup>395</sup>

This sort of positive hermeneutic may appear simply an extension of the contemporary trend toward ecumenical pluralism and there remains significant texts that need further interpretation for the paradigm as a whole to function as strongly as Soulen sets it forward;<sup>396</sup> but even if the proverbial pendulum has perhaps swung too far in the opposite direction, the framework deserves serious consideration, if only for its positive conceptual bridge with contemporary Judaism. The endpoint, in certain regards, remains the same for both systems, as

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<sup>394</sup> For a sympathetic yet critical summary of this interpretive movement and its primary forerunners, cf. William Plevan, "Meet the new Paul, same as the old Paul: Michael Wyschogrod, Kendall Soulen, and the new problem of supersessionism." *Cross Currents* 59, no. 2 (June 2009): 217-228. For recent work by Michael Wyschograd, Soulen's rabbinic counterpart, cf. *Abraham's Promise* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>395</sup> Soulen, *God of Israel*, 171. Italics original.

<sup>396</sup> Cf. Longenecker, Bruce W. "On Israel's God and God's Israel: assessing supersessionism in Paul." *The Journal of Theological Studies* 58, no. 1 (April 2007): 38-42; Plevan, "Meet the new Paul", 217-218, 226.

both affirm fulfillment of the prophetic teaching of Romans 9-11 concerning the final fate of Israel. For both, the final destination is unity in Christ, but significant differences remain in how the issue is framed in the present. According to supersessionism, former Israel, ethnic and religious, has ceased to function and been entirely replaced by the Christian Church. While Jews may individually be included on a basis of profession of faith in Christ, the same as Gentile converts, the Jews, as a people, effectively lost their privilege and are thereby cut off from the covenantal salvation of their ancestors. Only by forsaking their defunct Jewish salvation and accepting a Christian salvation does a Jew become saved in this view; s/he bears absolutely no difference in their relation to God than a Gentile. Although there is, in a significant sense, a deeply rooted truth in this view (that all humanity stands before God in judgment and in need of salvation), it assumes a substantive difference between the salvation of the Jew and the Christian, the former having come to its termination in the advent of the latter. Meanwhile, Soulen, along with recent trends in scholarship, has given substantive support for interpreting the supersession involved in the Christian gospel as adding to but not subtracting from the promises of salvation to Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>397</sup>

While full systematic analysis of this theological current is beyond the purview of the present study, some concluding remarks on its present relevance are in order.<sup>398</sup> First, the historical relationship of supersessionist theology and anti-Semitism needs to be observed and

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<sup>397</sup> “Whereas Christian theology has traditionally read the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ as marking the end of God’s covenantal history with Israel, the heart of the supersessionist claim, Soulen argues that the incarnation is the proclamation that God’s promises to Israel will be fulfilled *as Israel*, that is with Israel maintaining its integrity and distinctiveness from the gentile nations, who of course will also be included in God’s reign.” Plevan, “Meet the new Paul”, 223.

<sup>398</sup> Longenecker’s critical evaluation is particularly excellent and demonstrates the main deficiencies of the interpretive framework, thereby showing the areas most needing further research. The key issue whether his critique holds hinges on whether Paul considered non-messianic Judaism to be “salvifically deficient”, which Longenecker maintains is genuine to Paul’s thought, “On Israel’s God”, 39.

sublimated in on-going theological dialogue, not hidden or obscured, but fully articulated. Further, there is a definitive historical consequence of supersessionism on Jewish-Christian relations which must also be explicated by Christian theology. Indeed, if Christians affirm the truth of Romans 9-11, regardless of the specifics of interpretation and identification involved, then there is an ongoing act of salvation happening among the Jewish people that will culminate in the eschaton, one which Paul affirmed with joy and gladness. Accordingly, the mechanism whereby the Jew may understand him/herself as part of the Christian gospel is a vital question for theology and is essential to the ongoing Jewish-Christian dialogue. Are the aspects of the flesh, which rabbinic scholars like Boyarin claim are definitive to Judaism, in essence merely *adiaphora*, chaff in the winds of the gospel proclamation? Is Israel ultimately no different than the nations?<sup>399</sup> Is Jewish identity truly eradicated by the allegorizing of Israel into the Christian Church? Specifically relating to the present study, how much (if any) of the Jewish culture and ethos should be imported into the Christian faith, or is it truly eradicated as Boyarin claims?

While it is not necessary for the present study to take a hard stance in favor of Soulen and the critics of supersessionism, it is important to realize the questions that are raised by an examination of the theory's theological and historical implications, as discussed above. A vital issue exposed by this inquiry concerns whether the Christian gospel holds the Hebrew-Jewish culture and religion in special favor, or whether its distinction is effectively eradicated by the universalizing scope of the Christian mission, which directly affects the normative value of the Hebrew view of marriage for the Christian community. Even though texts in favor of

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<sup>399</sup> While upholding a basically supersessionist reading of Paul, Longenecker tries to mitigate the dismissal of Jewish culture by claiming that diversity is part of the gospel. What is missing here, as is rather typical of supersessionism's defenders, is a recognition that this inclusion of the Jews and their cultural standards as a reflection of the universalizing tendencies of the gospel is exactly what rabbinic voices like Boyarin are reacting against, because it essentially erases Jewish privilege as the covenanted people.

universalization, particularly Galatians 3:28, which is central to Boyarin's interpretation of Paul discussed above, might appear to place the Jewish culture on a qualitatively equal footing with the many cultures of the nations, there is reason to question this trajectory of thought. Indeed, Paul appears to present a paradox concerning the relation of the Jews to the Christian gospel, for he claims both "what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way" and yet also "Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all."<sup>400</sup> Is this an example of Paul being self-contradictory, as E.P Sanders likes to claim, or is there something subtler going on here? While the rhetorical thrust of the passage aims primarily to convince Jews that they stand in judgment before God in the same sense as the nations, at the same time the section is framed by positive evaluations of the Jewish people and the Law, opening as cited above and closing with the forceful remark, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary; we uphold the law."<sup>401</sup> In order to understand the complexities and nuances of Paul's rendering of the relationship of the Christian movement to its Jewish progenitors, it is imperative to recognize how Paul's statements in Romans follow closely from the early Christian remembrances of Jesus' ministry and can be found to be particularly consonant with the view of the Torah expressed in Matthew.

Paul's seemingly paradoxical statements, both in strong favor of Jewish privilege and yet also holding an equal status with the nations, demonstrate an interpretive approach to the Torah that is remarkably similar to the view of the Gospel of Matthew. Although Jesus maintains a coherent interpretive approach to the Torah throughout the canonical Gospels, the most focused in addressing this relationship is Matthew, likely resulting from his widely noted Jewish

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<sup>400</sup> Romans 3:1-2, 9.

<sup>401</sup> Romans 3:31.



orientation. So too, Matthew's presentation of Jesus is arranged thematically, in contrast to Luke's historical orientation or Mark's sudden transitions, whereby the Christian perspective of the Torah is given primary emphasis in the most important bloc of teaching material, the Sermon on the Mount (SotM). One of the foremost scholars of this passage, Hans Dieter Betz claims that Matthew 5:17-20 offers "the hermeneutical principles which guided Jesus in his interpretation of the Torah."<sup>402</sup> Betz argues for four specific principles: (v. 17) the repeated phrase of not abolish but fulfill defended against notions that Jesus was teaching heretical views of the Law; (v. 18) affirmed that the Torah remained in full effect, though it remained also a historically conditioned entity which reflected towards an eschatological fulfillment; (v. 19) defined the binding force of Jesus' Torah teaching as a contrast to the Pharisaic claim that the difficulty of keeping a command equated to its significance; (v. 20) indicated how this teaching was to be applied, which "requires a renunciation of merely external observance and a turning toward the inner disclosure of the human heart before God."<sup>403</sup> Taken together, these principles are reflected consistently throughout the SotM as well as the Gospel as a whole, but are particularly central to the framework of radicalizing the demands of Torah (you have heard it said... I say unto you...) which immediately follow.<sup>404</sup>

Actualizing of the Torah, accordingly, is principally an activity of the soul, not of the flesh, in the sense that one's inner dispositions are the essential focus, whereby outward activities

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<sup>402</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, "The Hermeneutical Principles of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-20)." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 42, (March 1983): 18. See also, Elian Cuvillier, "Torah Observance and Radicalization in the First Gospel: Matthew and first-century Judaism: a contribution to the debate." *New Testament Studies* 55, no. 2 (April 2009): 148-154.

<sup>403</sup> Betz, "Hermeneutical Principles," 28.

<sup>404</sup> Matthew 5:21-48.

are authenticated on the basis of this inner state.<sup>405</sup> Further, the passage culminates in the radical demand to love even one's enemies, which can be read as a subtle push for the Jewish community to relate openly with Gentiles, especially given the comparison that even the Gentiles greet their brethren in love, whereas the Jews (and therefore Christians) are called to more.<sup>406</sup> Rather than displaying a character of supersessionism, as discussed above, Matthew's view of the Torah, which is more explicit than but entirely consistent with the other canonical Gospels, emphasized powerfully the continued relevance of the Torah, certainly not its abrogation. The failing indicated here was a reliance on the observances of the flesh, the letter of the law, in absence of the deeper authentication of the spirit, the divine intention behind it. Blanton has argued further that Matthew's orientation to the Torah doesn't just make it a central affirmation of the on-going Christian community, but that it functions as the soteriological principle of the Church.<sup>407</sup> While often commentators use the category of hyperbole to reduce the apparent demands of the Sermon on the Mount, Blanton claims that Matthew truly believed that one could attain perfect obedience of the Torah, as indicated in the closing remark of the pericope, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect."<sup>408</sup> Even while Blanton's reading of Matthew may tend too far toward theological perfectionism and underestimate the pervasive effects of sin in the present order, the point remains that Matthew's presentation of Jesus clearly

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<sup>405</sup> "The gift character of righteousness correlates with the fact that being precedes doing. Before one can do acts of righteousness, one must be righteous." Brice L. Martin, "Matthew on Christ and the Law." *Theological Studies* 44, no. 1 (March 1983): 61.

<sup>406</sup> Matthew 5:47. "In none of the antitheses does Jesus abrogate the law; in each case, rather, he brings out its radically absolute meaning." Martin, "Matthew on Christ," 69.

<sup>407</sup> Thomas R. Blanton, "Saved by Obedience: Matthew 1:21 in light of Jesus' teaching on the Torah." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 2 (2013): 393-413.

<sup>408</sup> Matthew 5:48. "Matthew's Jesus assumes that it is possible to follow all of the commandments, there is no suggestion by Matthew of any human incapacity to follow the precepts of the Torah." Blanton, "Saved by Obedience," 408.

advocates the continued relevance of the Torah for the Christian movement and indeed conceives of its fulfillment as indicative of the salvation offered by Christ.

To return to the issue of supersessionism, there is much in the Sermon on the Mount to indicate a fulfillment rather than abrogation of the Torah, but how does this relate to the question of Jewish identity and its relations with the Christian Church? Once again, the Sermon on the Mount provides a conceptual framework to understand the definitional role of the Jewish community for the Christian faith. It is important to note that the emphasis on radicalizing the demands of the Torah focuses on social behaviors: acts of hatred, sexual objectification, swearing empty oaths, vengeance, and, in contrast, agapic love. In describing interpersonal relations, Jesus makes it clear that reconciliation with others is a vital mandate of the Jewish-Christian ethos; before making a sacrificial offering, if one has a conflict with a brother, “First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”<sup>409</sup> Righteousness, the central virtue of the social-religious paradigm advocated by Matthew’s Jesus, becomes thereby definitional of the Christian community’s ethos and is consistently presented not as a negation of the Torah but rather as its fulfillment. If the Torah is extended, radicalized, and ultimately fulfilled by Jesus, then in what way does the Jewish community participate in this reality? Was it merely a placeholder, a historical device that ceased to function with the arrival of Jesus as the Christ?

Consider again Paul’s teaching in Romans on the value of the Jewish people: “To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!”<sup>410</sup> The Jews are to be thus held in a position of honor and privilege because they were as a people entrusted with the divine oracles,

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<sup>409</sup> Matthew 5:24b.

<sup>410</sup> Romans 3:2b-4a.

and should be praised for their preservation. So too, there is the subtle but powerful indication that the Christian gospel, freely given and wholly undeserved, is fully an extension of the Jewish gospel, namely that God chose an unworthy people, lowest among the nations, and raised them up to special purpose. Even while the narrative history of the Hebrew Scriptures demonstrates that the people were more often disobedient than obedient, Paul reinforced the radical hope in the promises of God that are conditioned by but not predicated on humanity's response to the divine commands. Does the faithlessness of humanity nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!

So how should the Christian community understand the Jewish people and religion? Despite the fact that, as individuals, all humanity stands equally before the judgment seat of God, it has been argued herein that Paul in Romans and Matthew in the SotM both advocate fulfillment rather than abrogation paradigms which maintain a special place for the Jewish people and their Torah. There remains an equalizing and universalizing feature to be sure, namely that the salvation of Israel has been effectively extended to all of humanity (thereby fulfilling the promises to Abraham that his progeny will be a blessing to the world). Thus, it is the same salvation shared equally and, in this way, the Jew is not given preference; his/her salvation is not qualitatively superior to the Christian. Accordingly, the Christian tradition should venerate and celebrate the Jewish people and religion as the fountainhead of its salvation. But this should also go beyond merely paying homage, as the Jewish culture further functions in a normative fashion for the ethos of the ongoing Christian community. Even while Christian commentators such as Martin Luther, noted above, often seek to maintain the moral categories of the Torah while dispensing with the ritual and cultural elements, the precise mechanism for this transition is more difficult to articulate, especially in otherwise supersessionist frameworks. What appears to be missing is that the Jewish culture is an incarnation of the Torah that has

existed for thousands of years as an embodiment of its praxis, an ethos which the Christian community should seek to embody in spirit if not in letter.

As such, the Jewish culture and religion should be interpreted as a vanguard and forerunner that, while still historically conditioned and vulnerable to sin, provides not only the essential theological insights required to establish the Christian ethos, but also a fully embedded cultural expression of divine revelation. Although the Christian does not need to become a Jew to share in the salvation of Israel, thanks to the sacrifice of Christ, the Christian lifestyle and the moral characteristics of the ecclesial community nonetheless should embody the ethos of the Hebrew-Jewish culture in a normative regard. Despite the failings of historical Israel, the demands of the Torah were preserved and taught through the generations, and thereby provide a contextualized expression of divine desires for human community in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>411</sup> While the cultural aspects, such as hairstyle or clothing, may be shed by the universalizing principles of the Christian proclamation among Gentiles, Judaism retains even still the character of revelational witness which provides the Church with the characteristics it should embody, namely a life lived, individually and communally, according to the Word of God, and thus stands in a position of singular privilege. In essence, while the letter of the Torah, its cultural expressions, may remain unique to Judaism, the spirit of the Torah, whereby a person's entire life is infused with the divine, is precisely what Christianity carries forward in the category of the sacramental. This realization is important to the present study as it legitimates why the cultural and historical progression of the Hebrew-Israelite-Judean culture(s), described in the previous

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<sup>411</sup> For example, though the historical context was vastly different for the biblical prophets, and thus the precise content of their condemnations and directives are culturally embedded thereby in a sense historically obsolete, yet the spirit of their discourse remains applicable and should be embodied in the contemporary Christian movement. The problems of the present may in functional regards appear vastly different, so require new solutions, yet the spirit of the prophetic witness provides the framework wherein these conclusions can be sought.

chapter, remain relevant for the Christian community; a point which is further supported by the manner in which Jesus responded to the question concerning the legitimacy of divorce.

### *The Synoptic Divorce Controversy*

Although Paul offered the most direct and extensive canonical teachings on marriage and sexual ethics, as discussed below, Jesus as remembered in the canonical witness did offer a few direct teachings on the subject which should not be overlooked. The more mysterious and complex passage concerning the fate of the seven-time widow in the resurrection will be developed in further detail below, but first, the more direct and compact Synoptic teaching concerning divorce should be explored as it provides further corroboration for the progressive view of the Torah as advanced above. The primary critique of Jesus against the Pharisees was that they claimed to fulfill the Torah, yet their emphasis was on the external rather than internal aspects, as also reflected in the discussion of the Sermon on the Mount above. Further, Jesus differentiated between the commandment of God and the tradition of the elders, an important hermeneutic contrast which is foundational to His prophetic rebuke of the Pharisees:

“You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said... But you say... thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”<sup>412</sup>

While in this specific text Jesus meditates on a teaching concerning how to interpret the Decalogue commandment of honoring one’s parents, the structure of the teaching provides a clear hermeneutical framework which is remarkably similar to the Sermon on the Mount. The

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<sup>412</sup> Mark 7:8-13. Cf. Matthew 15:1-9. The contents of the teaching are removed in order to emphasize the structure of the teaching and its basic logical framework.

flesh, the social interpretations and applications that defined the Pharisaic culture, should be a reflection of the spirit, namely the divine intentionality behind the commands. If the spirit of the maxim was perverted, twisted, or reversed by the resulting tradition, then the tradition should be critiqued on this basis. This same interpretive framework is also foundational for Jesus' controversial teaching on divorce:

And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."<sup>413</sup>

Here the contrast between the traditions of the elders (men) and the intention of the divine command comes to the fore once more. The intentionality for sexual relationship was established univocally in the creation of humanity as male and female, and Jesus cites the Genesis narrative explicitly in forming this conclusion. It was because of the hardness of humanity's hearts that the allowance for divorce was given, which might be understood as referencing the pervasiveness of sin on the human condition.<sup>414</sup> Marriage was established at creation as the divinely instituted framework for sexual expression, existential fulfillment, and the creation of family, yet because of the fallen conditions divorce was regrettably allowed as a concession, not a commandment.<sup>415</sup> For those desiring to seek the spirit rather than merely the

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<sup>413</sup> Mark 10:1-9. Parallel in Matt 19:1-9, and a reduced form of the prohibition against divorce in Luke 16:18.

<sup>414</sup> While never explicitly addressing the issue of polygamy/gyny, this statement by Jesus affirming the Genesis coupling gives powerful credence to normative monogamy and can explain polygamy as a concession to the needs of historical (fallen) humanity, according to the same logic as expressed here.

<sup>415</sup> To be contrasted with Paul's treatment of marriage discussed below, which should be interpreted within this framework such that sexuality is the normal and expected course, to which spiritual celibacy is added as the only legitimate alternative lifestyle. Divorce is a regrettable concession; marriage is not.

letter of the Torah, marriage should be conceived of as an expression of divine intentionality that is indissoluble. Mark's version goes on to indicate an absolute prohibition of divorce, even claiming that one who divorces and remarries commits adultery, while Matthew notoriously adds the exception for *porneia*, sexual sin.<sup>416</sup>

Although the teaching against divorce is relatively brief and not unpacked in detail by the evangelists, it can be understood as further expressing the progressive view of Torah discussed above due to the logic of its critique which hinges on whether the teaching fulfills not just the letter of the Law but its spirit, divine intention. In this case, Jesus sides unequivocally with marriage as a divine institution, indicating prophetically that it is the God of Israel whose power effects the conjoining described in Genesis of the primal couple, and that this archetype is the divine intentionality for the design of humanity as sexual beings in relationship. Divorce was allowed as a historical concession in the face of pervasive sin, but is not part of the divine intention for humanity. This framework further expresses the sacred-social dynamic explored in the previous chapter and carries forward a consistent emphasis on Genesis as normative for the human condition. So too, the Torah is conceived not as a collection of teachings as such, but rather as the higher principle which stands behind them; thus, Judaism is effective insofar as it expresses the true intentions of divine providence and should be critiqued insofar as its traditions invalidate or suppress the living Word of God. This standard, applied by Jesus to the teachings of

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<sup>416</sup> Matt 19:9. Many scholars believe this to be a Matthean addition, although it is unnecessary for the present study to make a judgment on this issue. Luke, meanwhile, deletes the disagreement over the Torah, presumably due to his focus on Gentile Christianity, while still maintaining the implied prohibition of divorce via the equation of remarriage with adultery, although coupled instead to the claim that "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void." Luke 16:17. While Luke does not maintain the emphasis on Torah as centrally as Matthew, this summary claim appears to be clearly consonant with the progressive understanding of Torah articulated herein. It is further interesting to note that Luke follows this pericope with the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, which might be understood as a thematic connection, as it is made clear that it is not enough to possess the Torah (Moses and the Prophets), it must also be actualized.



the Pharisees, should also function as foundational to the ongoing Christian ethos and offers a basis for critical reflection concerning its traditions. Given this hermeneutical approach, the issue posed to Jesus concerning the fate of the seven-time widow in the resurrection will be analyzed to demonstrate hope for the continuing endurance of marriage in the eschaton.

### MARRIAGE IN THE ESCHATON

Of the many facets and variations of marital vows, perhaps one of the most common and enduring is the summation phrase: “‘Till death do us part.’”<sup>417</sup> Assumed in this simple little sentiment is that the covenant, which is being bound by this sacred ceremony, endures only so long as the flesh does. With death comes the breaking of the contract, the end of the agreement, its completion and functional annulment. Yet, at the same time, the radical hope of the Christian gospel claims that humanity is destined for eternal life, not simply a disembodied existence but indeed a full resurrection, a perfection of the flesh rather than its abandonment. So how are Christians to understand the nature of marriage in its relationship to the eschaton? There are many factors involved in such a question and relatively few biblical texts on the subject which could easily lead to abandoning the issue entirely and relegating it to the ‘mystery’ category.

What is worse for those who might desire a form of marriage that transcends death, there is a teaching of Jesus which has often been interpreted to support the total dissolution of marriage in death, namely the controversy with the Sadducees over the fate of the remarried widow in the resurrection. In an attempt to discredit Jesus, and more implicitly also the Pharisees

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<sup>417</sup> It is instructive to note that this phrasing is absent from Orthodox ceremonies which follow the theological position that truly sacramental marriage extends into the eschaton. Cf. John Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 113-131. This point is discussed further in the next chapter on Christian history.

who upheld the resurrection, the Sadducees posed a problem to expose the concept of the resurrection as both absurd and against the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures, which for them meant the Torah.<sup>418</sup> The response given by Jesus is simultaneously prophetic, as He charged the Sadducees with ignorance of both the Scriptures and the power of God, and difficult, as a plain reading of His response that those who are raised “neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven”<sup>419</sup> would seem to validate the marital vow cited above: that death is the end of the marriage covenant. The question, then, is precisely what did Jesus mean by the enigmatic response to the Sadducees? In order to provide an adequate rendering for this difficult text, the present section of the study will proceed through three phases.

First, the passage itself will be scrutinized in order to understand the various complexities and ambiguities involved in interpreting the text. The principle task here is to place the teaching properly in its original *sitz im leben* in order to understand the immediate cultural context of the dialogue and thereby the rhetorical effect of Jesus’ reply. From this historical-critical rendering the proceeding phrase, that in the resurrection persons will be “like angels in heaven”, must be analyzed to demonstrate how this rather mysterious inference modifies the assertion that persons will no longer take nor be given in marriage. Broadly construed, there are three principle historic interpretations of this phrase, but the present study will argue that they are plagued by contradictions or ambiguities that leave them ultimately unsatisfying. It shall then be asserted that the proper foundation for interpretation of the whole pericope lies in the final assertion of the passage, namely that God is the God of the living, not of the dead, which is often overlooked or

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<sup>418</sup> This is the classic logical argument known as *reductio ad absurdum* from the Latin for ‘reduced to absurdity’ and, as will be discussed in more detail later, intends to show the fault of the position by demonstrating the absurdity of taking the disputed premises to their ultimate conclusion(s).

<sup>419</sup> Mark 12:25, ESV. Parallels to this pericope are Mark 12:18-27; Matt 22:23-33; Luke 20:27-40. The variations between Mark and Matthew are slight while Luke adds some points of elaboration analyzed below. Generally, the Mark passage will be taken as primary.

relativized in critical interpretation to the detriment of the overall evaluation of the passage. With this focus, it will be demonstrated that the intended rhetorical effect was not to devalue the spiritual nature of marriage, as it is too often taken, but rather to challenge the Sadducee's lack of faith in the efficacy of the God they claimed to worship.

In light of this rhetorical framework, a challenge will be offered against the claim that the reference to being like angels in the passage indicates a sexless or androgynous state which includes annulment of marriages and, more implicitly, no expressions of sexuality and no new children. Given the inadequacies of the principle veins of interpretation, an alternative hermeneutical context will be demonstrated that offers a radical possibility for interpreting the larger implications of the controversy with the Sadducees. Quite often, this passage is read using interpretive assumptions, particularly notable in the Western Latin tradition, which belie Greco-Roman rather than Judaic precepts. Instead, it shall be demonstrated that the intertestamental Jewish writings that would have formed the most immediate context for the original Palestinian interlocutors and audience provide a textual connection between the state of being like angels and a resurrection life that is filled with abundance wherein all the failings of the present order are remedied, thereby including marriage for the unwed and children for the barren in this life.

Next, the present study will offer further interpretive context for reading this difficult passage in light of the larger teaching of the New Testament on the resurrection following from what has already been established concerning the Torah. Perhaps the most pertinent text on the topic of the resurrection is found in First Corinthians chapter fifteen wherein Paul answers, at relative length and with notable sophistication, the objections of those that would relativize or misunderstand the nature of the resurrection. The most important emphasis of the passage for the present study is that the resurrection is not a simple continuation of the present world order but is

rather a radical continuation. The metaphor of the seed dying to give birth to the plant is a striking and helpful image for recognizing both the continuity and radical transformation involved in the consummation of the eschaton in the general resurrection and can also be located firmly in the rabbinic view of the resurrection as an age of absolute abundance. Beyond mere imaginations, humanity has been given in the present an indication of what the resurrection will be like because one has already been raised, Christ Jesus, who is the firstborn of the new creation, and through understanding Him we can better understand what awaits the faithful in the grand conclusion of history. By better understanding the nature of the resurrection we will be better prepared to interpret Jesus' statement concerning the role and nature of marriage in the eschaton.

Taken together, this section of the study will endeavor to demonstrate a logical, biblical, and historical evaluation of the nature of marriage in the eschaton that provides a consistent hermeneutic with which to understand Jesus' mysterious reply to the Sadducees. The principle thesis herein is that the present life will be radically transformed in the resurrection and ultimately only that which is pleasing to God will persist, but it will do so in absolute abundance. As Jesus reminded the Sadducees, God is a God of the living, not of the dead, and thus humanity's *only* hope for life after death is to be found in the everlasting promise of God to His people. Thus, in a very real sense, death is the final end of marriage, just as death is the end of all human affairs, as is expressed most clearly in Ecclesiastes. However, for those of the biblical faith, there is a radical hope that death is not the final end, but rather the beginning of life in total communion with God. Only God has the power to raise the dead to life, and so the only hope that a married Christian has of there being a future for marriage is to be found in the radical hope of belief in a God that is the God of the living, not of the dead, as Christ clearly taught. Ultimately,

what Jesus condemned the Sadducees for was their materialism, their ingrained belief that this life was all that there was, or perhaps the only state of existence that mattered, even despite the witness of the Torah to the contrary. They could only conceive of the resurrection as a simple continuation of this life: life part two. Instead, Jesus showed that only in the radical hope that God is the God of the living can there be *any* continuation of *any* human relationship after death. We must, therefore, be careful about how much of our assumptions from this earthly existence we import into our notions of the resurrection wherein every tear will be wiped away and humanity will live in perfect harmony with God.

*Rhetorical Framework – Sadducees and the Absurdity of the Resurrection*

The controversy with the Sadducees over the resurrection is an interesting text in that it is at once both very well known to Christian believers and exegetes, and yet, theological scholarship has tended to avoid it like the plague. Even in commentaries which are, by their nature, forced to cover every bit of material in a text, this passage is usually given only a secondary analysis and the actual question posed by the Sadducees, whose wife will she be, gets rather lost in the fray. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the sort of dodgery that commentaries offer in conclusion on the question of the present study:

But those that believe in eternal life (such as Jesus and the Pharisees) envision a different kind of existence. They believe that God has the power to bring about a new way of being in communion with God.<sup>420</sup>

Here [Jesus] reveals that marriage is a reality of the present age that is passing away (which is not to deny that a unique relationship may remain in heaven between those who were spouses on earth). Earthly marriage, as good as it is, will give way to something far greater: a union with God and all the saints that will

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<sup>420</sup> John R. Donahue, and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark in Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 350.

infinitely surpass the earthly one-flesh union of husband and wife.<sup>421</sup>

In speaking of marriage, however, Jesus would have been concerned – as was normal at that time – with questions of property and legitimacy, and what he is rejecting is therefore the notion that this social contract continues into the resurrection life. The implication is perhaps that the limitations of this bond will be removed in the age to come, allowing a wider and deeper experience of human relationships in an existence which will be very different from that of this present age.<sup>422</sup>

The vagueness of these remarks, offered as they are by critical authorities on the text, demonstrates the general lack of a clear understanding of this passage in contemporary academia.<sup>423</sup> Rather than presenting a clear thesis on what precisely Jesus is saying, this passage is instead given hazy descriptions like “different kind”, “new way”, “something far greater”, “may remain”, “is perhaps”, “wider and deeper”, and “very different”. Notice how none of these commentaries provides a clear rendering for how exactly this question should affect the Christian perception of marriage other than to relativize it in light of eschatological expectations.<sup>424</sup> Thus, the question posed by the Sadducees, *whose wife will she be*, which is a pertinent question considering the complexities of families, is avoided entirely.

It is instructive to remember the Synoptic rejection of divorce, assessed above, which is situated prior to the resurrection controversy; it is of contextual significance that Jesus has

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<sup>421</sup> Healy, Mark. *The Gospel of Mark* in the Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture series. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. Notice also the implicit assumption that the afterlife envisioned is “heaven” whereas the passage is actually discussing eschatological resurrection.

<sup>422</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Mark* in Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 284.

<sup>423</sup> This trend is further demonstrated by the fact that in critical academic journals only a paltry few articles have been written on this text despite its visibility and widespread acceptance as authentic. Thus, there is no excuse for scholarship, liberal or conservative, to have avoided this text for so long.

<sup>424</sup> To reinforce the point, it is important to note the near automatic equation of heaven with the eschaton, which implicitly ignores or relativizes the resurrection therein.

already made a strong proclamation in support of the theological nature of marriage as having been established by God from the beginning of creation. Yet the question over the legality of divorce does not cover exactly the same ground as the question concerning the seven-time widow, which presents an attempt by the Sadducees to trap Jesus into either rejecting the resurrection or accepting its absurdity and supposed contradiction with the Scriptures. In its canonical context, which in large part accounts for the saying's widespread familiarity, it follows immediately after the controversy over the paying of taxes to Caesar. Despite the widespread attention given to the question of taxation, the resurrection controversy, while still well known, does not receive nearly as much analysis or scrutiny, as noted by the vague sentiments offered by critical commentators. The striking and demanding nature of the text further condemns exegetical scholarship for its lack of interaction with this text due to the fact that Jesus begins his response to the Sadducees with a prophetic rebuke that claims that they are wrong because they know neither the scriptures (*graphe*) nor the power (*dunamis*) of God. As J.L. Mays has rightly pointed out in his recent (2006) exegetical reflections on this passage, this prophetic rebuke should make the reader sit up and take note as it drives at the heart of how Jesus read and interpreted Scripture.<sup>425</sup> Given further that Jesus is providing an exceptionally rare insight into the nature of the resurrection, which stands at the heart of the Christian faith, the relative silence by interpreters is all the more marked. Is the text so enigmatic that no logical explanation can be given beyond vague suggestions? It is my contention that if the text is placed in its proper context it can be explained and understood.

Given the nature of the text itself, as noted above, this text demands attention. But what is

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<sup>425</sup> Mays, James Luther. "Is this not why you are wrong?" Exegetical Reflections on Mark 12:18-27." *Interpretation* 60, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 33.

actually being expressed in the passage? Mark notes from the beginning an important attribute of the Sadducean ideology: they did not believe in the resurrection.<sup>426</sup> This unlocks the first important rhetorical attribute of the conversation; the question is not an honest one.<sup>427</sup> The Sadducees are seeking to trap Jesus via a classic example of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument by attempting to show the absurdity of the belief in resurrection, particularly when contrasted with Scripture, specifically the practice of Levirate marriage.<sup>428</sup> If a woman is married with no children and passes in marriage through seven brothers, none producing heirs, “whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”<sup>429</sup> The logic of Jesus’ response, and the striking nature of His prophetic rebuke, must be foundationally interpreted in light of the ingenuine character of the question itself. Jesus is thus not principally engaged in honest dialogue; He is encountering a vicious opponent who is seeking to discredit Him and belittle His teachings. Accordingly, the response given will provide an answer to the question, but not directly.

Instead, Jesus’ answer is laced with criticism; from the very beginning, it pushes back against the Sadducees and accuses them of faithlessness. To challenge the Temple authorities of

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<sup>426</sup> As R.T. France defines the Sadducean ideology: “Sheol was a final resting place, and any continuity was to be understood in terms of reputation and posterity, not in terms of personal survival.” R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* in NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmans, 2002), 471.

<sup>427</sup> The Sadducees could easily have asked another similar question: who is to inherit the land? Given that the tribal boundaries were established as far back as Joshua, and literally hundreds of generations have lived and died in the land, in the resurrection who will get to inherit the land? Interestingly, the answer Jesus gives, as interpreted herein, still holds even for this different but related question, as will be demonstrated.

<sup>428</sup> Discussed above in chapter 2. Weir claims that the crux of the question for the Sadducees hinged on the fact that none of the husbands had done their Levirate duty as there was no child between the seven of them. J. E. Weir, “Would Viagra Have Helped? A Discussion of Mark 12:18-27 from a Liberationist Standpoint.” *Expository Times* 114, no. 6 (2003): 187-192.

<sup>429</sup> Mark 12:23b. It is also widely recognized that the Apocrypha text Tobit may have formed some of the conceptual background for the question, as the damsel in distress of the tale has been married seven times only for a love-sick demon murder her husband each time on the wedding night. The connection is of interest but does not significantly modify interpretation of the text itself.



the Judaic religion with ignorance both of the Word<sup>430</sup> and power of God is a dramatic challenge to make, but how does Jesus substantiate this astonishing rebuke? First, by invoking angels in the comparison of the resurrected state to a heavenly existence, Jesus shows the hypocrisy of the Sadducean beliefs. At once they taught the absolute authority of the Scripture, which they defined strictly as the Torah, while also holding to an essentially materialistic ideology that rejected angels, demons, divine intervention, and any substantive afterlife or resurrection.<sup>431</sup> By invoking the angels, Jesus implicitly displays the contradiction – the Sadducees affirmed the Torah as absolute and authoritative yet completely ignored or drastically reinterpreted any references to angels, which are rather common in Genesis! The critique continues with the reference to the burning bush<sup>432</sup> and God's call of Moses, which flies in the face of the Sadducean belief in a non-interventionist deity. Indeed, with this reference Jesus functionally invokes the entire Mosaic-Exodus tradition, which is vitally founded on a supreme act of divine intervention. To claim thereby that the Torah was the true Word of God and yet deny the truthfulness of its events and theology is revealed to be the real absurdity. Thus, the Sadducees know neither the scriptures nor the power of God; they read the *words* without comprehending the *Word*.

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<sup>430</sup> Capitalized 'Word' herein is used to indicate the view that the Hebrew Scriptures were divine revelation.

<sup>431</sup> Admittedly, we do not have any writings from the Sadducees themselves, so our notions about them are taken entirely from polemical sources, most notably Josephus and canonical Gospels. While we must be careful not to take our criticisms of the Sadducees too far given the oppositional nature of the sources describing them, from what historians and biblical scholars have been able to glean their representation is at least historical in its outline of their theological features and function in society.

<sup>432</sup> The reference to the burning bush is only found in Mark, and if Markan primacy is indeed correct, then likely this part of the saying was original to Jesus and edited by the subsequent evangelists. To advance any claims of precisely why the later Gospels dropped this part of the saying would be unduly speculative.

*Historical Framework – Sexless Angels or an Age of Absolute Abundance*

Having established the rhetorical framework of Jesus' reply and its fundamental critique, it is further instructive to clarify the concept of 'being like the angels', as this forms the most direct description of the resurrection state in the passage. Since the early church, interpreters have struggled to identify what precisely this statement is meant to convey. Broadly construed, there are three general historic trajectories to define the reference to being in the likeness of angels.<sup>433</sup> A widespread perspective in the early church developed out of essentially a position of androgyny.<sup>434</sup> Angels, it was argued, are sexless, without gender, and thus humans will be sexless and marriage will be obviated as a result.<sup>435</sup> This position typically views marriage as predicated wholly or at least functionally on coital acts; thus, no sex equals no marriage. This was modified by Augustine who pointed out exegetically that Jesus uses the dual verbs for describing marriage, both taking in marriage, the active form referring to men and the passive to women, thereby indicates continuation of a gendered state into the resurrection.<sup>436</sup> Although Augustine, who will be discussed further in the next chapter, rejected the overt androgynous position, even still his writings tended to uphold celibacy as the highest form of Christian living which is easily transposed onto the eternal state as being inherently celibate or sexless even if still gendered.<sup>437</sup> Yet the foundations of this perspective are questionable considering the fact that

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<sup>433</sup> A helpful and concise overview of the various interpretations on this passage is given by William E. Phipps, "Jesus on Marriage and the Afterlife." *Christian Century* 102, no. 11 (April 3, 1985): 327-328.

<sup>434</sup> Discussed above in chapter two.

<sup>435</sup> As argued above, this view is laced with significant presuppositions that owe more to Greek philosophy than to the Judaic theological tradition.

<sup>436</sup> Augustine, *City of God* XXII. Cited and evaluated in Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 40-41. Discussed in further detail in chapter four.

<sup>437</sup> This belief began in the early church as Encratism and was later denounced as heretical but lingered on in the Catholic doctrine of clerical celibacy. Originally the Encratites taught that all Christians *must* be celibate (later revived by the Shakers) but this was softened to include only the clergy, as they were expected to walk the "higher

angels appear in Genesis 6 to be capable of producing children through sexual unions with women, and generally this perspective is plagued by incipient Neo-Platonism that devalues the flesh as inferior to the spirit.<sup>438</sup> Marriage, in this view, has little place in the resurrection as it is primarily an expression of sexuality and is often coupled with a belief that marriage was only created in order to provide a mechanism for procreation.<sup>439</sup> In the resurrection there will be no new children, the thinking goes, so marriage, and sexuality more broadly, will have fulfilled its *telos*.<sup>440</sup>

While the androgynous-celibate matrix reigned generally supreme through most of the history of the medieval Western church,<sup>441</sup> in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries new paradigms of thought offered a discernible shift in the dominant perspective. Coupled with the Protestant teaching that clergy could be married (and, in some circles, should be), which reversed the classic Catholic position that celibacy was spiritually superior to marriage,<sup>442</sup> a new emphasis

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path", so to speak, and thus celibacy was championed as superior to marriage. Discussed in chapter four.

<sup>438</sup> This tendency has already been noted in chapter two in the discussion of androgynism. The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7 bears on this issue, discussed further in the next section. Further, this association of angels being sexual beings in Genesis (although it remains the majority interpretation of the passage) is not necessary for the following interpretation to hold, as it is enough to say that the sexual nature of angels is uncertain and that it is impossible simply from this passage to deduce Jesus' position on the issue. If this is taken out of the equation, the rest of the interpretation still holds that the reference to angels maintains rhetorical weight against the Sadducees and is better situated in reference to the culminating statement that God is the God of the living, not the dead.

<sup>439</sup> Chapter four will demonstrate a more nuanced and complex portrayal of Augustine on this issue.

<sup>440</sup> It will be argued below that this supposition is historically foreign to the Judaic tradition which conceived of the angelic state of the resurrection to be the fulfillment rather than termination of life's desires.

<sup>441</sup> It should be briefly noted that Orthodox theology has tended to interpret this text as a rejection of Levirate marriage and disconnected thereby from the question of Christian sacramental marriage, so the interpretive issue remains largely a problem in the West only.

<sup>442</sup> It should be noted that the Eastern Orthodox Church did not follow the Western notion that celibacy was superior as evidenced by its historic acceptance and support of clerical nuptials. Thus, the shift being indicated here is primarily situated among the Western Catholic and Protestant thinkers.

on the perfection of marriage rather than its negation gained a foothold in academic theology.<sup>443</sup>

This shift produced two new distinct, though intertwined, interpretive trajectories, one characterized generally as ‘feminist’ in that it focuses on the role and rights of the woman in the passage, and the other, which represents the contemporary consensus position, insofar as one has been established, is that the consummation of the resurrection state will bring a fulfillment of marriage through its perfection rather than abnegation, as previously held, although the precise mechanism for this transition is too often left vague and abstracted.

The feminist option, as intimated by the earlier citation from Hooker, claims that Jesus’ challenge to the Sadducees was concerned “with questions of property and legitimacy” and heralded an end to the “social contract.”<sup>444</sup> Ruth Barnhouse puts it quite clearly:

The usual interpretation that sexual relations will be superfluous in heaven is at least inadequate, if not actually untrue. Since biblical writers were not squeamish in referring to sex, we may conclude that what Jesus meant was the actual institution of marriage as it existed at that time... At that time the wife was a possession, and was *owned by her husband in exactly the same way in which he owned his ox, his ass, his children, his slaves, and whatever other worldly goods he had...* Still, that there will, in heaven, be no marrying or giving in marriage surely means that the *old form of patriarchal marriage is to be obsolete.*<sup>445</sup>

Truly, there is something to the assertion that Jesus was challenging the presumptions lying behind the question itself. The answer, thus construed, is that marriage *as the Sadducees understood it* comes to an end with death. That leaves open the question of whether there are elements of marriage that persist into the eschaton or further whether more recent notions of

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<sup>443</sup> It should be noted as well that this trend, of seeing marriage as fulfilled rather than negated, echoes the pattern of the critique concerning supersessionism discussed above.

<sup>444</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 284.

<sup>445</sup> Ruth T. Barnhouse, “Is Patriarchy Obsolete?” in *Male and Female: Christian Approaches to Sexuality* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 233-234. Note again the implicit conflation of heaven and the resurrection. Italics added for emphasis.

marriage, based more on personal love and existential fulfillment than on social expectations and structures, might endure if it is only the “old form of patriarchal marriage” which is made obsolete. If so, then can this passage bear any significant relevance for contemporary forms of marriage beyond a general renouncement of patriarchal influences in marriage traditions?

These questions are generally left unresolved by the feminist approach to the text; so too, questions of clarification and application are too often circumvented by the general consensus view that has emerged in the late-twentieth century critical scholarship that posits, often in vague references as noted above, that the marriage relationship will be perfected, either in some variation on the marriage of the lamb<sup>446</sup> or in a sort of loving maximalization of all human relationships.<sup>447</sup> While these positions are helpful and, in many regards, *correct* in outline, they tend to be rather vague in answering the question of what Jesus actually intended to convey about the nature of the resurrection in the controversial exchange.<sup>448</sup> Even while the assertion that humanity will be like angels in the eschaton is an important phrase for interpretative

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<sup>446</sup> “Jesus is not teaching that we will be asexual in heaven, but rather without marriage. His reference to the angels does not mean that we will be angelic beings without bodies, but rather that we, like the angels, will no longer die. And if we no longer die in our eternal state, then there is no longer a need for procreation, one of the major purposes of God’s good gift... What we long for and experience in the sexual intimacy of marriage in this world will be made full beyond comparison in the wedding of the Lamb.” Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 90-91. Note the assumption that a cessation of death would equate to the end of childbirth as well; why must this be the case in an infinite age of total abundance?

<sup>447</sup> “Marriage and the “one flesh” union exist from the beginning to point us to the “marriage of the Lamb” (Rev 19:7), to the union of Christ and the Church (see Eph 5:31-32). In the resurrection, the “primordial sacrament” will give way to the divine reality. In other words, if God created the union of the sexes as a foreshadowing of heaven, Christ is saying, “You no longer need a foreshadowing to point you *to* heaven when you are *in* heaven. You’re there. The ultimate union has come.”” West, Christopher. *Theology of the Body*, 53. Note the implicit equation of the resurrection with heaven, once again.

<sup>448</sup> Even N.T. Wright offers a rather vague suggestion in this direction, that Jesus “spoke of “the resurrection” as a complete even in the future when all the righteous would be raised, and he seems to have indicated that in this resurrection state certain things would be different so that there would be no problem about who had been married to whom in the present life... (Contrary to what people sometimes suggest, by the way, he didn’t say that in the resurrection God’s people would *become* angels; he said that they would in certain respects be *like* angels [Matthew, Mark] or *equal to* angels [Luke]).” Again, notice the language of “seem” and “different”, quite vague for an otherwise systematic thinker like Wright. N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 38.

consideration, and will be given a historical-contextual rendering below, even so, what little scholarship that has been devoted to unlocking the meaning of the passage has focused almost exclusively on whether being like angels means being sexless or without gender. Meanwhile, a very important aspect of the passage is often overlooked or relativized: Jesus goes on to claim that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and is the God of the living, not of the dead; how does this contribute to answering the question at hand?

Jesus' conclusion draws a radical and seemingly non-sequitur conclusion by claiming that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is also the God of the living, not of the dead. Given this enigmatic answer, it is no wonder that exegetes tend to avoid this passage!<sup>449</sup> What is to be done with this statement? Was Jesus just waxing philosophic or is there a discernible logic to His answer? It is the contention of the author that there is a very clear logic to be found here, but it requires multiple steps in order to make sense of the whole. First, it must be remembered that the primary rhetorical intention of Jesus' response is to rebuke the Sadducees for their unbelief, as they have posed a deceitful question. This does *not* mean that the rest of the response has no bearing on the question, much the opposite; it is fundamental for answering the question, but in an indirect manner. Rather than answer the question directly, Jesus challenges the very basis of it and calls into question the various assumptions being made by posing it.<sup>450</sup> Second, the references to angels and the burning bush highlight the fact that the Sadducees didn't recognize the power of God even though they read the Scriptures. Thus, their failing was one of belief; they

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<sup>449</sup> Critical exegetes also have little to go on in regards textual variations, manuscript evidence, and Synoptic parallels as France notes, *Mark*, 469-470.

<sup>450</sup> In the realm of systematic apologetics, we might say that Jesus here is primarily engaged in Presuppositional Apologetics, as He is challenging the basis of the Sadducean worldview on the level their unspoken, but foundational, presuppositions, such as the disbelief in angels, the afterlife, and so forth.

simply did not believe in the kind of God that Jesus clearly believed in.<sup>451</sup> The response culminates in the claim that the God of the progenitors is also the God of the living, not of the dead. So how does this follow from the previous assertions?

What Jesus was exposing, and what made the crowds remark in astonishment, was the disbelief of the Sadducees. They didn't believe that God could act in this world and neither did they believe that God would sustain souls after death much less raise the dead to new life. After shaming the Sadducees through references to angels and the burning bush, both aspects of belief that they denied despite their commitment to the Torah, Jesus concludes, implicitly, that their greatest sin is the belief that God is not powerful enough to sustain a human soul after death or raise the dead to new life. If there is no continuation of life after death, as their incipient materialism indicated, then there is no continuation of *anything* and God is left powerless in the matter. If, however, God truly is the God of the living, not of the dead, and at the same time is *still* the God of the progenitors, then the implication is that God has sustained them, for God is still their God despite the fact that they are well known to have died over a thousand years prior. This is all fine and good, one might say, but how does this answer the question?<sup>452</sup> There are two principle directions to Jesus' answer, both of them related to undermining assumptions imported by the Sadducees in the very nature of their question. On the one hand, Jesus is saying that the entire category of marital obligation, as they understood it, is nullified at death.<sup>453</sup> Indeed, death

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<sup>451</sup> "So the clash between Sadducees and Jesus is a clash between world views. One thinks reality is determined by what is. The other knows that reality will be transformed into what will be." Mays, "Is this not why you are wrong?", 37.

<sup>452</sup> In presenting research to seminar colleagues, one earnest inquirer asked nearly the same question as the Sadducees, "If I marry a widow, whose wife will she be in the resurrection?" but he asked it not as a trap, as the Sadducees had, but as an honest inquiry seeking an answer, as one who *does* believe in the eschaton. Thus, if Jesus' teaching *only* rebuked the Sadducees for their disbelief and did not actually provide an answer then it would have failed in the broader context, as those who seek this text now honestly want to know, whose wife will she be?

<sup>453</sup> Mays articulates this point well in his article which highlights the radical nature of Jesus' saying, "The

is the great end to all aspects of present life.<sup>454</sup> The Bible witnesses to this foundational truth in many ways, but nowhere more directly than in the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?”<sup>455</sup> Death, known in Hebrew as *Sheol*, was the great eater of souls from which there was no hope of return, “as the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to *Sheol* does not come up,”<sup>456</sup> or *almost* no hope. Indeed, the only hope available was of the radical variety. *If* there is indeed a God, and *if* that God is more than just an arbitrary creator but truly has a relationship with humanity, and *if* that God wants what is best for humanity, and *if* what the prophets say is true, *then* God will use the divine power to sustain human life after death, and even recreate the world in abundant perfection.<sup>457</sup> This is the radical hope of the Bible, and Jesus invoked this hope, which the Sadducees denied, through references to angels, the burning bush, and the two-fold claim that God is both the God of the progenitors and yet also the God of the living, not of the dead.<sup>458</sup>

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God of whose power Jesus speaks in our text is the electing God, the One whose initiative of grace makes the present the opening to the future instead of merely the result of the past, and who makes death the way to life instead of the defeat of life”. Mays, “Is this not why you are wrong?”, 41.

<sup>454</sup> Bradley Trick has offered an excellent study on the nature of Jesus’ response in light of the invocation of the burning bush and God of the living phrases, in “Death, Covenants, and the Proof of Resurrection in Mark 12:18-27.” *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 3 (January 1, 2007): 232-256. In particular, Trick locates the nature of Jesus response as specifically targeting the notion that the seven marriages will all have been broken by death, and so the question is really who will she re-marry (or, put another way, which of the men will have the right to take her as wife), which thereby explains the use of the twin verbs to marry or be given in marriage.

<sup>455</sup> Eccl 1:2-3. The term translated as either vanity or meaningless comes from the Hebrew term *hebel* which means literally vapor or breath and symbolically transitory-ness.

<sup>456</sup> Job 7:9.

<sup>457</sup> This point is made even more explicit by Luke’s rendering of the passage which adds a few points, most important for the present issue: “But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, *for all live to him.*” Luke 20:37-38, italics added. The ending phrase there further confirms the present interpretation as it drives home the point precisely, that the only life to be found after death is in God.

<sup>458</sup> Trick puts it quite clearly, “whereas physical death suffices to annul covenants (such as marriages) between physical beings, it cannot annul covenants with God since all people—not just the patriarchs—continue living with respect to God even after physical death”. Trick, “Death, Covenants”, 255.



Thus, the implication that this saying pushes the listener/reader toward is a dual revelation. On the one side is the absolute nature of death; it engulfs all humanity, its achievements, even its memories, as Ecclesiastes makes quite clear. On the other is the claim that the covenantal God of the Scriptures is *not only able* to accomplish any feat, even the seemingly impossible (bringing the dead to life), but *also willing* to do so for those that believe and obey.<sup>459</sup> Truly the physical contract of marriage ends, as does every facet of human existence, in death; all is consumed by the universal reality of mortality. The only hope of continuation is in the radical belief that the Creator of the universe has both the ability and the desire to sustain humanity, even to re-create the cosmos into its most perfect form in the resurrection.

Jesus was, thereby, not simply waxing philosophic with His rebuttal to the Sadducees; rather He offered a very substantive response. The wrongness of the Sadducees was in the fact that they didn't believe that God *could* or *would* recreate humanity through the resurrection. Their limited imaginations could only conceive of a resurrection state remarkably like the present state of affairs, a *simple continuation* of present circumstances. Their conception of the resurrection, reflected in the assumptions of their query, was therefore simply a mass resuscitation, a return to the old life, not transformation into a perfected form of living. Jesus' reply demonstrated how they were wrong: their hearts were so hardened that they couldn't even believe the claims of their own holy writings, that God is both the Creator of the cosmos and yet also maintains a unique relationship with His people, a relationship that continues even after death.<sup>460</sup> Even while purely human covenants are doomed to erasure in the great consumption of

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<sup>459</sup> This is of course evidenced most readily in the ministry of Jesus who, quite literally raised the dead to life, an impossible feat in the eyes of materialists like the Sadducees who refused to believe even when they were faced with the very incarnation of God in their midst.

<sup>460</sup> France puts it well: "The argument is better understood as a reflection on the character of the covenant God who Moses encountered, a God who through his new name, 'I AM' is revealed as the living God, the ever-present helper and deliverer of his people. If such a God chooses to be identified by the names of his long-dead

universal death, even so the radical hope of the biblical worldview is that God is supreme even over the very powers of death itself.<sup>461</sup> Thus, it is only by *grace* that God continues to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are living, not dead, even though they have passed through the veil of dying. Thus, only through the radical hope in the grace and salvation of God that Jesus offered can the marriage covenant continue in any meaningful sense. Yet even as Jesus was the ultimate representation of this hope, it did not arise in a vacuum. Rather, this interpretive trajectory is evidenced in the early rabbinic teachings concerning the resurrection as an age of absolute abundance, which provides the historical framework with which Jesus' teaching can be properly understood.

It has already been demonstrated in the prior chapter that the position of androgynism owes more to Greco-Roman philosophy than the Hebrew-Jewish ethos, and serves as a primary interpretive conditioner towards the claim that Jesus' reference to angels in the pericope indicates a sexless or genderless state. From this basic assumption, which owes heavily to the Platonic tendency to denigrate the flesh as a prison of the spirit, a constellation of interpretive features emerges, as charted above. Yet there are significant questions with this nearly automatic assumption on the part of many interpreters to equate the angelic state with the elimination of sexuality in general and marriage in particular that needs to be challenged. If the dualistic framework of Plato is to be rejected as the hermeneutical lens to interpret Jesus remarks, then what might function in its stead?

Although it does not appear to have been picked up on in wider critical scholarship yet,

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servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom his covenant was made, and whom he committed himself to protect, they cannot be simply dead and forgotten... but its basis, far from being merely the tense of a verb, is in the fundamental theological understanding of Yahweh, the living God, and of the implications of his establishing an 'everlasting covenant' with his mortal worshippers." France, *Mark*, 471-472.

<sup>461</sup> Cf. Trick, "Death, Covenants", 250-255.

William Loader's survey of early Jewish and Christian texts on the topic of sexuality provides a clear referent with which to understand Jesus' remark concerning angels:

Most expressions of future hope in Jewish literature of the period paint the future as fulfilling the dreams for the present. Sometimes, this is almost literally the restoration of peace in the land... Visions of the future usually went beyond literal description into fantasy and symbol, or at least, the fantastic, including the promise of huge harvests of fruit and wine. Abundance regularly included *abundant offspring* among animals and, not least, humans. Some form of resurrection is often assumed and associated with it, ideas of transformed existence. This could mean life as it is now, but mostly it meant being in a *transformed state, sometimes angel-like*. Some texts speak of living forever; others of living for a thousand years. The same texts usually combine this with visions of abundant offspring, so that length of life does not seem to have triggered the thought that producing progeny might be superfluous. *Nothing suggests an absence of sexual intimacy.*<sup>462</sup>

In light of this rabbinic context, it is astonishing to note how many assumptions are imported into the widely-held view, described above, that this passage refers to a sexless state in the eschaton that obviates marriage. As Loader points out, the eternal nature of the resurrection does not seem to have bothered the rabbinic commentators because, by their definitions, it was an age of absolute abundance, so why should it not include all the goods of this life in perfected form? In this way, being like angels was understood as being in perfect harmony with God and the divine plan, which, according to the very first commandment given to humanity, includes procreation. Rather than a negation of human relationships, most importantly marriage and the family that it brings, this teaching was intended to evoke powerfully the fullness of the Christian Gospel, the perfection of the world in an age of absolute abundance. Every limitation the human mind can conjure will be shattered by the ultimate power of God in transforming the state of existence into its perfect form, thereby bringing ultimate fulfilment to the Sermon on the Mount teaching to become perfect, as discussed above. Jesus harshly rebuked the Sadducees for their limited

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<sup>462</sup> Loader, *Making Sense of Sex*, 97-98. Italics added for emphasis.

imaginings in conceiving of the divine power to bring all things to perfection, so let contemporary readers of Jesus' teachings be careful not to fall into the same traps.

In conceiving of the potential mess the Sadducees conjure to mind, the squabble over love or territory which we expect to face in the dividing up of the resurrected state, the radical hope of Christ directs contemporary Christians in a manner analogous to the rabbinic tradition summarized by Loader, toward an age of absolute abundance where all limitations are eradicated. This both affirms the standing of the woman, as the discussion echoes considerations of the physical inheritance of Israel (and even may be posed alternatively in regards "whose land will it be?"), as a full subject in relationship individually before God, as her standing in the salvation of Israel is not dictated by her attachment to a man, as it would have been in this life. Rather, every complaint our minds might bring, every potential squabble will be utterly dissolved in the light of the eschaton. The real question that those seeking treasure that will persist beyond death in their marriage relationships should ask is whether they infuse their partnership with the light of Christ and let the divine Spirit lead them toward the age of absolute abundance where their labors in the present will be perfected in the ultimacy of the eternal and infinite. In this regard, the ethos of the resurrected state should serve as a definitional category for Christian marriage in the present.

### *Canonical Framework – 1 Corinthians 15*

While the preceding exposition should provide a relatively clear and articulate rendering of the difficult passage in question, it stands open to further enquiry whether this interpretation is consistent with the wider witness of Scripture. Among the handful of direct teachings on the resurrection, perhaps the most explicit and developed is found at the conclusion of Paul's First

Letter to the Corinthians wherein he explicates a detailed response to those that would deny the literal nature of the resurrection:

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.<sup>463</sup>

Here, Paul speaks of the very foundation of human nature, both in its created origin as well as its divinely intended conclusion. Humanity is currently in the life of dust for we follow in the image of the man of dust, the earthly man<sup>464</sup>, but in the life to come we will be reformed in the image of the heavenly man, Jesus. The truly inspired analogy is given that just as the seed dies to give birth to the plant, so too must the earthly die to give birth to the heavenly. This is not, it must be pointed out, an assertion that the heavenly is a-material, as is often argued.<sup>465</sup> The heavenly existence is not less real than this one, but rather more real; the resurrection will continue from

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<sup>463</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:35-49.

<sup>464</sup> Paul is here playing on words with the notion that Adam is made from dust/dirt and his name is etymologically connected to the Hebrew term for earth.

<sup>465</sup> Wright gives an excellent articulation and rebuttal of this incipient Platonistic spiritualism in *Surprised by Hope*, particularly cf. pgs. 26, 86-87, and 160.

the present world but in a radical fashion. Alan Padgett sums it up quite clearly:

[Paul] sets up a parallel with the world of plants. A seed is planted, and has one kind of body, but after it dies it grows into a different body, the body of the plant. God has given the plant a different substance or body than the seed had, one that is fitted for its new environment. There is also a continuity between seed and the plant that grows from it. This parallel is similar to what he wants to say about our mortal bodies and the new resurrection body. In both cases, there is continuity and difference.<sup>466</sup>

This vision of the resurrection fits quite clearly with what has been previously asserted as the proper interpretation for Jesus' response to the Sadducees. The resurrection will be a radical transformation of the present world, radical in the fact that it is only by the precious grace of God that any life is continued post-mortem and that it will be an age of total abundance without qualification or limitation. The Sadducees were so obsessed with the nature of the seed that they lost sight of the glorious plant contained within. They were as the fetus fearing to face the death of birth for there is no way to be certain that there is any continuity to be found on the other side. Paul further emphasizes the centrality of Jesus' assertion that God is the God of the living, not of the dead, by pointing out that the entire process is guided directly by God, for all are given their bodies as God has chosen (vs. 38). So too then the resurrection body will be chosen and bestowed by God in the image of the man of Heaven, the Christ.

It is also instructive that Paul is clear that Jesus, as the first resurrected, is the vanguard of the coming resurrection, the firstborn of the new creation. Given this emphasis on the man of earth compared to the man of heaven, Paul gives a helpful indicator into the nature of the resurrection. What can be said of Jesus when He was raised from the dead? For one, it was a surprise to everyone.<sup>467</sup> The surprising nature of the event itself gives some indication of why the

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<sup>466</sup> Padgett, Alan G. "The Body in Resurrection: Science and Scripture on the "Spiritual Body" (1 Cor 15:35-58)." *Word & World* 22, no. 2 (March 1, 2002): 159.

<sup>467</sup> Indeed, the surprising character of the belief in the resurrection is the principle impetus behind Wright's

disciples at first do not recognize the face of Jesus in the various post-resurrection encounters, but it doesn't account for this entirely. Truly the glory of the resurrected state itself was so utterly transformed from the earthly body of Jesus that had just been horribly executed by the Romans, it was beyond imagination to even conceive of what Paul refers to as the imperishable body (*aphtharsia*<sup>468</sup>), in the days following the crucifixion. Jesus represents the radical nature of the relationship between the earthly and heavenly bodies – even as his earthly body was broken and tortured, his heavenly body bore the marks, as evidenced by Thomas' queries, and yet the pain was entirely extinguished; tragedy was turned into triumph.<sup>469</sup>

Given this conceptualization of the resurrection, it becomes clear that the continuity is a radical one. Jesus was still the same Jesus that the disciples had known, but at the same time He was also entirely new. The heavenly body will be continuous insofar as every aspect of the person that is pleasing to God will remain, but all the pain and strife of the earthly life will be left behind in the tomb; though the scars may remain, the wounds will have been healed. Christian marriage, in this hermeneutical context, is thereby to be understood as principally composed of two parts, the earthly and the heavenly, whereby the flesh should function as a harmonious embodiment of the spirit. The earthly is a servant of the heavenly and points beyond itself to the more perfect law of love, but for those still living the life of dust, the earthly marriage is also necessary and can be quite fulfilling. Yet what marks the truly Christian life, and therefore the

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text *Surprised by Hope* cited herein.

<sup>468</sup> A rather rare term in the NT, the negative of *phtheiro* (as contrasted by Paul) which means to be corrupted or destroyed, as with the destruction of the Temple, which is itself a rare term. The distinction is thus between a body destroyed in death and a body that is beyond death, transformed by it while transcending it.

<sup>469</sup> So it shall be in the resurrection; if our identities as individuals, and as groups, are to remain in any meaningful sense then we must still bear the marks of the pain in this life, but in a perfected and transformed form. Thus, our wounds, which are such deeply ingrained aspects of human nature and identity, will be cured and all tears will be wiped away.

truly Christian marriage, is the attempt to actualize the higher heavenly life even in the here and now, on earth as it is in heaven, which, it shall be argued in the next chapter, is the substance of the sacrament.

### *The Hopeful Mystery of Human Relationship*

This study has attempted to demonstrate a logical and exegetical approach to understand the difficult and enigmatic response of Jesus to the question posed by the Sadducees about the fate of marriage in the eschaton. As it has been argued, Jesus' answer is a prophetic rebuke of the Sadducees' disbelief as evidenced by the reference to angels and the burning bush. The Sadducees simply could not conceive of a God powerful enough to act in history or raise the dead, and Jesus demonstrates their hypocrisy of claiming to believe in the Scriptures while ignoring many of the claims therein. The core of Jesus' response is thus an accusation as well as an answer. The accusation is that the Sadducees lack the radical belief in a God that is at once the God of the ancestors and yet also the God of the living, not of the dead. Truly, all human relationships are ended in death; this is a fact of life that is inescapable. As the teacher of Ecclesiastes put it so clearly, "For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return."<sup>470</sup> Death is truly an all-encompassing reality and in it the legal and earthly bonds of marriage are ended. For the Sadducees, that was the end of the story. Meanwhile, Jesus' answer should be understood in light of the radical hope of the resurrection: God is willing to sustain human life beyond death and recreate the world. It is only through such radical hope as this that

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<sup>470</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:19-20.



*any* human relationship can continue.

So, whose wife will she be? In conclusion, one must be careful about importing categories of experience from the earthly realm to the heavenly. Perhaps most problematic is the fact that the present world lives in a struggle of constant competition. By the nature of present reality, what is mine cannot be yours.<sup>471</sup> In the realm of relationships, we have to compete for attention, love, and affection. If I am showing affection to one child then the other is deprived of that affection. However, in the perfection of the resurrected state competition will be a thing of the past; it will pass away with the transformation of the earthly realm into an incorruptible state. The Sadducees, who were conditioned by their culture to consider women the property of men, as we are reminded by feminist interpreters, could not conceive of a world where ownership and rights of legitimacy, so important to the life of dust, would not also extend. Whose wife will she be? The very nature of the question implicitly imports assumptions of competition and thereby limitations which will be erased in the age of abundance. The woman's identity as a child of God will be the relationship which defines and sustains her, not her connection to a man. Her inheritance in the covenantal promises to Israel, which are the background of Levirate marriage and certainly inform the issue, will be dictated by her standing before God, not her marital status.

For final consideration, think for a moment of the unique nature and mystery of human relationships themselves. A relationship between two persons is unique to them, be they spouses, parents with children, siblings, co-workers, and so forth. Some relationships are more unique than others in the sense that the person is singular.<sup>472</sup> So whose wife will she be? In a very real

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<sup>471</sup> This is, of course, potentially overcome in marriage where what is the husband's is equally the wife's, thereby setting a pattern and precedent that hints toward the fulfillment of the resurrection.

<sup>472</sup> A child only ever has one mother and father; this is a biological fact. Yet a child can have more than just two parents, for the role of parent is not limited to biology. In this regard, I personally have two mothers, one that gave birth to me, and one that married my father after my parents' divorce and contributed to my upbringing. My relationship with my mother is unique, but so is my relationship with my step-mother. In this world, there have been

sense all of them, and yet none of them in the way that the Sadducees were thinking. The seven-time widow will be a free and autonomous individual whose entire being will be sustained by relationship with God, like an angel, and the contracts and demands of this life will no longer persist nor define her, as she will not be taken nor given in marriage. Thus, the only hope, radical as it is, for any part of marriage to persist into the resurrection is if the relationship is pleasing to God, for only that which God chooses to sustain will be maintained. Given this further corroboration for a nuanced and developed view of Christian marriage as theologically significant, how does it relate to the apparent support of celibacy by Paul that led historically its promotion as spiritually superior to marriage? It is to this question that we now turn.

### **PAUL AND CORINTHIAN SEXUALITY**

Whenever approaching the topic of biblical instructions concerning sexual ethics, particularly in relation to monogamous marriage, the message and intentionality of Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 7, remains the most extended development of the topic in the New Testament. How one understands this passage will dramatically alter conceptions of the role of marriage in the Christian community, the suitability of divorce and remarriage, and whether celibacy is a positive ideal for the Christian. Constructing coherent theological doctrines based on Paul's teaching proves more elusive than one might expect, after a surface level reading of the passage. Conceptual barriers for the modern interpreter are many and varied, including the vast linguistic distance between Koine Greek and modern English, the highly occasional nature of the document itself, and the range of historical uncertainties involved in reconstructing the situation

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times when there was competition between them, but in the age to come love will be perfected and competition will be no more; it will be an age of absolute abundance where every tear shall be wiped away.

of the original audience in Corinth. These surmounting challenges can easily lead to two common avoidances of the task – either give only a surface level reading that ignores the peculiarities of the text or give up entirely and turn to other sources such as tradition or culture for instruction. No matter the difficulty of rendering an adequate interpretation for 1 Corinthians 7, it is vital to rescue a biblical understanding of the doctrine of marriage and thus this passage must feature at the center of such a theological rendering.

Accordingly, this study will seek to provide a comprehensive rendering of 1 Corinthians 7 in order to provide the exegetical and conceptual foundations for further theological development of the Christian doctrine of marriage. It will be argued that Paul's sexual ethics were founded on a two-fold theological formulation of equality and liberation. As all persons are made in the image of God, Paul is keen on reminding his reader that the marriage union is really a holy re-union as two are made one, but this does not erase the gendered nature of either partner.<sup>473</sup> Men do not cease to be men nor women to be women, but each fills a divinely created role and through total submission of each to the other produces a sanctified relationship. Further, the equal but gendered union of male and female in marriage is sexually liberating because it offers a divinely sanctioned outlet for sexual energy. This liberation, however, must be tempered by fidelity for one's spouse produced by the same kind of engrossing love that a Christian has for Christ.<sup>474</sup> Thus, the ultimate theological role for marriage is that it provides a holistic relationship

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<sup>473</sup> Indeed, the Kroegers identify the dissolution of gender roles as one of the principle underlying concerns of the overall letter. Richard Clark Kroeger, and Catherine Clark Kroeger, "Sexual Identity in Corinth: Paul Faces a Crisis." *Reformed Journal* 28, no. 12 (December 1, 1978): 11-15.

<sup>474</sup> While some may attempt to use a formulation like this to deny the Trinitarian nature of God, it would be in contradiction to the larger theology of Paul and is thus not an acceptable implication. Instead, it would be more appropriate to state that loving one's spouse is a form of loving God, as all are made in the image of God, and Jesus as the only begotten Son of God serves as an intermediary between the inscrutable YHWH and the mortal human.

where sexuality can be fulfilled while the unique bonding of husband and wife provides a sacred opportunity to experience and express the love of God for humanity.

In order to provide a comprehensive reading of 1 Corinthians 7, the historical, theoretical, and theological background of the letter in general and the passage in particular will be reconstructed in order to demonstrate the essential conceptual and rhetorical intentionality of the passage. Two primary conceptual contexts provide the rhetorical thrust of the argumentation: the philosophical Stoic-Cynic debate concerning the allowability of marriage and a Hellenistic-Jewish sapiential tradition which appears to have challenged Paul's legitimacy in Corinth. Having explicated these two conceptual conditioners, a comprehensive rendering of Paul's exhortation will be established in regard both to instruction to individuals in various social situations as well as to the broader role of sexuality in the Christian community. It will be claimed that Paul's ethic of sexuality in 1 Corinthians 7 was highly contextualized to the historical situation Paul faced while remaining founded on eternal principles that can still be actualized in today's radically different cultural situation.

### *Historical Background of Roman Corinth*<sup>475</sup>

The city of Corinth of Paul's time was a relatively new metropolis that housed a hybrid fusion of Greek culture filtered through Roman reconstruction and Imperial pluralism. The ancient Greek city of Corinth had been destroyed two centuries prior in 146 BC at the hands of the Romans. Yet the strategically important location of the twin ports of Lechaëum and Cenchreæ, resulted in the reconstruction of the city by decree of Julius Caesar in 44 BC and this

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<sup>475</sup> This historical reconstruction, while evidenced in a variety of congruent sources, follows David Horrell and Edward Adams, "The Scholarly Quest for Paul's Church at Corinth: A Critical Survey," in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 2-13.

was the beginning of the history of the city that Paul would visit and regularly inhabit. The city itself was a major thoroughfare for goods traveling between the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean and was also the site of the then ancient Isthmian Games which were second only to the Olympic Games.<sup>476</sup> It is likely that the Games would have proven an ideal opportunity for Paul to share his faith with travelers and launch new communities throughout the region. The large number of travelers would have also given Paul the opportunity to advance his trade –tent-making and leatherworking.

The religious situation of Corinth would have been both an advantage and a challenge for Paul and his co-workers. While general syncretistic tolerance went a long way toward ensuring the Christians unhindered gathering and proclamation rights, the broad variety of religious philosophies, cults, and movements would have meant that Christians had to compete for the loyalty of their flock. The Temple to Aphrodite upon the acro-Corinth was a domineering reminder of the sway of polytheistic Greco-Roman paganism in the city and the sexual ethos it projected of domination and objectification. Taken together, the challenges for Paul in Corinth were not the same external persecutions as he had faced elsewhere; here his message would have to be heard over the cacophony of competing religious options available to the Corinthian residents.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Horrell and Adams, “Scholarly Quest”, 5.

<sup>477</sup> “The Corinthian Christians would have been confronted on a daily basis by these imposing symbolic reminders of the religiopolitical world out of which they had been called.” Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 4.

*Reconstruction of the Pauline Church at Corinth*

The generally positive social and political environment for the advancement of the gospel in Corinth was hindered not by external persecutions, as with the Macedonian churches, but rather by internal strife. The opening chapter of First Corinthians demonstrates this point amply in Paul's frustration over the divisions among believers relating to different personalities in the church, his own included.<sup>478</sup> A great deal of modern critical scholarship has been devoted to the topic of rooting out the precise nature of this conflict. Traditionally, it was often concluded that the opposition was from outsiders or unbelievers in the community, not from fellow Christians. Many scholars trace the first major and lasting challenge to this traditional interpretive framework to the work of F.C. Baur in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>479</sup> Baur's basic thesis was that the dominate situation in the Corinthian church that occasioned Paul's writing was a developing schism between followers of Paul and Peter reminiscent of the influence of Judaizers that Paul faced in Galatia.<sup>480</sup> Others, following Munck, have challenged the existence of specific schisms at all<sup>481</sup>, while even others see four groups in Corinth rather than two.<sup>482</sup>

Yet another direction was taken by Schmithals, following Bultmann, who championed the case for Gnostic or proto-Gnostic influences invading the community at Corinth. Accordingly, this interpretive framework sees the whole of 1 Corinthians as a response to the gradual emersion

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<sup>478</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:12-31.

<sup>479</sup> David G. Horrell and Edward Adams, *Christianity at Corinth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 13-4.

<sup>480</sup> F. C. Baur, "The Two Epistles to the Corinthians," in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 53. Also, Michael Goulder, "Sophia in 1 Corinthians," in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 175-6.

<sup>481</sup> Johannes Munck, "The Church without Factions," in *Christianity at Corinth*, 63.

<sup>482</sup> C. K. Barrett, "Christianity at Corinth," in *Christianity at Corinth*, 83-4.

of a Gnostic thesis in the community which concluded a sharp division between Jesus the man and Christ the spirit.<sup>483</sup> The presence of this basic Gnostic thesis has been generally challenged by recent scholarship but has also had notable modifications. Richard Horsley detects a specifically Jewish form of Greek wisdom that he characterizes as prevalent in the Diaspora community which embodied partially the concepts earlier associated with Gnosticism, particularly the use of *gnosis*.<sup>484</sup> Goulder continues this trend while also rejuvenating Baur's thesis by concluding that there were, in fact, two factions at Corinth which were between Paul and a group of Jewish wisdom teachers that preached a divinely based wisdom in accord with the Torah in the name of Peter.<sup>485</sup> Thus, according to this interpretive trend, the questioned slogan of 1 Corinthians 7:1b relates to an ethical purity based on a Hellenistic Jewish wisdom movement that had become popular in the church.<sup>486</sup> Similarly, Thiselton has argued for the role of the "Christ" faction as a group of "hyper-spiritual enthusiasts who see no need for any human leader."<sup>487</sup> This group, according to Thiselton and his supporters, taught an ascetic, ecstatic, mystic form of Christianity that was characterized by its teaching that the *eschaton* had already arrived.<sup>488</sup> As a result, social obligations were entirely denounced as cast-offs from the old order,

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<sup>483</sup> Walter Schmithals, "The Corinthian Christology," in *Christianity at Corinth*, 75.

<sup>484</sup> Richard Horsley, "Gnosis in Corinth: 1 Cor 8.1-6," in *Christianity at Corinth*, 120-2.

<sup>485</sup> Goulder, "*Sophia*," 179.

<sup>486</sup> Poirier and Frankovic further modify this thesis by asserting that the issue at stake was Paul's own Pharisaic understanding of Levitical laws which stated that sexual fluids rendered a person unclean. It is thus an overreaction to this teaching which the community was responding and which Paul had to carefully distinguish in order to preserve the unity of the congregation. John C. Poirier, and Joseph Frankovic. "Celibacy and Charism in 1 Cor 7:5-7." *Harvard Theological Review* 89, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 1-18.

<sup>487</sup> Anthony Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," in *Christianity at Corinth*, 109.

<sup>488</sup> David E. Garland, "The Christian's Posture toward Marriage and Celibacy: 1 Corinthians 7." *Review & Expositor* 80, no. 3 (June 1, 1983): 352-6.

which included marriage and sexuality more generally.<sup>489</sup> While the precise nature of these divisions remains disputed, what seems clear is that there was a growing trend in the community toward asceticism which Paul sought to correct.

Distinct, though related, is the topic of the social standing and demographic makeup of the Pauline church at Corinth. Historical studies of first-century Corinth indicate an opportunistic market for potential economic and social advancement coupled with a vast amount of war veterans and slave labor force. Amid this metropolitan tide of potential converts, it remains unclear, however speculated upon, precisely which segments of the populace would have been attracted to the Christian message in Corinth. Historically it was generally concluded that the Pauline church was primarily made up of the poor and dispossessed. Yet this idyllic vision of the early church as a haven for the lower-class was more likely a hybrid blending of classes that was, indeed, a novelty in the highly stratified Roman culture at large. Theissen<sup>490</sup> and supporters such as Chow<sup>491</sup> and Barclay<sup>492</sup> have demonstrated a host of closely related theories that have been largely accepted among the scholarly community as sufficient to establish the existence of at least a visible minority of upper-class congregants.

If there were, in fact, well-to-do members of the Corinthian church community, as seems likely, then the complexity of the situation faced by Paul was even greater. It seems clear from

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<sup>489</sup> Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 114-5. See also, Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Celibate Pneumatics and Social Power: On the Motivations for Sexual Asceticism in Corinth." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 48, no. 3-4 (January 1, 1994): 105-126.

<sup>490</sup> Theissen, Gerd. "Social Stratification in the Corinthian Community," in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 98-105.

<sup>491</sup> John K. Chow, "The Rich Patron," in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 197-206.

<sup>492</sup> John M.G. Barclay, "Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity," in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 183-196.



Paul's instructions concerning the Eucharist meal in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 that there were tensions developing between the working and leisure classes that had begun seeping into the conducting of worship. The growing divisions in the community and the apparent presence of false teaching which had perverted Paul's previous instructions were quite possibly further aggravated by the social tensions produced by an economically diverse congregation. In order for Paul to repair the situation, he would thus have to demonstrate a reason for maintaining the unity of the community despite these various challenges, and to do so he would have to appeal to the Corinthians on a number of levels while yet maintaining a coherent theological foundation. To this end, Paul marshaled his rhetorical skill and delivered a message that was both grounded in Hellenistic philosophy and Jewish theology, yet wholly Christian.

### *Hellenistic Philosophical Background*

Among the more recent trends in the scholarly reconstruction of the background of First Corinthians, there has been a preference toward the Hellenistic aspects of both the context and content of Paul's message. In particular, 1 Corinthians 7 has served as the basis for Will Deming's exemplary study of the Stoic-Cynic elements in the passage.<sup>493</sup> Marshaling an impressive array of historical and textual evidence in support of the Hellenistic philosophical background of 1 Corinthians 7 as essential to understanding the meaning of the text itself, Deming's thesis hinges on the ultimate interpretation of Paul in regard to sexual ethics and asceticism. Against the historic majority, following the Encratite<sup>494</sup> advocacy for sexual

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<sup>493</sup> This thesis was first developed by Deming as his dissertation at Chicago Divinity in 1991 and has been redacted into a second expanded edition which answers some of the scholarly objections to the original thesis. Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>494</sup> For a full discussion of the development of clerical celibacy which highlights the role of the heterodox Encratist movement see Charles A. Frazee, "The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church." Church

asceticism especially among the clergy, Deming argues that Paul was a supporter of the practical and spiritual advantages of sexual celibacy but was not a sexual ascetic.<sup>495</sup> The principle distinction between the two closely related positions is that for Paul, celibacy properly understood is a gift that frees the Christian from the burdens of sexual living whereas asceticism denigrates sexuality as being inherently deficient or sinful, as was likely being preached by the originators of the phrase quoted in 7:1b.<sup>496</sup>

To demonstrate this keen distinction, Deming advocates that the proper context of Paul's discussion of the potential merits of celibacy should be understood in relation to the ancient, even at that time, debate among Stoics and Cynics concerning the values of marriage for the philosopher.<sup>497</sup> Beginning as early as the fifth century B.C., two basic positions began taking form which would come to typify the Stoic and Cynic positions. On the question of whether a philosopher (*stoa* or *sophos*) should marry, the Stoics stated that marriage was a requirement for the continuation of the city-state (*polis*). It was thus the responsibility of the wise among a society to raise new citizens, and the best place for this was in marriage. By the time of Paul, this position would have been widened to define citizenship as being of the world (*kosmos*) rather than a single city-state, but the same basic principle applied: marriage was the most suitable place to raise the next generation. On the other side, the Cynics concluded that marriage was a

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History 57, (January 1, 1988): 108-126. Also, Bill J. Leonard, "Celibacy as a Christian Lifestyle in the History of the Church." *Review & Expositor* 74, no. 1 (December 1, 1977): 21-32.

<sup>495</sup> Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 207-219.

<sup>496</sup> Cf. Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Celibate Pneumatics and Social Power: On the Motivations for Sexual Asceticism in Corinth." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 48, no. 3-4 (January 1, 1994): 105-126.

<sup>497</sup> For a comprehensive evaluation of the evolution of the Stoic-Cynic marriage debate, see Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 47-104. The present reconstruction follows Deming.

distraction from the pursuit of wisdom and therefore should be abstained from by the philosopher.

Certain considerations closely connect these two divergent perspectives and the congruence between them is highly informative for understanding Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 7. Both the Stoics and Cynics generally perceived sex as a natural aspect of human existence but primarily to be pursued only insofar as it produces the intended goal of offspring (new citizens). This reflected the larger Greco-Roman ideal, highly influenced by Athenian strands of social philosophy, that wives were for having children, prostitutes (slave and free) were for sexual pleasures; the two were keenly differentiated.<sup>498</sup> Since sexual pleasure was generally dismissed by both Stoic and Cynic alike, the resultant view of sexuality linked it invariably to the act of child-rearing.<sup>499</sup> Thus, the question of marriage properly understood focused primarily on whether a philosopher should engage in building a family, not whether he (exclusively male) should enjoy sexual expression, which it agreed upon in both systems that he should not.

This background is highly informative in regard to the original intentionality of Paul and the basis of the question posed to him regarding whether or not, literally, "man should touch woman,"<sup>500</sup> euphemistically, to engage in sexual relations.<sup>501</sup> While the question posed to Paul certainly has further ranging implications than the comparatively narrow focus of the historic Stoic-Cynic debate on marriage, the form of Paul's response gives an indication that, at the very

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<sup>498</sup> O. Larry Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles* SBL Dissertation Series 80 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 53-60; John T. Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 3-14.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid, 60-62.

<sup>500</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:1b.

<sup>501</sup> Gordon D. Fee, "1 Corinthians 7:1 in the NIV." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, no. 4 (December 1, 1980): 308.

least, the Corinthian community was conversant with the traditional positions and formulations.<sup>502</sup> Hints of a Stoic influence in the community might be detected in the earlier contrast of the wisdom of God and of the world in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 wherein Paul refers to the natural man (2:14) as not accepting the Spirit which appears to him as folly. More directly, the formula that Paul quotes at the opening of 1 Corinthians 7 is identified conclusively by Deming as a Cynic position: the wise, here taken to be the ideal Christian, should abstain from sexuality.<sup>503</sup> While agreeing in part with this claim, on practical rather than theological grounds, Paul modifies the Cynic position such that celibacy's advantage (not bearing the weight of familial obligations) is not for the pursuit of wisdom, but rather because celibacy is a divine gift (*charism*) reserved for those to whom it is given which allows undivided attention (*aperisasto*) to be given to spiritual matters. This is closest in logic to Epictetus' mediating Stoic position which included a role for the ideal philosopher, who he termed the Cynic unsurprisingly, that would seek the purest life of philosophy (which he himself pursued) whilst most would still be bound by the teaching that marriage was necessary for the majority. Although this philosophical tradition serves as a vital context for Paul's teaching, even so, the theological basis of Paul's claims clearly extends him beyond the realm of the Stoic-Cynic debate.<sup>504</sup> Thus, to continue, we must next look at the Jewish theological background of the text and Paul's instructions therein.

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<sup>502</sup> For an extensive survey of the textual similarities between 1 Corinthians 7 and the Stoic-Cynic debate on marriage see Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 105-206. In addition to Deming, cf. David L. Balch, "1 Cor 7:32-35 and Stoic Debates about Marriage, Anxiety, and Distraction," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 3 (September 1, 1983): 429-439; Terence Paige, "Stoicism, eleutheria, and Community at Corinth," in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 208-218.

<sup>503</sup> For a succinct summary of Deming's position in this regard see Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 120.

<sup>504</sup> Dunn puts it clearly, "He draws on the best of Stoic tradition insofar as it accords with traditional Jewish wisdom." James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1998), 695.

### *Jewish Theological Background*

While the Hellenistic philosophical background of 1 Corinthians 7 requires extra-biblical evidence to substantiate as discussed above, Paul's Jewish background appears considerably more self-evident at first glance. It is generally agreed upon that Paul was deeply engrossed in Judaism and considered his own Christian identity primarily as an extension of his Jewish faith. What is less certain, however, is the relationship of the Corinthian church to Judaism.<sup>505</sup> As indicated above, since the innovation of F.C. Baur's thesis concerning the perceived strife between the Pauline and Petrine variations of Christianity, scholarship has disputed the precise nature of the Jewish elements in the Corinthian community.<sup>506</sup> More recently, as indicated above, Horsley has argued for a distinctively Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom tradition in Corinth that focused on theological knowledge (*gnosis*) which served as the conceptual basis for the divisions caused by the 'strong' and 'wise' mentioned variously throughout 1 Corinthians.<sup>507</sup> Along similar lines, Goulder has rejuvenated Baur's thesis while further characterizing the Petrine Christians as representative of a distinct Hellenistic Jewish sapiential tradition which taught that the Torah was the perfect guide to wisdom instruction.<sup>508</sup> But where did this teaching come from?

Although the danger of speculation increases dramatically the more specifically the situation is reconstructed, it can be generally surmised that there was an increasing tendency in

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<sup>505</sup> Moynihan argues effectively for a sizable Jewish community in Corinth in Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, "Jewish Laws on Illicit Marriage, the Defilement of Offspring, and the Holiness of the Temple: A New Halakic Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:14." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121, no. 4 (December 1, 2002): 712, n.6.

<sup>506</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, "The Two Epistles to the Corinthians (1845; ET 1873)," in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 51-59. For a critical review of subsequent studies, cf. Johannes Munck, "The Church without Factions: Studies in 1 Corinthians 1-4 (1952; ET 1959)" in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 61-70.

<sup>507</sup> Horsley, "Gnosis in Corinth," 120-121.

<sup>508</sup> Goulder, "Σοφία in 1 Corinthians," 179.

the Corinthian community to accept a modified legalistic asceticism based on Hellenized Judaic wisdom traditions. Many of the questions answered by 1 Corinthians can be understood in relation to the influence of this conceptual trend from issues of sexual immorality to food sacrificed to idols. Considering the highly reflective nature of Hellenistic Judaism, it is entirely possible if not likely that the Greco-Roman philosophical connections enumerated above were also closely connected with the same group: the strong/wise. If, in fact, this movement was nominally connected with Peter, regardless of whether the disciple had any real relationship to the group, then it is entirely possible that Paul was facing a similar Judaizer position as he had faced in Galatia, which sought to rejuvenate Torah obedience in the congregation. Particularly if the letter to the Galatians is given an earlier dating as first among Paul's canonical writings (as a significant scholarly minority defend)<sup>509</sup>, then it is entirely possible that by the writing of 1 Corinthians elements of this movement had spread to Corinth. Yet, just as Paul himself took many approaches in order to present the gospel in understandable terms for a variety of audiences, so too, would the Judaizer influence have had to evolve in order to maintain itself as persuasive to the Corinthians. In this regard, elements of Greco-Roman philosophy were integrated in order to be convincing to the Corinthians, particularly the educated and elite of the community. While this reconstruction remains, admittedly, speculative, it is nevertheless a cohesive approach to the topic of the background of 1 Corinthians.

One point that should not be overlooked in regard to Paul's relationship to his Jewish roots in 1 Corinthians 7 regards a point upon which he is entirely silent. Just as the ancient Stoics

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<sup>509</sup> Although this dating has fallen out of scholarly preference in recent years as the acceptance of the North Galatian theory has grown in popularity, I continue to hold that it makes the best sense of the data, particularly in relation to Acts. Cf. William B. Decker, "The Early Dating of Galatians." *Restoration Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (January 1, 1958): 132-138.

had viewed the primary purpose of marriage to be the successful creation of a new generation, so too did the Jews consider marriage to be a duty to produce children.<sup>510</sup> Even more than the Stoic ideal of the city-state, Judaism taught that marriage and the production of children was the very first commandment.<sup>511</sup> Yet despite the prevalence in both systems of thought for the central role of producing children as the proper responsibility of marriage, the topic is *never* broached by Paul anywhere in his writings, not even in 1 Corinthians 7.<sup>512</sup> While silence certainly does not require contradiction, as Paul would almost certainly agree that marriage was a divine mandate and closely connected with bearing children, the complete lack of such a typical feature of discussions of the viability of marriage must not be overlooked. Instead, Paul's insistence in the equal sharing and giving involved between spouses demonstrates an existential framework that goes well beyond the simple need to procreate and indicates toward a deeper, richer reality of mutuality, fidelity, and fulfillment, and even enjoyment of the sexual act regardless of fertility.

Another important feature of the Jewish background of 1 Corinthians 7 concerns the apparent eschatological expectation that Paul presupposed behind his instructions concerning marriage and sexuality in the Christian community. The clearest expression of this eschatological tendency is found in the enigmatic statement "time is fleeting" in 7:29. This phrase is often translated the 'present distress', or similar phraseology, which would tend to suggest that Paul is referring to some sort of cataclysmic circumstance that the community was facing, or perhaps simply a broader expectation of the nearness of Christ's return.<sup>513</sup> The exhortation which follows

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<sup>510</sup> Apart from a few dissenters, generally "the rabbis were unanimous in arguing that procreation was in fact an obligation demanded of everyone. Indeed, they regarded it as a divine command." Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles*, 21.

<sup>511</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *Hermeneia 1 Corinthians*, trans. James Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 114.

<sup>512</sup> The possible exception is the enigmatic reference to childbearing in 1 Tim 2:15, which is disputed.

<sup>513</sup> "In accord with traditional apocalyptic expectations, [Paul] seems to be anticipating that there will be all

indicates that the community should seek to live without attachments (as without a wife, without mourning, without rejoicing, etc.) which is often a feature in Jewish apocalyptic literature. Yet Kuck has argued convincingly that this passage “suggests an eschatological meaning where probably none was intended,” but if this is not an apocalyptic eschatological expectation, then what is it?<sup>514</sup> The English phrase “time is fleeting” more accurately captures Paul’s teaching because it more clearly indicates the larger purpose of the passage: Christians are to live in the expectation of the conclusion and not be disoriented by the present conditions of the world, and this is precisely the potential hazard in becoming married.<sup>515</sup> Thus while Paul utilizes the language of Jewish apocalypticism, he does so in the light of the Christian gospel, to demonstrate that the Christian should not see the present world as the ultimate end of his/her existence.<sup>516</sup> Based on this interpretive framework, Paul’s specific instructions can be properly understood.

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kinds of cosmic havoc and social turmoil as the end draws nearer, and that this will create especially difficult circumstances for women and infants.” Victor P. Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 65.

<sup>514</sup> David W. Kuck, “The Freedom of Being in the World “as if not” (1 Cor 7:29-31).” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28, no. 6 (December 1, 2001): 588-589.

<sup>515</sup> It should be noted that apocalyptic or otherwise, the interpretive conclusion remains largely the same. Furnish takes this section as Paul “advising the Corinthians to remain “aloof” from their earthly circumstances, or at least to remain “indifferent” to them.” Furnish, *Theology of the First Letter*, 66. The difference in interpretation then remains largely in the expectations of Paul and whether contemporary readers will be willing to follow his logic. Arguments based on apocalyptic eschatological expectation are largely unpersuasive to the majority of modern believers, whereas an existential argument based on the generally perceivable reality that time is fleeting is a much stronger line of reasoning that extends beyond its original context.

<sup>516</sup> Indeed, Dawes also recognizes that Paul’s eschatology in this passage has the interpretive function of relativizing the choice between marriage and celibacy because such life choices do not carry ultimate weight, although there are some advantages to the unmarried life and some warnings associated with the married life. Gregory W. Dawes, “But if You Can Gain Your Freedom” (1 Corinthians 7:17-24).” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (October 1, 1990): 696. While Dawes does not draw the conclusions formulated in the present study as such, the function of the passage grows increasingly clear – Christians are not to become attached to the things of the world, including (especially) their own social roles.



### *Sexual Ethics for Married Couples*

Paul's instructions concerning marriage and sexuality in 1 Corinthians 7 has a variety of angles and avenues of approach, as has already been previously demonstrated. In particular, three primary strains of exhortation can be discerned: to the married, to the previously married, and to the unmarried. It would appear from the organization of the chapter that the central issue at stake concerns the congregants that were already married as they are addressed first and foremost. According to the previously deduced reconstruction of the situation behind the writing of the letter, the question that Paul initially addresses with the slogan in 7:1b likely concerned whether married Christians were supposed to remain married since marriage implied sexuality. In response to this difficult and highly charged topic, Paul gives three avenues of approach.

First, the reasoning for marriage itself is given rather simply – because of the tendency toward sexual objectification (*porneia*), God has ordained for men and women to be married. Rather than viewing marriage as a secondary measure to be taken only by those incapable of sexual restraint, it is considerably more likely that Paul understands marriage as a natural aspect of creation, as it provides a divinely ordained outlet for sexual activity (and procreation thereby). Thus, the larger question at stake behind this, is whether or not sexuality is allowable for the Christian convert, and to this Paul resolutely answered 'yes'. What is remarkable about Paul's instruction here is that he not only addresses men but also women, unlike the vast majority of his Cynic, Stoic, and Jewish predecessors.<sup>517</sup> Apart from the radically egalitarian underpinnings of this approach which will be highlighted further below, the content of Paul's exhortation makes

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<sup>517</sup> Margaret MacDonald has argued that this reversal of ancient expectations signaled the fact that it was primarily women that were advancing the ascetic teachings in the community and Paul sought to save face by addressing them alongside men, but this thesis seems highly speculative and makes Paul out to be rather sneaky in his approach which I find to be quite unbecoming of his larger character in the letter and at large. Cf. Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Women Holy in Body and Spirit: The Social Setting of 1 Corinthians 7," in *Christianity at Corinth*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 161-172.

clear that sexuality is expected within marriage, as men and women equally were obliged to willingly (even cheerfully) give themselves sexually to their spouses. Nowhere does Paul indicate that sexuality itself is to be avoided, as one would expect if Paul were a sexual ascetic as many have claimed. Given the force of the present rendering of *porneia* as sexual objectification (the act of sex as one partner objectifying the other, as with prostitution or rape, is likely how the Corinthians would have generally understood the term)<sup>518</sup> then the sense of total mutuality, sexuality included, between husband and wife is made clear. Proper sexuality, according to Paul, is to be a co-equal and mutual activity wherein the gratification of both partners, not just the husband, remains a standing requirement.

Second, Paul recognized the positive nature of the tendency toward celibacy, even in the confines of marriage, but only insofar as it was mutually agreed upon by both spouses for a limited duration. There is at least a partial agreement here with the opening phrase that it is good not to engage, euphemistically, in sexuality. It is quite likely, as previously argued, that this reflects an ascetic teaching wherein sexuality itself was determined to be sinful or otherwise detestable. From Paul's response, it seems likely that the result of this teaching was the splitting, theoretical or actual, of married couples as an attempt to avoid sexuality. At his most urgent throughout the passage, Paul makes clear that divorce was prohibited by divine command (of the Master) and thus married Christians were to remain such and continue to engage in the fullest relational aspects of the institution including sexual activity. At the same time, Paul intimately understood the motivations for seeking sexual abstinence in order to devote time and energy to spiritual activities, and thus he leaves open a carefully construed caveat that would allow for

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<sup>518</sup> As noted previously, Ruden, a classics scholar, makes a strong case for this sense of the word in its original Roman cultural use as the basis for Paul's usage here, Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (New York: Image, 2010), 18.

married couples to abstain from sexuality for a limited time by mutual agreement and only for the purposes of pursuing spiritual disciplines.

Third, Paul also addressed the tricky question of whether a Christian was obligated to stay with a non-Christian spouse. Paul's answer here continues to be remarkable in its clarity and insight, as he gives a practical solution to the clear constraints established by the prohibition against divorce. The Christian's relation to a non-Christian spouse was to be largely (if not solely) determined by the attitude of the non-Christian partner. If s/he was willing to make a home with the Christian and continue their marriage, then so be it, the Christian was bound to remain in the marriage.<sup>519</sup> If, however, the non-Christian spouse was not willing and wanted to separate, then so be it, the Christian was no longer obligated.<sup>520</sup> For such cases, Paul would give further instruction for the previously married, as analyzed below.

In sum, Paul's exhortation concerning the viability of marriage for those already married is clear, with few exceptions: the married Christian was to remain married and continue the obligations expected herein. Further, marriage itself was to be understood in a radically mutual light wherein each partner has authority over the body of the other (as opposed to the prevailing notion that men had complete authority over women but were not equally obligated to their wives). Although the highly contextual and situational nature of this teaching must not be overlooked, it does provide a clear basis for understanding marriage as an equal enterprise which

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<sup>519</sup> Murphy-O'Connor argues that Paul did not counsel divorce as acceptable here, as such, but rather modified the teaching from Jesus so that separation, but not divorce, was allowed. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor 7:10-11." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100, no. 4 (December 1, 1981): 605.

<sup>520</sup> "Although the Christian may not break up the marriage, it is possible that the unbeliever may want to separate, since, as we have said, he or she does not accept Christ's authority or His teaching on marriage." Brian Byron, "1 Cor 7:10-15: A Basis for Future Catholic Discipline on Marriage and Divorce?." *Theological Studies* 34, no. 3 (September 1, 1973): 430.

served a decidedly positive role in the Christian community: sexual gratification without associated objectification (as was the general cultural expectation of his day).

### *Sexual Ethics for the Previously Married*

The next major category of exhortation in this passage concerns whether or not those that had been previously married should be re-married. It is likely that the term not married (*agamois*) in this context refers to the divorced as it is coupled with the widows (*cherais*). Paul will later address the status of the entirely unmarried (*parthenōn*) and conceptually it makes more sense for the divorced to be addressed alongside the widow. Accordingly, Paul demonstrates the central overarching concept of the larger passage – remain as you are. Thus, the general rule for those that had been previously married when they entered the Christian community is that it is better for them to remain unmarried although Paul is not explicit as to his reasoning for this claim. It is perhaps likely, although subterranean in this passage, that Paul had a monogamous basis for making this claim even though strictly speaking a spouse was only bound to the marriage covenant as long as the other spouse was alive. Remaining unmarried was thus to be preferred for those that had been married before, although Paul was equally clear that it was not a sin to remarry and it was better to do so than to burn with passion.

What is remarkable about this passage is not that Paul allows remarriage, but rather that he allows for congregants to remain *un*married. Jewish expectations of the period, following the ancient Levirate customs, generally held that widows were to remarry within the family.<sup>521</sup> More broadly, women were primarily identified socially and religiously with their significant male, either a father or husband (or brother), and thus to lose a husband meant to lose social identity.

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<sup>521</sup> Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles*, 24-26.

While widows were protected in Jewish tradition, they were protected because they were understood as being vulnerable and without social status, much like the orphans that they are often grouped together with. While the Greco-Roman perceptions of remarriage were more various and were fluctuating in the first century, the reality was that for most women in the Empire their status and livelihood entirely depended on their association with their husband.<sup>522</sup> This association was contingent on the whim of the husband as well, as divorce was rampant in the first-century Roman Empire to the point of being declared an epidemic by Emperor Augustus, and there were few opportunities for women in general, but especially so for those without a husband. For Paul to declare that it was actually better for a divorced or widowed woman to remain unmarried would have been a radical teaching in support of the personhood of women irrespective of their relationship to men.

### *Sexual Ethics for the Unmarried*

The third broad category of individual which Paul instructed concerning in 1 Corinthians 7 was the virgin (*parthenōn*), the previously unmarried. While uncertainty remains concerning who exactly Paul was addressing with this section, whether the father of a young virginal daughter considering engagement or to young engaged couples, the message remains intact regardless.<sup>523</sup> As has been thoroughly demonstrated, Paul did not view sexuality in general as a sin and marriage thus features as the proper context for the expression of authentic divinely ordered sexuality (as opposed to objectifying sexuality, *porneia*). But at the same time, Paul relativized the choice itself by indicating throughout this section that the outward appearances of

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<sup>522</sup> Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women*, 12-14.

<sup>523</sup> Cf. Peters, "Spiritual Marriage", 12-18.

life (circumcision, slavery, etc.) were not what ultimately counted, rather it was the internal condition that was determinative.<sup>524</sup> Thus Paul was clear that it is not sinful for these unmarried Christians to be wed so long as they understood the dangers of being married, namely an obsession with worldly status.

It is important to recognize, however, that this section is not explicitly addressing the question of pre-marital sex as it is (too) often utilized in contemporary popular interpretation. Paul is clear throughout that on this topic there was no direct commandment from Jesus, but as far as Paul considered himself to be an authority, he felt that marriage was an acceptable livelihood so long as it didn't interfere with spiritual concerns. While Paul doesn't address pre-marital (or extra-marital<sup>525</sup>, for that matter) sex explicitly, it can be generally inferred from the larger passage that sexuality outside of marriage exhibits a clear tendency toward sexual objectification rather than mutuality, consumption instead of communion. While the sexual drive presses humanity toward *porneia*, marriage serves as a corrective whereby the true divine intention for sexuality may be lived out and experienced in sanctified union. However, for those that do not experience the sexual drive, rather than a deficiency, Paul saw the celibate option as a special gift from God.

### *The Proper Role of Christian Celibacy*

If marriage it thus to be preferred, as seems clear, for the majority of Christians, then what should the proper role of celibacy be in the Christian community? Although a surface level

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<sup>524</sup> Furnish puts it clearly: "Believers are conditioned but not claimed by their particular circumstances. They gain their identity not from who or where they happen to be within society but from who they are in their belonging to Christ. Those who are claimed by the Lord are in principle free from the claims of the world." Victor P. Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62.

<sup>525</sup> Although Fee reads *porneia* as adultery, this rendering appears too narrow. Rather, adultery was included in the larger sense of the term, but it was not limited to this. Fee, "1 Cor 7:1," 312.

reading of this passage could easily leave the impression that Paul valued celibacy above marriage, this would be a perversion of his intentions behind the text. As has been previously demonstrated, it is likely that a group in the congregation was teaching a sort of asceticism through a blend of Hellenistic philosophy and Jewish sapiential tradition. The result of this teaching was a broad sense of division in the community particularly centering on the differentiation between the ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ members of the community. In this respect, the strong were likely teaching that sexuality was sinful or otherwise to be shunned and therefore marriage, which in certain respects amounts to sanctioned sexuality, should be avoided (or even terminated for those already married).

If this reconstruction is substantively accurate, then Paul would have been faced with a difficult situation indeed. It is entirely possible that Paul’s own celibate nature was being used by the ‘strong’ to assert their sexual asceticism: essentially, if it was good enough for Paul... As a result, Paul had to approach the topic very carefully and thereby demonstrate his own motivations for remaining celibate while also gently correcting this ascetic position in order to demonstrate the validity of marriage. To this end, Paul’s citation of the ascetic slogan in 7:1b can be understood as both an agreement with and modification of the Corinthian use of the phrase. In agreement, Paul indicated that being unmarried was more advantageous for the Christian because marriage could potentially divide a believer’s attention so that they concern themselves primarily with this-worldly affairs. However, it is important to realize that this advantage was not inherently spiritual in nature, as Paul is often taken as intending, such that just being celibate makes one a better Christian by virtue of not engaging in sexual activities. It should be remembered that the overall motivation of First Corinthians was to reunify the church in light of potential divisions. If, in fact, the ‘strong’ were lording their ascetic disciplines over the rest of

the community, as seems likely, then it would be highly hypocritical for Paul to conclude that celibacy as a lifestyle was spiritually superior to marriage, which would substantiate the claims of the ‘strong’. Indeed, nowhere in the passage does Paul indicate that celibacy is preferable because it allows a person to be untainted by sexuality. Rather, he corrected the implicit suggestion in the ascetic position that sexuality is sinful or wrong, as implied by the quote of 7:1b, to claim instead that celibacy has certain *potential* advantages since there are less social responsibilities attached to it as a lifestyle than to married life.<sup>526</sup> In essence, it is not the lack of sex which makes the celibate a better Christian, but rather that s/he is freed from the social obligations of sexual relationship which allows for a life solely devoted to spiritual purpose.

### *Sexual Equality and Liberation in the Christian Community*

What, then, are the guiding theological principles behind Paul’s instructions concerning marriage? While necessarily simplifying of this complex and nuanced passage, this study proposes a two-fold theological foundation of equality and liberation that accounts for the particularity of Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 7. First, as has recurrently been argued in the present study, Paul’s distinctive, among his cultural contemporaries, indication that husbands and wives have authority over one another presents a radically egalitarian basis for marriage. Rather than a husband having total control over his wife, the suggestion that husbands should cede authority of their own body to their wives was largely unprecedented for Paul’s day. Yet, we must be careful not to impose twenty-first century ideals onto Paul’s thinking either. Before we make Paul into a communist or modern liberal, it should be recognized that Paul’s thinking is

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<sup>526</sup> Although beyond the purview of this study, it should be noted that mandatory celibacy for ordained clergy in Roman Catholicism is currently a hotly debated topic and the rendering of this passage features prominently among the established positions. While I have, as a Protestant, no stake in this debate, the presently argued interpretation of this passage would undermine the teaching that clergy must be celibate on spiritual grounds.



clearly steeped in Jewish creation theology which deeply recognized the distinctions between male and female. While both are made equally in the image of God, as indicated by Genesis 1:26-27, there are also clear gender distinctions which should be maintained in a marital relationship. Precisely what these gendered roles are, however, is not made explicit. Thus, while the equality espoused by Paul should not be taken to the extreme of completely eroding gender distinctions, it remains up to the modern interpreter to discern precisely what these distinctions are as Paul gives us no specific direction. In this regard, gender distinctions must be evaluated while maintaining the basic assertion that husbands and wives should give equally of themselves to the other in love and fidelity.

Second, Paul's sexual ethics should be understood as dramatically liberating in comparison to the ethical systems of his day. Sexuality for the Jews was a divine mandate emanating from the command to be fruitful and multiply, and marriage was accordingly the principle institution for achieving this goal, but it too easily tended to conceive of women in terms of property, as noted above in the feminist interpretation of the resurrection controversy. For the Stoics, marriage was the venue in which the next generation would be produced and the health of the city-state would be assured and should be pursued (by men) in order to free them of the burdens of daily living so they could meditate on truth all the more, but enjoyment of sexual activity is entirely missing, much less any indication that a woman was an active subject, rather than just an object, of the sexual intercourse. While not disregarding the potential production of children as a principle element of sexuality, Paul gives a positive evaluation of sex in his exhortation that spouses should give themselves cheerfully (*eunoain*, lit: (with a) good mind) to each other sexually. This positive analysis of sexuality should not be overlooked when evaluating Paul's sexual ethics as it goes beyond the typical (for his day) understanding of marriage as

primarily (if not solely) for the production of children and therefore the household. Against the ascetic teachings that sexuality was inherently sinful, Paul taught a liberating view of sex as a positive aspect of human nature, even if a potentially dangerous one, so long as it is contained in the divinely instituted marital covenant. Accordingly, the sexual liberation inferred by Paul must be tempered by covenantal fidelity. While Paul does not go into any detail on this account, the monogamous implication is clear in his teaching that marriage is for life and the widow may remain unwed. Marriage should thereby serve as the proper domain for the exercise of sexuality wherein individuals can completely share themselves with another person without fear of rejection, humiliation, or domination, as God intended. Sexual expression was not, in Paul's understanding, merely another social activity like eating, rather it was intensely personal and had lasting, even indelible, spiritual effects, as he indicates clearly in his condemnation of prostitution which precedes his considerations on marriage. In order to curb the natural tendency toward sexual objectification, something which is maximalized in prostitution by turning a potentially spiritual activity into something crass and commercial, and consummate the divine intentionality for sexual relationship, each man should have his own wife and each woman should have her own husband.<sup>527</sup> In this way, the Christian should see their sexual partner as a *subject* rather than an *object*, and by committing to a monogamous and lifelong relationship this tendency can be reduced if not entirely overcome. Thus, the sexual liberation that Paul offers is not free-love libertinism (as it seems some in the Corinthian community took him as saying as reflected in 1 Corinthians 5-6) but rather an opportunity for individuals to freely express themselves sexually in a loving and committed relationship.

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<sup>527</sup> To be contrasted with Jesus teaching on divorce as a concession as discussed above; Paul does not view marriage or sexuality as a concession to sin, as he is too often taken, but rather, it has been argued herein, that he understood a powerful and affirming potential for sexuality that could only be unlocked in marriage, something that should only be avoided by those that demonstrate spiritual celibacy.

Taken together, these two foundations of equality and liberation provide a basic theological formula with which to understand Paul's sexual ethics and teaching concerning marriage. Clearly disagreeing with the ascetic claim that sexuality was necessarily sinful, Paul taught that marriage was the proper and divinely ordained relationship wherein sexuality should be freely and gladly expressed in co-equal submission. In this way, sexual experiences could be based on love and mutual respect rather than violence, domination, or objectification. Each spouse could, through total submission to the other, experience authentic sexuality that would not, if properly pursued, damage a person's relationship with the divine. Much the opposite, through the loving and unconditional embrace of Christian lovers, Paul envisioned a radical new identity for marriage that would feature prominently in the formation of Christian community.

#### *Putting Pauline Sexual Ethics in Context*

This study has sought to demonstrate a comprehensive literary and historical rendering of 1 Corinthians 7 in order to establish the positive theological basis for Paul's understanding of marriage. It must be remembered when approaching this passage, however, that "throughout this chapter Paul is dealing with particular, not abstract or general, problems and is giving concrete advice to real people, involved in specific problems."<sup>528</sup> Yet it should not be concluded, therefore, that Paul's understanding of sexuality and marriage are of no relevance for the modern believer. Rather, the present study has proposed a number of key conclusions regarding Paul's perception of sexuality and marriage as outlined in 1 Corinthians 7 which remain relevant and valid for contemporary Christianity.

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<sup>528</sup> John C. Cooper, "St Paul's Evaluation of Women and Marriage." *Lutheran Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (November 1, 1964): 297.

First, Paul did not understand sexuality as inherently wrong or sinful but much the opposite, this was the position that he was seeking to redress with this passage. Rather than being himself an ascetic, as has often been claimed, it appears more likely that Paul understood sexuality as a divinely created aspect of human nature, no more or less. Accordingly, sexual expression is best reserved for marriage, as this is the divinely ordained outlet for sexuality. Further, sexuality within marriage is to be understood as co-equal between both partners (however gendered) and liberating since it allows for full sexual gratification (although also requiring of strict vows of fidelity in order to maintain the union).

Second, the problem with sexuality, according to Paul, that required the ordination of marriage was the tendency to objectify the other person in the sexual encounter. Historically, the Greco-Roman cultural expectations concerning sex understood the encounter as domination of the man over the woman (or man over man) wherein the act of penetration demonstrated superiority and dominance. Instead, Christians are called to view sexuality as a co-equal enterprise wherein each partner submits authority over one's own body to the other. This act of mutual submission would ensure the health of the continued sexual relationship while maintaining respect for the divine image inherent to every person.

Third, while Paul, following Jesus, strictly forbade divorce in principle, he was also keenly aware of its presence in the community regardless of this prohibition. The simple fact was that divorce was an increasingly acceptable choice in the Roman Empire and it was therefore almost certain that a significant portion of the converted Gentile community would have been divorced. Thus, Paul allowed for some leeway in this regard, as those seeking to be remarried should not be prevented from doing so (with the implication that it should be to another Christian) although reconciliation should always be forefront, particularly among believers. For

those Christians married to non-believers, Paul was clear that divorce was not an option although some exception existed if the non-Christian spouse sought to leave; in these cases, the Christian could not be expected to prevent such action from being taken.

Finally, celibacy, properly understood according to Paul, is a gift only given to a select few. The advantages of this gift, which should never be taken as a means for division or hierarchy among believers (just as the other spiritual gifts), are principally practical as they allow the Christian to pursue spiritual matters without concern for worldly affairs. It might similarly be argued that being a free citizen would allow for more freedom for religious devotion, but this wouldn't make the free person spiritually superior to the slave. If anything, choosing a life of celibacy only increases the spiritual demands upon the individual since they have no excuse, whereas a married person legitimately engages in the world. Accordingly, the principle instruction in this regard revolves around a warning not to become obsessed by the world, to live in it as if not.

In sum, it must be remembered that Paul was not concerned with establishing a systematic evaluation of marriage, divorce, sexuality, or celibacy when he wrote this text. Rather, he was concerned with maintaining the unity of a church experiencing deep internal schism and in need of specific theological counsel. Yet throughout it all, certain key principles keep rising to the fore: equality, liberty, and dedication to God. Ultimately marriage is best understood, in light of Paul's own teaching later in the letter, according to the central command of love: "And now, abide by these three: faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of these is love."<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:13.

*The New Testament Legacy as the Leaven of Sacramentalism*

This chapter has demonstrated a consistent hermeneutical framework that connects the ethos of the prior Hebrew-Judaic culture and sublimates it in the transforming light of the Christian gospel. The historic and conceptual problems with supersessionism must be recognized in Christian theology to establish the correct relationship between the Christian Church and its Jewish forebears. While the letter of Torah, the cultural markers, may be set aside by Gentile Christianity, its spirit should be ardently maintained as normative. This interpretive framework has been shown to resound throughout the writings of the New Testament with a remarkable solidarity given the complexities of the issue. The most notable and definitional characteristic of a life lived according to Torah, as the Hebrew Scriptures promote, is that every aspect of life is essentially sanctified in the light of covenantal loyalty. This framework serves as the basis of the Christian sacramental theology, which will be explored in the following chapter, whereby all aspects of life, particularly its most important rites of passing, are infused with the spirit of Christ.

While this framework is totalizing, taking into account all aspects of mundane living in a broad sense, marriage still functions in a special, even singular, role due both to its primacy in the Genesis narrative, as discussed above, but also due to its consistent association as being indicative of the divine-human relationship. This concept, discussed in detail in the previous chapter in the ministries of the latter prophets, is taken forward by the writer of Ephesians, Paul or a later disciple, by the association of marriage as a great mystery (*mega musterion*) in 5:32.<sup>530</sup> The love of Christ serves as definitional of Christian marriage: mutual, faithful, and empowering.

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<sup>530</sup> Once again, the historical debate over whether Paul was the actual writer of Ephesians can be set aside, as it is irrelevant whether it was the apostle himself writing or one of his close-disciples, as the teaching remains canonical and therefore authoritative. So too, even with a potential later dating, Ephesians still represents a very early perspective which was highly influential in the historical developments discussed in the next chapter.

“Husbands, love, your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her... that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”<sup>531</sup> This powerful and affirming teaching concerning the theological and symbolic importance of marriage not only contributed to its veneration in the early Christian community, but over the course of time featured prominently in the development of sacramental theology which will be explored in the following chapter.

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<sup>531</sup> Ephesians 5:25-26a, 28b-28. It is also instructive to note that Paul (or his disciple) also cites Genesis in support of his position, invoking the very same text as Jesus did in the divorce controversy.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SACRAMENTALISM AND MARRIAGE IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

*For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife,  
and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.  
Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*<sup>532</sup>

It has been established that marriage was a deeply embedded social institution in the Judaic culture that founded the origins of the Christian community's ethos. While marking a nearly universal social function, marriage also served in the Hebrew-Christian tradition as a spiritual bonding that was taken with the utmost seriousness. The predominant logic of the Israelite tradition tended to reject inter-ethnic mixing (excepting key examples such as Ruth), as noted in the saga of Ezra discussed in chapter two, on the basis that to mix clean and unclean rendered both defiled. Yet the early Christian community, following the lead of Jesus and the logic of Paul, reversed this such that holiness became the communicable quality. This orientation was foundational to the earliest forms of Christianity, which quickly transcended traditional divisions of race and class, spreading, as noted by its Roman antagonists, rather like a plague, striking at all quarters of society. A significant aspect of this early paradigm involved the social dynamics of marriage, as Paul had affirmed that it was not against Christian teaching to be married to an unbelieving spouse, as discussed in the prior chapter, but rather that the holy spouse brings holiness to the relationship.<sup>533</sup> In the period of the early church, the question was raised by theologians what exactly was involved in the marital union that made it sanctified? In seeking to answer this query, early formulations of the sacramental were constructed; following

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<sup>532</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:14, ESV.

<sup>533</sup> There is a significant tension here to be sure, as Paul counsels against a believer knowingly entering into covenants with unbelievers, notable in 2 Corinthians 6:14. However, in situations where a believer is married to an unbeliever, this is not grounds for divorce but rather, as laid out in 1 Corinthians 7 discussed in chapter three, an opportunity for the believer to sanctify the unbelieving spouse through their spiritual conduct.



the Greek concept of *mysterion*, the Latin translation *sacramentum* originally functioned in the Western Church as a sign of commitment, a seal of fidelity that marks the New Covenant of Christ. Just as a seal was placed on a letter, or a tattoo on a soldier, the rites of baptism and Eucharist were specified as particularly central in conferring and maintaining the Christian commitment. While these rites were definitive communal standards, sacramentality was conceived as involving the entire life of a Christian rendered holy by commitment to Christ. Accordingly, all aspects of a Christian's life become sacramental, that is sanctified by the holiness of Christ, yet some rites were recognized as having a special place and privilege, including marriage. Even as marriage is a nearly universal social practice, the early Christians were able to adopt pre-existing social rites from a variety of cultural settings while reframing the practice in the Christian faith.

While little can be maintained as monolithic in the early centuries of the Christian tradition, early sacramental theology came to its fullest formulation in the writings of Aurelius Augustine, bishop of Hippo, who argued in refutation of the schismatic Donatist movement concerning the efficacy and longevity of sacramental rites. On the theoretical basis that it is not the activity of humans, either priest or communicant, that fulfills the sacramental purpose but rather the unique, eternal, perfect work of Christ. The perfection, theological or moral, of a person is not to be expected (or considered possible) and thus it is divine work that guarantees salvation. Rather than the mechanism of salvation, as it will later become defined, the sacramental rite is a reflective symbol, that partakes in the process of salvation on the basis of the ultimate reality to which it indicates but not the originator of it. Accordingly, marriage is sacramental, that is, infused with holiness, insofar as Christ is involved therein, as the rite itself (including the cultural trappings) are simply reflections of the deeper reality, the *mezas*

*mysterion* to which Paul indicated in Ephesians, of the Gospel. Building upon this sacramental logic, Augustine established a watershed synthesis, whereby the category of sacrament serves as the central activity of the Church, leavening this world with the sovereignty of God, whereby the Christian's life is infused with the power of Christ in every stage, including marriage. Even as the present study will primarily adopt an intentionally Augustinian interpretation of sacrament, it is also instructive to reflect upon the parallel developments in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, which maintained their interpretation primarily following from the Greek *mysterion* that allowed for a more mystical approach to the topic that particularly emphasizes the encompassing nature of the resurrected state and in turn did not fall prey to some of the excesses of Scholasticism which the Reformers reacted against.

In addition to the broader discussion concerning sacramentalism and the role of marriage therein, Augustine's teachings concerning the role of lust and desire in marital unions provides a complex and evolving view of sexuality. Early in his life, Augustine was wrought with shame concerning sexuality and thereby was attracted to the blend of ascetic denial and easy alleviation of guilt offered by Manichaeism's dualism. As an adult, Augustine continued to wrestle with sexuality and its place in the Christian life, leading to the dismissal of his long-time concubine in order to pursue ascetic monasticism. This historical background provides an essential element in tracing Augustine's teachings on marriage, as it was in this period, shortly after his return to North Africa following the death of his mother, when he wrote the oft-cited text *De Bono Coniugali* – "The Good of Marriage". This short treatise offered a rather glum view of sexuality and marriage that reflected his ascetic leanings and recent personal experiences. Despite his desire to pursue a monastic life, Augustine was pulled into service as bishop which led him to encounter personal struggles and concerns on a very different level than he had previously as a

withdrawn contemplative. These experiences led to an evolved view on marriage and its theological nature that is reflected in his later works, which emphasized the goodness inherent in creation, particularly against dualisms that posited that material creation was inferior. This, in turn, led Augustine to affirm that sexuality existed in Eden prior to the Fall, not as a product of it, and laid the groundwork for a positive view of marriage as capable of transcending the present fallen state.

Despite the holistic and nuanced view of Augustine concerning sacramentalism, with the rise of Scholastic theology in the late medieval period the peculiar methodologies of the movement, particularly derived from Aristotle, produced a complex sacramental theology that was particularly concerned with enumerating the precise ingredients involved for a rite to be efficacious. Even as Scholasticism itself was hardly monolithic, it broadly shared methodological and perspectival characteristics which led to a pseudo-empirical theology that narrowly defined sacraments according to the elements necessary for the Church canonists to confirm that the sacrament was effectively communicated. Even while some Scholastics, particularly Aquinas, were nuanced in their development of sacramental efficacy, after being filtered through the canon legalists the final product, noted by its characteristic phrase *ex opere operato*, “from the work done”, came to be associated not with the work of Christ, as Augustine had argued and also as Aquinas had intended, but rather the work of the rite itself. This formulaic theological orientation was consequently challenged by the Reformation and in the ensuing debates marriage was rejected as a sacrament. Yet, even while the Classical Reformers heavily critiqued the Scholastic formulas and winnowed the list of sacraments down to only baptism and Eucharist, they quietly maintained a dire presupposition, namely that a sacrament is the ritual activity which imparts the grace of salvation. If viewed from this angle, only baptism and the Eucharist are considered

directly efficacious in the process of justification as argued by the early Protestants, but it remains questionable whether a sacrament should be defined in this manner. Indeed, as it shall be argued, the legacy of this orientation caused significant damage to the Protestant theological inheritance, noted by the practical decisions of Calvin which opened the door to tacit acceptance of divorce, and a resultant de-emphasis on the theological value of marriage which plagues Protestant theology to this day. It shall be argued that it was the poisoned fruit of Scholastic definition of sacrament, as the efficacious rite conferring salvific grace, that must be ultimately rejected and a more holistic understanding championed that returns to the holistic definitions of Augustine augmented with insights from Eastern Orthodoxy that allows for marriage to once again be affirmed as a sacrament and given its proper place of privilege in contemporary Protestantism.

### **SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

The roots of sacramentalism are found in the prior Hebrew-Judaic society which was principally defined by its covenantal status, a relationship which required a wide range of activities and prohibitions, ritual and moral. As it has already been demonstrated in the prior chapter on Christ's view of the Hebrew Torah, it must be ratified by the continuing community of faith, but radicalized in its demands so that the focus is no longer on the external aspects but rather the internal. Similarly, even as the early Christian movement shed most of the social restrictions and ethnic requirements of the Jewish system, most notably the rite of circumcision, it did not reject the entire category of ritual but rather reoriented it radically. Ritual sacrifice, previously a principle vocation of the Jerusalem Temple, was replaced by the liturgical tradition of the mass, a ritualized remembrance of Christ's sacrifice embodied in the partaking of the flesh

and blood via the elements of the Eucharist.<sup>534</sup> Similarly, the Judaic requirements of ritual cleanliness that included regular washings were replaced by the singular baptism event, which was prefigured by John the Baptist but came to represent quite early the ritualized crossing over from life through death to the resurrected state. These two ritual aspects served as the primary defining features of the early Christian movement, but they were supplemented by the development of a theological category: the sacramental.

Etymologically, the term sacrament is derived from the Latin *sacramentum* which was a sacred oath, particularly associated with military service, but this is in turn a translation of the Greek *mysterion* by which the English cognate term mystery is derived. While the mystery aspect of the original concept was adopted into Latin nomenclature as *mysterium*, the ritual feature was transferred to the term *sacramentum* which was in the early tradition conceived as the seal of the New Covenant in Christ. Following the same basic hermeneutic pattern as practiced by Jesus as noted above, the physical aspects of the Hebrew covenants (Abrahamic and Mosaic) were transformed into spiritual forms by the early church. Accordingly, the requirement of circumcision was dropped as it was primarily a sign of the flesh, whereas the New Covenant was ratified in the spirit thus its seal was not visible. Just so, because humanity lives currently in a physical realm, this unseen reality can be made visible through infusing the rituals of life with the power of the sacrifice of the Christ. Whereas, before the Jews had to be made physically clean in order to be ritually pure, the Christian's soul was washed once and for all in the blood of the Lamb, thus the physical aspects of the rituals of baptism and Eucharist were not themselves

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<sup>534</sup> The conceptualization of the medieval Catholic church concerning the mass as a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ was a facet of the theological criticisms made by the Reformers, as noted in Luther's early (1520) treatise *Babylonian Captivity* 2.37, "it has come about that at this day there is no belief in the Church more generally received or more firmly held than that the mass is a good work and a sacrifice." *Works of Martin Luther*, trans. Albert T.W. Steinhaeuser, (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), 167-293.

causes but rather representations of the grace that is offered wholly, freely, and universally to all by the singular sacrifice of Christ.

Even while the vast majority of Christians would be united in the claim that it is Christ that saves, the question still remains, how exactly this salvation is imparted and in particular what the role of the Church<sup>535</sup> is in relation to this soteriological activity. Perhaps the most historically pervasive answer to this inquiry is that the Church relates the grace of Christ through the dispensation of sacred activities via ritual observances known collectively in the Western tradition as the sacraments. Medieval Roman Catholicism specifically developed an itemized catalogue of seven such sacraments through the course of its development which, in turn, was rejected by the Protestant Reformation and replaced by either a reduced numbering or categorical dismissal. This has, in turn, led to extensive illiteracy among contemporary Protestants concerning the role and nature of the sacraments which, the present study will argue, has diminished the sacred value of the role of the Church and its relation to Christian living in Protestantism broadly understood.

In the study of the historical development of Christian doctrine, the essay of John Henry Cardinal Newman on the topic (1845) stands as a keystone of the paradigm shift into the modern era. Previous to Newman, the reigning paradigm in Western Christian thought was “that Christianity does not fall within the province of history”<sup>536</sup> and thus doctrine was a timeless entity that stood above history and was otherwise unaffected by it. This premise had come under criticism especially in the Reformation but was still ardently held by many in the nineteenth

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<sup>535</sup> Church as a capitalized term will be used herein to denote the universal body of Christ.

<sup>536</sup> J.H.C. Newman, “An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine” (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 1.

century until Newman's essay ushered in a paradigm shift on the issue within Catholicism. Instead of a timeless and eternal body of truths set apart from the historical process, Newman argued forcefully for an organic analogy that likened the growth of doctrine to the development of an organism; accordingly, there were aspects that promoted health and wellbeing but also corruptions that diminished and defiled. In order to delineate between these, Newman proposed a series of seven tests or standards upon which doctrinal developments might be judged.<sup>537</sup> While it is beyond the purview of the present study to systematically develop these tests, the key aspect that unites them is the notion of genuine preservation throughout generations. Even as doctrines must necessarily evolve to meet the demands and challenges of new contexts, the key is that these alterations follow the original intention (typically apostolic) of the doctrine and remain logically coherent.

It is upon this standard that the present study will argue that the development of sacramentalism in the Western tradition corrupted the original use and intention of the concept through the assimilation of contrary aspects from Aristotelean philosophy via the Scholastic movement which in turn was the principle base of rejection by the Reformation. Yet even as the Protestants rightly protested against certain alien ideas of the Scholastics, their rejections further corrupted the tradition through inheriting untenable presuppositions and methods which ultimately damaged the sacred value of the Church and in turn divorced the everyday life of the Christian from the grace of Christ. It will be argued that contemporary Protestantism should renew its study and understanding of the sacraments and reconsider the historical trends which resulted in current views that contrast or contradict the earliest Christian teachings on the subject.

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<sup>537</sup> As Newman writes "it becomes necessary in consequence to assign certain characteristics of faithful development, which none but faithful developments have, and the presence of which serves as a test to discriminate between them and corruptions." "Essay", II.V.2., 85.

### *Origins of Sacramentalism*

The Christian tradition of sacraments begins not with the writings of the New Testament but rather with the Hebrew Scriptures and the culture they represent, as discussed in the prior chapters. The most vital of the Hebrew traditions was the extensive socio-religious codes of the Mosaic Torah which included moral, ritual, lifestyle, and theological mandates ranging from idolatry and adultery to clothing and hairstyle. Although the historical works of the Hebrew Bible contained in the *Nevi'im* indicate strongly that Israel struggled mightily with these precepts, various key events and eras placed increased focus on the cultural standards as representative of the moral and religious identity of Judaism.<sup>538</sup> With the fall of the Judean kingdom at the hands of Babylon in 586 BC, the collective identity of the inheritors of the Mosaic tradition changed radically.<sup>539</sup> Since the days of David, more than four centuries prior, the people of Judah had lived in a homogenous society wherein the Torah served as the basis of the entire society, from king to peasant.<sup>540</sup> Yet with the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews had to learn how to distinguish themselves from the dominant culture and thus arose the emphasis on cultural definition via strict personal observances gleaned from the Torah.<sup>541</sup> Thereby the definition of Jewishness became focused on ritual and social features such as cleanliness, Sabbath-day and dietary restrictions, and, perhaps most notably for the early Christian

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<sup>538</sup> “So the first followers of Jesus, who were Jewish, grew up in a unique sacramental tradition, a tradition in which God spoke to humankind through persons and events, a tradition in which sacred meaning was revealed in actions and in the record of those actions.” Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church Revised Edition* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2001), 21.

<sup>539</sup> This is excepting the branch of the Hebrews known by the NT era as the Samaritans, who were the remains of the ten tribes of the nation of Israel which were scattered by the Assyrians in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.

<sup>540</sup> This is not to say that everyone held to the Law in perfection, much the opposite, but simply that it was universally recognized as the foundation of their culture and collective identity.

<sup>541</sup> It is widely held among biblical scholars that the socio-religious institution known as the synagogue (an anachronistic term from the later Hellenistic era) arose in order to defend the Exiles against social assimilation.



community, circumcision.

While it is beyond refutation that Christianity began among Jews, known initially as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles as “the Way” (9:2; 22:4), the question quickly arose in the earliest church whether Gentiles could be converted to this movement and, if so, how?<sup>542</sup> Assuming the historical reliability of Acts, a series of events answered the Gentile question as Paul, former persecutor of the Way, was commissioned to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 9) and Peter accepted the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10), but the final answer was to come in the so-called Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), whereby the Jerusalem apostles confirmed that Gentiles were not under obligation to observe the Mosaic Torah with a few notable exceptions.<sup>543</sup> Yet even while the social and ritual restrictions were rejected as unnecessary to salvation, the moral and religious standards were repeatedly confirmed throughout the writings of the New Testament.<sup>544</sup> So too, while the sacrificial aspects of Judaism were integrated into the death of Christ, as emphasized in the Epistle to the Hebrews, two ritual functions of Judaism were assimilated directly into Christian practice: baptism and the Passover meal.

In many regards, the activities of baptism and the Passover meal, which developed in the Christian tradition into the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper, are definitional to the ministry of Jesus which begins with His own baptism by John the Baptist<sup>545</sup> and ends with the ritualized Passover

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<sup>542</sup> It is widely recognized among biblical scholarship that a key motivation in the construction of Acts was to explain the historical progression from a marginalized Jewish sect to a pervasive Gentile religion within a matter of decades.

<sup>543</sup> Food sacrificed to idols, blood, strangled meat, and sexual immorality. Acts 15:29. Contemporary Christianity mostly ignores the dietary restrictions and focuses principally on the sexual morality aspect.

<sup>544</sup> Paul’s letters to Corinth are notable examples of this central theme of living faith as well as the Epistle of James. Jesus repeatedly upheld and radicalized the moral requirements of the Law, especially in the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>545</sup> Glossing here over the fact that John does not depict this event.

meal, thereby linking it with His imminent sacrificial death.<sup>546</sup> Even further, the necessity of ritual baptism is established by the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18, whereby the apostles were commanded to make disciples of all nations via baptism (Gk: *baptizo*) in the name of the Trinity.<sup>547</sup> Accordingly, these two ritual functions became central to early Christian identity whereby one entered the community through Baptism, a singular event that replaced the recurrent ritual washings of Judaism, and continued in participation through regular celebration of the Eucharist meal, rather than the annual Passover meal, while the wine and bread came to replace the lamb and unleavened bread. Even as these two central practices became definitional to the early Christian identity, they as yet had not been given terminological definition.

The first systematic terminology that unified the practices of baptism and Eucharist under a single heading was the Greek term *mysterion*, used some seventy-seven times in the New Testament primarily to describe the workings of God in relation to humanity and did not in this phase take on any formal association with either baptism or Eucharist.<sup>548</sup> Indeed, the only practice directly identified as such was marriage for its allegorical representation of the union of Church and Christ.<sup>549</sup> The English word mystery is, of course, a cognate of the Greek term, but the original NT usage was not principally intended to indicate something that was unknown or beyond knowledge, but rather that the divine plan of salvation, which on our own cognitive powers is beyond comprehension, has been revealed definitively in the incarnation of the

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<sup>546</sup> Parallels in Mark 14:12-26; Matt 26:17-30; Luke 22:7-23; 1 Cor 11:23-25. Luke and 1 Cor have verbal parallels which further support the case for Luke's close historical association with Paul and also indicate an early date for the ritualization of the Eucharist meal, which Paul chastised the Corinthians for their abuses.

<sup>547</sup> While the term Trinity postdates the NT writings, this verse contains the clearest expression of the three-fold deity.

<sup>548</sup> Strong's: 3466.

<sup>549</sup> Ephesians 5:32.

Christ.<sup>550</sup> Even while the fullness of the divine plan of salvation has been revealed to the godly, it is not for the human mind to comprehend the inner workings of such, which is beyond mortal cognitive abilities. While this more original general notion of the mystery of divine providence was dominant in the New Testament writings (and maintained in Eastern Orthodoxy), a secondary usage in Roman culture associated Christian Baptism and Eucharist practices with the proliferation of mystery cults.<sup>551</sup> This loosely associated group of religio-philosophies were generally identified by the *musterion* nomenclature due to their collective use of secretive rituals and symbolic initiation rites. As Christianity rapidly spread throughout the Roman Empire, it was often taken as another such mystery cult and thus its use of baptism and Eucharist rituals, which were closed to outsiders and often secretive, especially in times of persecution, and thereby associated with this popular usage of the term.

As the terminology of the Greek *musterion* became translated into Latin a key shift occurred whereby the term was differentiated into two separate concepts. Tertullian in the early third century is the first known Christian author to translate the Greek into two distinct Latin terms, *mysterium*, which was a transliteration of the Greek term used to denote the mysteries of providence, and *sacramentum*, which referred primarily to oaths of service especially military vows as associated with initiation rites.<sup>552</sup> This, in turn, led to the common tradition among Latin patristic authors to refer to baptism as a holy seal; just as the soldier was given a tattoo denoting his pledge of service to Rome and the Emperor, in baptism the believer receives the seal of salvation on his/her soul, indelible yet invisible. Because the seal is invisible, it must be signified

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<sup>550</sup> Cf. TDNT 4:802.

<sup>551</sup> Cf. Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 22-27.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid, 29.

through a ritual act which gives it substance and form; thus, the elements involved, water, priest, etc., are outward signs of the inward change taking place whereby the individual accepts the grace of God.<sup>553</sup> Martos does well in explaining the role of sacraments at this juncture:

In this way, the principal theologians of the early church accepted and developed the idea that *sacramenta* were effective symbols: they actually caused what they signified. Or rather it was God who ultimately caused those effects, for only God could touch people's souls, forgive their sins, impart the Spirit to them, or make the Son present to them... To these fathers the effects of the sacramental rites were patently real, for the *sacramenta* enabled Christians to participate in the sacred and mysterious realities which were the utmost importance but beyond complete human comprehension.<sup>554</sup>

Yet at this point, all of this was incipient and only just beginning to take on any systematic form or substance. As was typical in the narrative of Christian history, it would take the challenge of heresy to bring systematic development, in this case the Donatist schism as refuted by Augustine of Hippo.

### *Augustine and the Medieval Synthesis*

In the first centuries of Christian history, systematic conceptual development was often sporadic due to the loose association of churches, periodic persecutions, and the generally counter-cultural nature of the movement prior to the reforms of Constantine the Great in the early fourth century. One of the key historical motivators that prompted systematic development and growth was the various challenges of heretical movements.<sup>555</sup> Regarding the nature and function of the sacraments, the most important heretical challenge came from the lesser known Donatist

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<sup>553</sup> Martos, *Doors*, 35.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid, 31. Martos cites Tertullian, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, and Cyprian of Carthage as representative examples of this trajectory.

<sup>555</sup> Heretical herein denoting simply the church traditions which were historically denied by the dominant orthodox tradition, even though heretical groups at times proliferated and could even take majority forms.

schism predominant in northern Africa in the fourth century. The group's development stemmed from the time of the Diocletian persecution (AD 303-313) and centered on the question concerning the relation of the Church to those that had renounced Christ to avoid persecution. Donatus, bishop of Carthage during the Diocletian persecution, argued that deniers of Christ, whom he dubbed *traditores*, effectively lost their salvation and must be readmitted to the Church through re-baptism and so too must errant clergy be re-ordained. Even further, if a priest who had renounced Christ was not re-baptized/ordained then any baptism made by him would be null along with any ordinations made by *traditor* bishops. In essence, being a *traditore* not only equated to losing one's own salvation, but also rendered any sacraments offered by the person inefficacious. Ultimately, disagreements with the orthodox majority, which tended to look more favorably on *traditores* and allow readmission without re-baptism, led to schism over the issue, the refutations lacked effective explanation to defeat the logic of Donatism for nearly a century until the time of Augustine.

Easily the most pivotal figure in the development of Western Christianity, Aurelius Augustine (354-430), bishop of Hippo for nearly four decades, was born into a society that had been dominated by the Donatist schism: Roman northern Africa. When Augustine was born, Donatism had become the majority Christian movement in the region; after he returned from his sojourn in Italy he was elected by a sort of mob rule to the bishopric by the minority Catholic community in Hippo, after hearing the eloquence of his preaching.<sup>556</sup> As Donatism was a schism rather than a heresy, strictly speaking, it observed identically, or nearly so, the ritual and theology of the Catholic tradition. Instead, the key disagreement, as discussed above, concerned the legitimacy of the so-called *traditores* within the Church. Even as earlier authorities in the Latin

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<sup>556</sup> Cf. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 131-138.

Church had denounced Donatism, it was nearly a century later that Augustine constructed a fully developed refutation that, coupled with the support of the Byzantine and Roman legal authorities, crippled the Donatist movement by reabsorbing it, if forcefully. Augustine's brilliant philosopher's mind deconstructed the Donatist position with central focus not on ecclesiology, as such, but rather soteriology.<sup>557</sup> The key issue behind the disagreement really concerned the manner in which God saves and how the Church features in this plan, whereby soteriology guides ecclesiology.

As the functional question concerned the role of baptism (and ordination) in salvation, Augustine delineated three distinct aspects involved in the sacramental ritual: the rite, the seal, and the grace.<sup>558</sup> The rite represents all the aspects controlled by the Church, including therefore the physical elements of the ritual, the words spoken, the person administering, and so forth.<sup>559</sup> The rite is thereby, in essence, the sensory aspects of the sacrament whereas the seal, as discussed above, was invisible and intangible. Extending the analogy of the soldier's tattoo, there is the ink itself embedded in the skin, which is visible, but also a seal of fidelity which is itself invisible, a pledge of loyalty that the tattoo indicates. In this regard, the seal itself however is a sign of a greater reality, just as the stamp of a king's seal is not powerful in itself but rather witnesses to the authority of the sender. In this way, the seal served as the contract between human and divine but itself does not save a person; rather it is by divine grace alone whereby

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<sup>557</sup> Augustine's most extensive work on the subject is in the seven books of *On Baptism, Against the Donatists* (ca. 400), Translated by J.R. King and revised by Chester D. Hartranft. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 4. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1408.htm> (accessed 11/15/15).

<sup>558</sup> Martos, *Doors*, 41. Cf. Augustine, *On Baptism*, III.19.26; IV.12.19; IV.24.32; V.15.20.

<sup>559</sup> It should be noted that the Scholastic perspective, developed below, over-emphasized the role of the rite that placed an untenable load on the role of the Church in the process of salvation.

salvation is attained.<sup>560</sup> Accordingly, the sacramental rite functions to demonstrate the human reception of the salvation offered by Christ, the signature on the contract that was given freely to the world by the sacrifice of the cross. Further, whether the rite is tarnished by negative aspects, such as sinful clergy, heretical claims, and so forth, does not diminish the efficacy of the sacrament in regards conferring the seal upon one's soul and the grace it represents which remain transcendent.<sup>561</sup> In essence, salvation hinges on the perfection of God, not of the human participants involved. Accordingly, Donatism misunderstood the role of the Church in relation to salvation by overestimating the role the human element plays therein. Whether the priest involved was in right relation to God is, first of all, impossible for external mortal minds to know; but further, it is not the priest who offers the salvation represented by the baptismal rite, rather it is Christ alone who stands behind the sacrament and on whose authority it is practiced.<sup>562</sup> Through this argumentation Augustine ushered the demise of the Donatist schism and inaugurated the beginning of a new age in Christianity that would persist for a millennium.

The medieval synthesis, often referred to as Christendom, was built upon foundations laid by Augustine and his forebears which allowed for a view of the Christian mission that was totalizing in scope. While there were many and various elitist/perfectionist strains of thought in

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<sup>560</sup> "How does a murderer cleanse and sanctify the water? How can darkness bless the oil? But if God is present in His sacraments to confirm His words by whomsoever the sacraments may be administered, then both the sacraments of God are everywhere valid, and evil men whom they profit not are everywhere perverse." Augustine, *On Baptism*, V.20.27.

<sup>561</sup> Augustine made it clear that membership in the Catholic Church did not equate automatically to salvation, for faith was the possession of the heart, not of the flesh, and God alone is the agent of salvation, not the priest who merely stands as human witness and deputized representative. Cf. *Ibid*, V.28.39. It may also be noted how particularly Platonistic (or Neo-Platonist to be precise) is this notion of material and transcendent realities.

<sup>562</sup> Heretics and schismatics thereby according to Augustine retained the efficacy of Baptism yet did not profit from active participation in the holy body of Christ, the Church. "But if Baptism is both possessed and transferred by the multitude of others who work the works of the flesh... then it is possessed and transferred also by heretics... And as, when those others are brought into the right path, it is not that Baptism begins to be present, having been absent before, but that it begins to profit them, having been already in them." *Ibid*, VII.54.103.

the early church, Augustine faced one of the most pervasive in his refutations of Pelagius, a contemporary British monk who gained favor particularly with Christians in Palestine heavily influenced by the Antiochean school. Monasticism in general also tended toward spiritual elitism by admitting, implicitly or otherwise, that those devoted to spiritual disciplines were superior to their more mundane equivalents.<sup>563</sup> This was reflected in the thought of Pelagius and his followers, especially Caelestius, by an emphasis on the role of the will in the process of salvation which Augustine renounced at length variously.<sup>564</sup> As with the arguments against Donatism, the effective agent of salvation must be God and God alone, for humans are incapable of attaining perfection without the freely given and wholly undeserved grace of Christ.<sup>565</sup> Accordingly, the Church was not the reserved refuge of the few monastic saints, but rather the visible worker of invisible grace in a fallen creation which was to be unequivocally offered to all.<sup>566</sup> As Augustine argued persuasively against the elitist legalism of Pelagianism, he established a synthesized view of culture whereby the Church permeated every aspect of life and included every kind of person, from Pope to pauper, both saint and sinner. Thus, it was not the business of the Church to judge between them for it simply announced salvation but did not effect it.

Through these arguments Augustine provided a view of sacramental life that was much broader in scope than either Donatus or Pelagius could envision. The basic task of the Church,

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<sup>563</sup> For a classic explanation of Pelagianism, cf. Brown, *Augustine*, 340-353.

<sup>564</sup> Of perhaps most interest is the extensive correspondence and polemics between Augustine and Julian of Eclanum who was exiled as a result of the controversy and his support of Pelagius contra Augustine.

<sup>565</sup> Augustine puts the thought forward powerfully in the phrase, “*Redduntur itaque malis bona; gratuita ergo, non debita et ideo gratia*” ~ “Therefore good things are given for evil ones—gratuitous, therefore; not of debt, and therefore grace.” “De Contra Duas Epistolas Pelagianorum Libri Quator”.IV.6.15, in NPFN1-05. *St. Augustine Anti-Pelagian Writings*, available online <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.xviii.vi.xv.html> (accessed 5/16/17); Latin text available online at [http://www.augustinus.it/latino/contro\\_lettere\\_pelagiani/index2.htm](http://www.augustinus.it/latino/contro_lettere_pelagiani/index2.htm) (accessed 5/16/17).

<sup>566</sup> As Paul states, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” 1 Cor 3:6-7, ESV.



according to Augustine, was to bear visible witness to the invisible grace of Christ; accordingly, while baptism and Eucharist remained the central signs of this, the role of the sacrament was not limited to only these two rituals. Rather, every aspect of life that bore witness to the grace of Christ could in essence be sacramental whereby the business of the Church is to provide the locus of this sanctifying activity.<sup>567</sup> As Augustine provided systematic development of the concept of sacrament that served as the foundation for a universalized Church, the definition he provided was purposefully broad enough to allow for appreciation that it is not the work of humanity, thereby neither of the Church, that saves but rather the sole prerogative of God alone. The Church in all her imperfection could witness truly and effectively to the perfect deity who stands behind her but if perfect understanding or perfect righteousness were requirements to receive salvation then none would or could be saved. The sacraments, thereby, are the visible markers and rites that remind the Christian of their utter and total reliance upon the grace of Christ for their salvation. Even while the medieval Latin tradition would develop in a problematic direction with the advent of the Scholastic movement and its enumeration of the sacraments, the more original and flexible notion of the divine mystery involved in the sacrament has been historically preserved in the Eastern Orthodox traditions which should be consulted in constructing a systematic theology of Sacramentalism and the role of marriage therein.

### *Eastern Orthodoxy – Sacrament and Mystery*

Before continuing the development of sacramental theology in the Latin tradition

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<sup>567</sup> “Thus the number of possible sacraments was infinite: everything in creation was a reflection of God, and so in a sense even the universe was a sacrament, a sign of God. On the other hand, Augustine also taught that the number of really important sacraments in the church was relatively small... all of them were sacraments because they helped make divine realities present to those who understood the meaning of the signs.” Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 43.

following Augustine, it is also instructive to consider how this topic developed in the Eastern Church as well. Marriage was connected very early in the East with sacramental theology primarily due to its explicit connection as a *megas musterion* (great mystery) in Ephesians 5:32 for its symbolic representation of the marriage of Christ and Church, much as it had served the prophets before. While the sacramental theology of the Western Church would eventuate, as demonstrated below in the following discussion of Scholasticism and the Reformation, into an instrumental view of sacramental efficacy, the Eastern Orthodox tradition continued to maintain the original Greek notion of *musterion* as normative whereby sacraments were not analyzed in such critical scrutiny but rather were allowed a wider mystical appreciation that focused on the radical transcendence of grace. The tremendous mystery of the divine-human relationship is particularly demonstrated in the divine liturgy of Orthodoxy which focuses primarily on the interplay between transcendence and immanence through sacred representation in physical forms.<sup>568</sup> The well-known use of icons in Orthodoxy is founded on this basic liturgical orientation that the worship space is intended to create on earth a foretaste of the eternal state with the congregation physically surrounded during worship by the representations of present heavenly realities, as the icons are intended not to depict their subjects in their mortal state but rather in their heavenly figure. Marriage, it follows in this system, is a physical institution most certainly, but just as the icon reflects the heavenly, so too can a sacramental marriage go beyond the boundaries of the mortal and find its ultimate expression in the resurrected state. Accordingly, the language of death being the termination of the contract of marriage is missing from Orthodox services and indeed the hope of the eternal is made explicit, as it is the heavenly realities made

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<sup>568</sup> Cf. Angelo Nicolaides, "The Seventh Ecumenical Council and the veneration of icons in Orthodoxy." *Acta Theologica* 34, no. 2 (2014): 77-93.

manifest in the present that make marriage sacramental and will be reflected in the glory of the ultimate renewed state. This Orthodox orientation thereby avoids the kind of instrumental scrutiny that led in the West to the Scholastic movement and Canon Law tradition that came to understand sacraments as causes as well as signs of grace.

In the centuries following Constantine, gradual erosion occurred in the relationship between the churches of the Greek speaking East and the Latin speaking West. While the official break between them occurred in 1054 with the mutual excommunications of the Roman Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople, the division had been progressively widening for centuries prior.<sup>569</sup> Consequent to the ecclesial schism of 1054, lines of dialogue between East and West continued to erode rapidly and so by the time of the Reformers few Western Christians even knew of their Eastern counterparts who had, in the meantime, been greatly diminished by the invasion of militant Islam culminating in the destruction of Constantinople and the subsequent relocation of Orthodoxy further East into Russia. As a result, the debate over the sacramentality of marriage has occurred almost entirely in the West, as the topic had been long settled in the East.<sup>570</sup> Given the deadlock that has settled into the debate subsequent to the Reformation, it would be prudent to renew a dialogue with Eastern voices which demonstrate a distinctive perspective on the issue alternative to both Catholic and Protestant positions.

While Eastern Orthodoxy represents a broad array of cultural variations, their theological core is founded on some of the earliest Christian witnesses, principally the Greek Patristics and

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<sup>569</sup> A particularly helpful historical perspective of this gradual erosion and final schism from an Eastern perspective is offered by Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 43-72.

<sup>570</sup> Orthodoxy never experienced a Reformation like in the West, although there were some lasting schisms such as the anti-Chalcedon Orthodox churches such as the Ethiopian Orthodox which persist still today. Yet even these internal schisms never resulted in the same level of massive change and diversification as the West experienced.

the rulings of the seven Ecumenical Councils. The Eastern teaching concerning marriage has been quite consistent since the influential writings of John Chrysostom.<sup>571</sup> Sacramental marriage is conceived of as theologically significant in a more ultimate sense in the East than what is typical of Western definitions. Indeed, while in Catholicism a great deal has been made historically of the indissoluble nature of marriage and subsequent condemnation of divorce, reversed generally by Protestants, but even still the death of a spouse is still regarded as the end of a marriage.<sup>572</sup> In contrast, the Eastern definition of sacramental marriage consists of both earthly and heavenly components which transcend death. The earthly elements are thereby shared with the non-Christian counterparts, but what makes a marriage sacramental is its participation in the kingdom of God which will thus be consummated in the reconciliation of the eschaton.<sup>573</sup> Accordingly, while in the West marriage has often been viewed as a concession for the remedy of sexual sin, in the East the sexual union of marriage was consistently celebrated and it was instead divorce that was seen as a concession to human sin.<sup>574</sup>

While Chrysostom was more negative toward marriage and sexuality during his early

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<sup>571</sup> Contemporary Orthodox authors recognize that there is an ascetic subterranean trend in the Orthodox tradition that at times has flared up to reject sexuality and marriage with similar arguments as the Augustine influenced Neo-Platonist Western trajectory, but the dominant voice has characteristically followed Chrysostom and is most readily visible in the consistent Orthodox support for clerical marriage even if bishops are generally expected to be celibate, but this is for practical concerns and based on 1 Cor 7 as supporting celibacy as a practical advantage for those at the highest levels of ecclesial authority.

<sup>572</sup> Thus, a separated couple could not remarry until the other died then the surviving spouse could be free to remarry. This practice in particular is rejected by Orthodoxy and second marriages are given only as a concession.

<sup>573</sup> Immediately the reaction often arises from the Synoptic reply of Jesus to the Sadducees concerning marriage in the resurrection that it will not persist (discussed in chapter three), but this is largely a Western interpretive problem as the East has long settled on a rendering of this passage that concludes that Jesus was only condemning Levirate marriage in particular as exemplifying the nature of the earthly aspect of marriage which is, in fact, left behind; but this does not in turn condemn sacramental marriage which transcends the earthly elements. Cf. Meyendorff, *Marriage*, 13.

<sup>574</sup> Second marriages are qualitatively different according to Orthodoxy such that while reluctantly allowed, have a distinctive ceremony that generally replaces the usual wedding joy with an air of repentance.

monastic years, his later writings during his tenure as bishop revealed a more supportive and pastoral approach to an institution that he ultimately came to recognize was a blessing to his congregation.<sup>575</sup> In his homilies, he spoke in exalted terms of marriage, given first as an ordinance of the good creation for the propagation of human kind and society, and then redeemed in the atonement of Christ which reconciles this earthly and limited institution into a blessed and eternal bond of divine love in the resurrected state:

This, then, is what it means to marry in Christ: spiritual marriage is like spiritual birth, which is not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh... How foolish are those who belittle marriage! If marriage were something to be condemned Paul would never call Christ a bridegroom and the Church a bride.<sup>576</sup>

Against the Western trajectory that often privileged procreation as the primary aim of marriage, Chrysostom instead reversed the order such that the spiritual fidelity of the nuptial union is the primary aim of marriage while procreation remains a natural and joyous byproduct fully intended by God's good creation.<sup>577</sup> Chrysostom spent much of his exhortation on marriage on practical issues concerning relations between spouses, but the core of his teachings reflected the firm conviction that Christian marriage was of a spiritual category that partakes of the earthly realm of flesh for now, but in the purification of the eschaton will be made imperishable.

Consequent to Chrysostom and the Greek Patristics who innovated the teaching of

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<sup>575</sup> Catherine Roth, "Introduction" in *St. John Chrysostom On Marriage and Family Life* trans. Catherine Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 7-9. Augustine, developed further in the next section, followed a similar path of softening his early ascetic views in light of his experiences as bishop.

<sup>576</sup> John Chrysostom, "Homily 20" in *St. John Chrysostom On Marriage and Family Life* trans. Catherine Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 54-55.

<sup>577</sup> There is some difference between translations of Chrysostom's sermon "On Marriage" offered by Roth and Anderson in *St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family Life* and by the citation in Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love* trans. Anthony Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 120. Roth and Anderson translate the highest aim as chastity while Evdokimov (via his translators) translates the same term as to be content seeing in it a primarily existential aim rather than chastity which represents a moral cause more conducive to Augustinian theories.

*apokotastasis*, the reconciliation of all creation, the developed perspective of Orthodoxy on marriage came to regard it as part of the reconciled order.<sup>578</sup> While the West taught that marriage was nullified by death, witnessed most clearly in the phrase ‘till death do us part’ which is so dominant in Western marriage ceremonies, the East instead defined marriage as an ongoing relationship that transcends death and plays at least some significant role in the resurrection. This is clearly evident in the Orthodox acceptance of clerical marriage and the strict teaching that second marriages are only allowable as concessions and not equivalent to the first marriage, even for widows.<sup>579</sup> But what precisely differentiates the sacramental marriage from all others? What gives it such a unique and distinguished character?

Historically in the East, marriage consisted of two ceremonies, the betrothal and the crowning.<sup>580</sup> The betrothal ceremony is the most readily relatable to contemporary Western marriage ceremonies that typically center on the exchange of rings and vows, something also shared by non-Christian marriage ceremonies. The Orthodox crowning ceremony, however, is distinctively Christian as it focuses on the sanctity of the marital union as a divine metaphor and traditionally highlights Ephesians 5 during the ceremony.<sup>581</sup> Even further, what specifically makes the Christian union a sacrament was made quite explicit very early on in the East: its

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<sup>578</sup> This concept is quite ancient but still in central service for Orthodox authors, as demonstrated by Chrysavagis: “What concerns the Church at all times is nothing less than salvation, the sanctification of every person, every relationship, everything – to the last speck of dust.” John Chrysavagis, *Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>579</sup> In fact, second wedding ceremonies in Orthodoxy are repentant in character and include pleas for divine forgiveness. Cf. John Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 45.

<sup>580</sup> For a concise historical overview of this development, cf. Meyendorff, *Marriage*, 20-29.

<sup>581</sup> This is still noticeable in the modern Orthodox ceremony which can be found in Meyendorff, *Marriage*, 113-131 and Evdokimov, *Sacrament of Love*, 130-148.

association with the Eucharist.<sup>582</sup> Thus, during the crowning ceremony the couple's vows are given divine sanction in the process of taking communion together as a couple to seal the bond of their marriage in flesh as well as spirit. This explicit connection establishes the theological basis for answering both what makes Christian marriage distinctive and what makes it a sacrament.

It is also important to recognize the distinctions between East and West on the very basis of the concept of sacrament. The West, as it has been demonstrated above, used the term *sacramentum* which had its root in special vows and increasingly took on a specific ritualized orientation in the later Scholastic developments. The East never followed this trajectory and instead maintained a more original notion of sacrament based on the Greek *mysterion*. Thus, while the West increasingly emphasized the functional mechanisms of the sacraments, the East instead maintained a more mystical orientation. Orthodox theologians often point to Paul's great homily on love in 1 Cor 13:8-12 as foundational to the nature of the sacrament:

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away... For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

In Orthodoxy, the mysterious quality of the sacraments has long been maintained. The mystery of the sacrament is that it can be seen and felt, but not fully known (not yet), and only faith can activate its hidden properties. Thus, the Eastern definition of sacrament is a symbolic action which is revelatory of God's grace.<sup>583</sup> Rather than the more juridical medieval Catholic

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<sup>582</sup> Cf. Alkiviadis C. Calivas, "Marriage: The Sacrament of Love and Communion." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 40, no. 3-4 (September 1, 1995): 250-252.

<sup>583</sup> "This double character, at once outward and inward, is the distinctive feature of a sacrament: the sacraments, like the Church, are both visible and invisible; in every sacrament there is the combination of an outward visible sign with an inward spiritual grace." Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 274.

enumerations of sacrament, discussed below, the East has been more hesitant to offer numbered lists at all, and although agreeing generally with the Catholic enumerated seven, the number is of less importance in Eastern traditions.<sup>584</sup> Indeed, Orthodox theologians have long contended in a manner that is highly congruent with Protestantism that there are two central sacraments, baptism and Eucharist, and it is from these that the other sacramental activities flow.<sup>585</sup> Baptism represents the individual's acceptance into the Christian family, and the Eucharist is the means to maintain relationship with that family and share in its grace.<sup>586</sup> Through the mutual taking of communion by both spouses, both at the wedding ceremony and throughout their marriage, the nuptial union is sanctified and ratified in the eternal promises of the resurrection. Marriage thus forms one of the essential building blocks of the Christian community,<sup>587</sup> and it is through the coequal taking of the Eucharist that the earthly vows of marital union are sanctified and become part of the Kingdom. It is only in the Christian church that hope can be offered for marriage to persist beyond the perishable conclusion to the flesh, and it is precisely this hope that Orthodox voices have long maintained.

It has been demonstrated that the origins of sacramental theology can be traced to the early church in its quest to understand the role of the Church in the process of salvation. In the debate with the Donatists concerning the salvation of *traditores*, Augustine provided a well-

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<sup>584</sup> Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 275.

<sup>585</sup> The taking of the Eucharist, or the Divine Liturgy as it is commonly known in Orthodoxy, is the central feature of the worshipping community and in fact rests at the root of the Orthodox definition of church. Cf. Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical, and Global Perspectives* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 20-22.

<sup>586</sup> Christian marriage adds, through the explicit experience of grace involved in the union, a religious and spiritual element to an otherwise legal and moral institution. Cf. Demetrios J. Constantelos, "Marriage in the Greek Orthodox Church." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22, no. 1 (December 1, 1985): 23.

<sup>587</sup> Evdokimov argues that the holy metaphor of Eph 5 also reflects the reality that the household becomes a church in miniature form and indeed becomes the very root or fabric of the larger Christian community, what he terms the "Domestic Church". Evdokimov, *Sacrament of Love*, 121-123.



developed position on the nature of the sacrament that accounted for the centrality of baptism and Eucharist while emphasizing that the ritual processes at the disposal of the Church were material signs of an eternal and ultimately transcendent reality. Salvation was the sole possession of God and was not effected by the sacramental rites, but rather the rites themselves were the offerings of imperfect humans accepting the perfect salvation offered freely by Christ.

Accordingly, the imperfection of the rites, even including bad theology and morally imperfect actors, does not impinge on the divine ability to confer salvation in grace, accepted by faith. This theological position became essential to the medieval synthesis which, against perfectionists such as the Pelagians, opened the doors of the Church to all persons, not just the privileged or elite. Even while the Western tradition would eventually produce the Scholastic movement and its pseudo-empirical approach to theology, it has been observed that the Eastern Orthodox tradition provides conceptual space for a more theologically relevant role for marriage that recognizes an element of Christian marriage that transcends death and extends into the eschaton. Having established this theoretical foundation concerning the nature of sacramentality in the early church, Augustine's specific teachings concerning marriage, and specifically the role of sexual desire therein, will be considered in order to establish a comprehensive Christian sexual ethos.

### **AUGUSTINE ON LUST AND DESIRE IN MARRIAGE**

There is perhaps no single more influential person in the history of Western Christianity than Aurelius Augustine, bishop of Hippo, who, as it has already been demonstrated, provided the essential theoretical foundations of the medieval synthesis which dominated Western Europe for nearly a millennium. Even beyond his role in establishing medieval Catholicism, the

Classical Reformers drew deeply from Augustine's impressive, even overwhelming, library.<sup>588</sup> It is a vital task for contemporary Christians to understand this most essential legacy which has provided the foundation for more than fifteen centuries of Christianity. Within this larger task, one topic that requires renewed inquiry concerns Augustine's understanding of the basis and nature of marriage. Among the chorus of historical voices that have contributed to the topic, Augustine once again stands as a foundational figure in this development due to his strong ecclesial and theological legacy in both Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Even so, studies of Augustine's view of marriage are relatively few and those that have been produced tend to focus too exclusively on his earlier work on the "Good of Marriage" (*De Bono Coniugali*) which, in turn, distorts his more complex developed thought on the subject.<sup>589</sup>

It is widely recognized in the study of Augustine, concerning the nature of marriage, he stood between the positions of Jovian and Jerome by supporting celibacy as spiritually superior to marriage (contra Jovian)<sup>590</sup> while rescuing sexuality from being classified as wholly sinful (contra Jerome).<sup>591</sup> Augustine argued that sexuality was part of the original plan of Eden and thus was not conferred as a punishment of humanity. However, sexuality was not completely sanitized of its sinful tendencies; here Augustine introduced the concept of lust, which he understood as universal to human sexuality as evidenced by shame, modesty, and the lack of willful control

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<sup>588</sup> A key aspect of the Reformation was its consistent claim that developed medieval Catholic tradition had erred in its understanding and application not only of the Bible but also of Augustine. Luther, it should be remembered, was a monk of the Augustinian order which heavily framed his perspective.

<sup>589</sup> A notable representative example is found in David G. Hunter, "Marriage" in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 535-537.

<sup>590</sup> Jovian was officially denounced during the same period that Augustine became bishop in Hippo, the early 390s, cf. Hunter, "Marriage," 535.

<sup>591</sup> Cf. J. Patout Burns Jr. And Robin M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 455.

over sexual organs particularly when tempted. Thus to comprehend the nature of sexuality in the marriage covenant, one must first seek to understand how lust affects it.<sup>592</sup> In regards sexuality generally and marriage particularly, the present study will argue that Augustine represents a dialectical tension between the desire for purity and the hope for love.<sup>593</sup> On the one side stands his concern for purity; Augustine's youth was lived under questionable pagan sexual morals, indoctrinated into him by his father, that continued to haunt him throughout his life.<sup>594</sup> As a young man, Augustine had somewhat freely explored his sexuality leaving him with a lingering sense of guilt which in turn attracted him to the Manichean system with its ascetic ideals and simplistic theodicy that relegates everything evil, including sexuality, to the Evil anti-god.<sup>595</sup> As the absurdities of the Manichean myths were replaced by Neo-Platonist influenced Catholic Christianity, Augustine was still compelled by the idea of celibacy from a Platonic suspicion of bodily existence wed to Christian chastity. Thus, Augustine's writings will continue to

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<sup>592</sup> Lust is to be understood as an aspect of the larger heading concupiscence, which in the thinking of Augustine is the essential fault inherent in the human condition, resultant from primal disobedience. What distinguished Augustine in particular against his Pelagian opponents was that even after baptism "everybody remains to some extent concupiscent and in that respect morally imperfect." Peter Burnell, "Concupiscence," in *Augustine through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 225.

<sup>593</sup> It should also be noted that the area of Augustine's view of sexuality in general and marriage in particular has not been sufficiently researched. For example, the quite excellent encyclopedia *Augustine through the Ages* (1999) has entries for marriage and concupiscence but not for sexuality, lust, or celibacy. While purely conjecture, perhaps this lack is due to a general perception that Augustine had little positive to say about sexuality, so for those interested in the topic, he might have appeared more an opponent than ally (a reputation not wholly undeserved).

<sup>594</sup> Typically, evaluations of Augustine's view of sexuality tend to focus primarily on his shame for these early sexual encounters. "It is difficult to resist the conclusion that Augustine's own experience with the difficulty of resisting sexual desire, described so poignantly in the *Confessions*, continued to influence his understanding of human nature as vitiated by original sin." Hunter, "Marriage," 537. The present study will argue that his relationship with and dismissal of his beloved concubine will play an equally important role in his personal and conceptual development.

<sup>595</sup> Specifically, original humans were created by the mating of demons captured previously by the Light so that human essence had both light and dark (with women for some reason having less of the good stuff) thus "human flesh has evil origins and comes about through procreation (an act which emulates the demonic origin of Adam and Eve)." J. Kevin Coyle, "Mani, Manicheism," in *Augustine through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 522.

demonstrate a bias, sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, against sexuality as being fleshy and thus of a lower category, something to be purified if not rejected outright.

At the same time, even as Augustine viewed sexuality with great suspicion and often spoke against it in stern tones, so too did he recognize an inherent goodness there that was in need of rehabilitation. His life had, at least for a time, afforded him with an example of fulfilling romantic love. While Augustine was never properly married according to the customs of his age,<sup>596</sup> he did famously take a concubine (an accepted practice during that time) which is to say that he had a prolonged monogamous relationship with a woman (the mother of his only child) but to whom he had only limited legal and social responsibilities.<sup>597</sup> While his concubine remains shaded in mystery and is only presented in faint sketches and momentary reflections in his *Confessions*, Augustine at least for a time felt the embrace of a loving and committed sexual relationship which troubled him greatly to end it as he did.<sup>598</sup>

Between these points of tension, Augustine taught that marriage was instituted and ordained by God prior to the fall of humanity in Eden and therefore sexuality was not a condition of sin as some held.<sup>599</sup> Rather, sin entered into sexuality through lust as a universal punishment

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<sup>596</sup> It is important to recognize that during this era Christian marriage rites were largely indistinguishable from the prior social norms. While bishops did regularly preside over marriage ceremonies, the rites were generally pre-Christian at this point. Thus, one of the tasks for Augustine was to Christianize marriage which “in North Africa seem to have been less “Christianized” than they were elsewhere in the West.” David Hunter, “Augustine and the Making of Marriage in Roman North Africa,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 1 (2003), 84. As a result, much of Augustine’s teaching on marriage focuses on the contractual and social obligations.

<sup>597</sup> Cf. Kim Power, “Concubine/Concubinage” in *Augustine through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 222-223. Little can be known of the unnamed concubine due to the sparsity of references by Augustine in the *Confessions* which remains the only source on the subject.

<sup>598</sup> A typical diversity of scholarly opinion has evolved on this, the present study will argue specifically that Augustine indeed felt the weight of his decision (with particular attention given to *Confessions* VI.25) and that it was a key element of his personal development which framed and shaped his later thinking. In particular, Augustine later taught effectively against the practice of concubinage as a social ill at least in part due to his own experience of it. Cf. Kim Power, *Veiled Desire* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 106.

<sup>599</sup> Julian of Eclanum charged this of Augustine, which also had an effect on his position as he sought to refute these accusations. Cf. Hunter, “Marriage,” 537.

for the Fall. Thus, lust serves for Augustine as the vehicle for the dissemination of so-called “original sin” as he concluded it was universal to human sexuality in the present era, but in the eschaton lust (and sin more generally) will be ended. But to what extent the removal of lust will affect sexuality is a point upon which Augustine gives somewhat contradictory answers following the tension herein described. On the one side, Augustine’s defense of marriage against its detractors led him to claim that sexuality existed in Eden prior to the Fall and thus humans will remain in a gendered state even in the resurrection. However, his own inability to conceive of a positive role for sexual desire and preference for celibacy led Augustine to conclude that while sexuality will persist in form, it will not in function. The present study will thus challenge this assertion by using statements of Augustine, primarily taken from his *Civitate Dei* (City of God), as a precedent for a more positive evaluation of human sexuality than he was able to conceive fully.

### *Purity and the Denial of the Flesh*

As a budding youth in Roman North Africa, Augustine found himself beset by a myriad of temptations and delights. As he recalls in the *Confessions*, his mother, Monica, was primarily concerned that he would “not commit adultery with someone else’s wife” but for the time Augustine was swayed by the looser morals demonstrated by his pagan father, Patricius.<sup>600</sup> Even while contemporary readers can remain critical of Augustine’s remembrances,<sup>601</sup> shaded as they are by his later perspective as a bishop, and are thereby not necessitated in conceiving of his

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<sup>600</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* II.7, trans. Chadwick (New York: Oxford, 2008), 27.

<sup>601</sup> “Even here, however, we have to be on our guard against his words. He is so anxious to demonstrate his major error in those days... to paint his sexual misdeeds in as black a color as possible”. John J. O’Meara, *The Young Augustine* (New York: Society of St. Paul, 2001), 33.

youth as utterly depraved, still the eloquence of his introspective discussion of the temptations to sexual sin is remarkable:

At one time in adolescence I was burning to find satisfaction in hellish pleasures. I ran wild in the shadowy jungle of erotic adventures... The single desire that dominated my search for delight was simply to love and to be loved. But no restraint was imposed... The bubbling impulses of puberty befogged and obscured my heart *so that it could not see the difference between love's serenity and lust's darkness.*<sup>602</sup>

Already a tension can be discerned in Augustine's reflections concerning his youthful approach to sexuality. Above all else, he desired love, but found the strong impulses of adolescence to fog his mind and drive him to indiscretions he later remembers with regret. Sexuality, he came to discover, holds both the promise to fulfill that longing for love and yet as it is currently known is filled with irrevocable lust. It was as if a man dying of thirst discovered a well only to find its water impure; to take a drink only increases thirst rather than offering relief.

It is well known that Augustine's attraction to the Manichean sect was largely on account of its critique of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures coupled with a simplified theodicy based on cosmic dualism.<sup>603</sup> Yet too often it is assumed that Augustine's interest was primarily intellectual, seeking to "answer the question that had begun to 'torment' him... 'From what cause do we do evil?'"<sup>604</sup> Yet it would be somewhat naive to conclude that Augustine was principally interested in theoretical issues when he approached Manicheism for answers as a teen.<sup>605</sup> Rather, it makes more sense to posit that Augustine's sexual frustrations were the primary inducement that led

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<sup>602</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* II.2, emphasis added.

<sup>603</sup> Cf. Coyle, "Mani, Manicheism," 521-2.

<sup>604</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 35.

<sup>605</sup> Once again, critical readers must be careful about taking Augustine on his word too quickly, as is often found in his biographers (for good reason considering how convincing his rhetoric can be). Just because Augustine focuses his comments on the Manichees in *Confessions* about theoretical issues does not mean that this was what had initially caught his attention as a youth.

him to consider the problem of evil which in turn led to his search.<sup>606</sup> As his reflections indicate, Augustine was a rather typical youth in his desire to love and his search for fulfillment in sexual pleasure. Yet something was not right; rather than serenity he found instead darkness.

The Manicheans, in turn, provided an easy synthesis to lay his mind at ease, at least for a time. The dualism of the Manichean sect is well known largely as a result of Augustine's interaction with the system and is well studied; its cosmological structure was borrowed from the dualism of Zoroastrianism wed to Christian imagery that posited two eternal principles of Good and Evil.<sup>607</sup> What this meant, specific to Augustine's experiences of sexuality, was that everything wrong with it was to be relegated to the Evil sphere and otherwise discarded, thus allowing for "elaborate avoidance of any intimate sense of guilt".<sup>608</sup> Even while Manicheism offered a sort of guilt-free living, their condemnation of sexuality ran deep. The material realm itself, everything that wasn't pure light, was the realm of the Evil principle. As Brown points out in the Manichean cosmology, the Evil is the more active principle while the Good is forced to retreat from it whereby material creation is the residue from this retreat.<sup>609</sup> Accordingly, sexuality was not just tainted with sinful aspects, it was in itself evil as it was part of the material creation and through procreation added further generations to be trapped in the mortal, material realm.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> Consider too that Augustine cannot be said to have any intimate awareness of evil in his life otherwise, having lived a relatively sheltered and cared for existence through his childhood and youth. So why did evil become such a preoccupying feature in his quest for answers? Quite probably because he felt its taint in his sexual experiences.

<sup>607</sup> For the purposes of this study, capitalization of Good and Evil will be used to denote the Manichee deities. These principles were not, as they are sometimes assumed, spiritual entities so much as literal physical forces, the Good was totally identified with light and Evil correspondingly with darkness. Cf. O'Meara, *Young Augustine*, 56-57.

<sup>608</sup> Brown, *Augustine*, 39.

<sup>609</sup> "Thus, throughout Manichaeism, it is the good that is condemned to be passive." Brown, *Augustine*, 41.

<sup>610</sup> Specifically, humans were the product of demonic sexual union, and their taint of darkness is thus spread to all humanity through the universal fact of human procreation. Cf. Coyle, "Mani, Manicheism," 522-3.

Sexuality, therefore, was to be entirely excluded for the Elect, the spiritual superiors of the movement who formed a sort of ascetic elite. The more mundane Hearers, among whom Augustine was counted, were not expected to attain the zealous ideals of the Elect, thus not bound by celibate strictures, and, as indicated above, were rather absolved of their indiscretions by the swift dismissal that it was the Evil within that did so.<sup>611</sup>

Even while Augustine's enthusiasm for the Manichean system would wane in the coming years, the next major influence in his life would further reinforce the notion that sexuality as symbolic of the flesh more generally was inferior if not actually evil. The movement known today as Neo-Platonism "purported to be a revival of Platonism, but was in fact a synthesis of Platonic, Aristotelean, Stoic, and Pythagorean elements" that could be broadly construed as a spiritual rationalism for its emphasis on the higher realm of ideas as transcending the material.<sup>612</sup> During his time in Rome and Milan, Augustine came to increasing awareness of the Neo-Platonic worldview which impacted him greatly.<sup>613</sup> In particular, he was able to overcome the materialism of Manichaeism and conceive of a purely spiritual state; the problem then was how to relate the material world to this higher realm. The Neo-Platonists for their part tended to denigrate the material world as inherently inferior and of little ultimate consequence.<sup>614</sup> While

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<sup>611</sup> This Manichean teaching was particularly founded on a peculiar reading of Rom 7 wherein the sin that Paul appears to struggle with was identified as the Evil principle found in all flesh, Brown, *Augustine*, 97. The Manichees in essence dismissed sin by the same logic as the contemporary idiom, "the Devil made me do it", a tendency which Augustine will come to identify as the attempt to relegate responsibility for personal sin originating with the Edenic fall. "Even worse, and more deserving of condemnation, is the pride shown in the search for an excuse, even when the sins are clear as daylight... to talk like this is really to accuse rather than to excuse oneself." Augustine, *Civitate Dei* XIV.14.

<sup>612</sup> O'Meara, *Young Augustine*, 130.

<sup>613</sup> There has been much historical debate over the precise interaction between Augustine and the Neo-Platonists. O'Meara's widely accepted thesis is that Augustine read them for himself rather than being handed a ready Christian Platonist synthesis as others have claimed. Cf. O'Meara, *Young Augustine*, 149-153.

<sup>614</sup> In particular the Neo-Platonists represent a distillation of traditional Roman attitudes toward sexuality that were prevalent during the time of Augustine that viewed marriage as primarily a civic institution for the



Augustine was once again attracted to their ascetic tendencies, his main intellectual problem, apart from the fact that key Neo-Platonist authors continued to reject Christ,<sup>615</sup> was how to relate this to the Christian view of the goodness of creation as well as the resurrection state which is bodily.<sup>616</sup> Even as Augustine would resolutely choose not to follow the Neo-Platonists in their rejection of Christ, it remained to be seen how their other-worldly spiritualism could be synthesized into orthodox Christian teachings concerning the world and its resolution in the resurrection.

### *Rehabilitating the Goodness of Creation*

Thus, on the one side, it has been demonstrated that Augustine's youthful indiscretions contributed to his confusion about the nature of good and evil particularly in relation to human sexuality with its great potential for good that yet appears insolubly tarnished. Although Augustine was greatly attracted to the chaste austerity of the Manichees and later the Neo-Platonists, their rhetoric tended to strike him as problematic, for in both systems the created world was given low status. For the Manichees the material cosmos was an embodiment of the Evil's campaign against the Good and for the Neo-Platonists the flesh was a shell to be discarded in the enlightened transmigration of the soul.

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procreation of new generations of citizens. This was conceived as the task of the general populace as the true Platonic philosopher sought "essentially the transformation from the sexual man to the wise man." Power, *Veiled Desire*, 36.

<sup>615</sup> Something he later attributes to the work of deluding demons, cf. *Civitate Dei* X.26; XIX.23.

<sup>616</sup> On the issue of sin and sexuality, Augustine represents a fine line between the perfectionism of the monastic communities, which were generally sympathetic to Pelagian ideals, and the general population of Christian laity. Augustine held to increasingly rigid personal standards as he progressed in the Christian life and examples such as Ambrose (cf. *Confessions*, VI.3.) pushed him further toward the position of clerical celibacy, but he allowed the lawful practice of sexuality among the laity so long as it was within the confines of marriage and for the express purpose of procreation while lust could only be satisfied as a lower (venial) sin. Cf. Hunter, "Marriage," 536.

Yet Augustine did not simply follow these trends but rather provided a more complex perspective on sexuality that synthesized it with Judeo-Christian cosmology. While purity remained a primary paradigm for Augustine, it was not the whole picture. Even as sexuality continued under the influence of the darkness of lust, it was not to be rejected entirely and must hold some proper function as part of the good creation considering proliferation is the first command given to humans in Genesis 1:28. This conviction is founded on the broader Judeo-Christian view, in contrast to both the Manicheans and Neo-Platonists, that creation is inherently good. Indeed, this principle serves as the basis for Augustine's theodicy which conceives of evil not as a separate principle but rather as a degradation or privation of good. This concept appears often in Augustine's writing, but his recurrent presentation of the issue in the *Civitate Dei* (City of God) is widely taken as the most classic and developed example:

For God is utterly incapable of any change or injury; and therefore the perversion which makes these 'enemies of God' resist him does harm to themselves, not to God, and it harms them simply because it does injury to the goodness of their nature. No nature is contrary to God; but a perversion, being evil, is contrary to good... It may be put this way: a fault cannot exist in the Highest Good, but it cannot exist except in some kind of good. Therefore good may exist on its own, but evil cannot.<sup>617</sup>

Unlike the Manicheans who taught that darkness had substance as the form of Evil, Augustine corrected this through the recognition that as darkness has no physical substance but is rather the absence of light, so too evil is not its own entity but rather the absence of goodness.<sup>618</sup> As God is the sole source for all that exists, and God is defined by the immutable attribute of goodness, thus creation must be good (as further evidenced by the divine proclamations of Gen 1 that claim as much). In this view, evil must be understood not outside the realm of goodness, but

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<sup>617</sup> Augustine, *Civitate Dei* XII.4. Also cf. *Against the Manichees* II.29.

<sup>618</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Civitate Dei* XI.11-19.

rather within it as a condition of deterioration. As with rust, rot, and decay, evil takes something whole and good and deprives it of its existence, with the ultimate result of destruction, for nothing evil can exist on its own. As with creation more generally, sexuality must therefore be considered by its nature good and not inherently sinful or evil, as the Manicheans taught.

To demonstrate this point, Augustine wrote rather extensively on the Genesis account and in particular on the nature and consequences of the primal or original sin. In his early (388/389) works on Genesis against Manichaeism, Augustine rejected attempts to dissociate the soul from the body, as was typical both of the Manicheans he polemicized and, more implicitly, the Neo-Platonists he praised. In contemplating the mud from whence Adam was created, Augustine writes, “we understand man in this place as made from body and soul... so the soul by vivifying the matter of the body forms it into a harmonious unity and does not allow it to fall into dissolution.”<sup>619</sup> Thus, even as the soul has the superior role by bringing life to the flesh, it is a harmony nonetheless, not cacophony as the Manicheans would have it nor discord as the Neo-Platonists teach. This harmony of soul and body is essential and good, but in the present age it is also fallen, thus there is discord indeed, but it was not created that way; it was perverted by sin.

Following his tendencies toward purity, Augustine spent a great deal of effort in his writing to elaborate on this fallen state. In the well-known and relatively early (401) work *de Bono Coniugali* (“On the Good of Marriage”) Augustine rather ironically writes at length of the problems of marriage and sexuality more generally, emphasizing therein the fallen status of the institution and its need for grace.<sup>620</sup> Even as he was keen to demonstrate that “the marriage of

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<sup>619</sup> Augustine, *On Genesis - Against the Manichees* II.8.

<sup>620</sup> Ironical in that a work devoted to the praise of marriage against its detractors actually concedes a great deal in the process and relegates marriage to a decidedly second-class status. What is left is a series of “goods” which are primarily practical and social in function: 1) social bonds and procreation, 2) fidelity, 3) sacramentum - holy sign. Cf. Hunter, “Marriage,” 535-6.

male and female is something good” as instituted by God, at the same time he denigrated the sexual element consistently thereby evidencing his Manichean and Neo-Platonist roots.<sup>621</sup> While Augustine indicated that companionship and fidelity are good in addition to the procreation of children for marriage, he did not extend such generous outlook to the sexual activity itself.<sup>622</sup> Instead, he praised married couples who make a choice for chastity before the infertility of old age has prompted it. Indeed, sexuality is presented as intrinsically damaged whereby God rescues it via the good of procreation, but apart from this there is nothing good about sexual intercourse in *de Bono* and Augustine goes so far as to praise a hypothetical wife who “endures unwillingly” the sexual advances of her husband in the hope that such a union might bring about children.<sup>623</sup> Such a vision of marital bliss may strike contemporary readers as cold and harsh, and indeed the question may be raised on what authority could Augustine write about ‘the good of marriage’ at this point in his life, given his past experiences?

The tumultuous sexual drives of Augustine’s youth gave way to a monogamous union with an unnamed concubine who gave birth to his only child, Adeodatus. Due to the sparsity of references by Augustine to this union, little can be known of the details. What can be said is that it was an acceptable practice in that culture for an upper-class male to take a lower-class wife,

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<sup>621</sup> Augustine, *de Bono Coniugali* 3.3. Augustine regularly indicated that the satisfaction of lust in marriage was sinful “not because you have enjoyed your partner, but because you have done so immoderately.” Sermon 278.9. It would seem then that enjoyment of sex is not sinful, rather it is the satisfaction of this additional immoderate lusting.

<sup>622</sup> Darl Ellis argues convincingly that one of Augustine’s hermeneutical problems in his approach through *de Bono* is its consistent and nearly singular emphasis on 1 Cor 7 with only minimal attention given to the more positive sacramental evaluation of Eph 5. “The Ambivalence and Lust of Marriage: with and beyond Augustine towards a theology of marriage as consecrated sacrifice.” *Scottish Journal Of Theology* 66, no. 1 (2013), 32. This skewed emphasis has, in turn, led scholars who focus too much on it for Augustine’s view of marriage to conceive of marriage almost exclusively in contractual terms rather than sacramental. Ibid, 42.

<sup>623</sup> *De Bono*, 5.5. Augustine follows this by decrying the sexual advances of husbands on their pregnant wives, 6.5. It should be noted that Augustine inherited a cultural perception of sexuality that considered it primarily for the gratification of the desires of the male upon the female as a passive receptacle. Power, *Veiled Desire*, 25-26.

but her rights to him were strictly limited and he maintained the legal and social ability to dismiss her at will.<sup>624</sup> And this was precisely what Augustine did during his time in Milan as he contemplated baptism and a proper Roman marriage. He writes painfully of the episode:

Meanwhile my sins multiplied. The woman with whom I habitually slept was torn away from my side because she was a hindrance to my marriage. My heart which was deeply attached was cut and wounded, and left a trail of blood. She had returned to Africa vowing that she would never go with another man. She left with me the natural son I had by her. But I was unhappy, incapable of following a woman's example, and impatient of delay. I was to get the girl I had proposed to only at the end of two years. As I was not a lover of marriage but a slave of lust, I procured another woman, not of course as wife... But my wound, inflicted by the earlier parting, was not healed.<sup>625</sup>

Certainly, the modern reader can empathize deeply with the experience Augustine recounts here (and marvel at his sincerity and honesty in publicly admitting as much). So too does it provide exceptional insight into his experiences with romantic love. While some may overemphasize the domineering role of Monica in this decision,<sup>626</sup> in reality Augustine was left with little choice if he wanted to progress in Roman society. "If he contemplated a suitable marriage or baptism or both, he had, in fact, a duty to remove her."<sup>627</sup> So too, it should be noted that Augustine admired the example set forward by his dismissed concubine; while she had no obligation to do so, she vowed chastity, a move he pitifully points out that he was unable to follow. Forced to wait for two years to enjoy the sexual use of his betrothed, Augustine shamefully procures another woman, not, as he recounts, as wife. The reasoning for this is clear:

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<sup>624</sup> Cf. Brown, *Augustine*, 50-52; Power, "Concubine/Concubinage," 222; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman North Africa*, 457.

<sup>625</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* VI.25.

<sup>626</sup> Cf. Power, "Concubine/Concubinage," 222.

<sup>627</sup> O'Meara, *Young Augustine*, 124.

he was a slave of lust rather than a lover of marriage. Just as disease eats away at flesh, so too there must be an element within the created goodness of sexuality that erodes its goodness.

### *The Nature and Role of Lust and Desire in Sexuality*

Given Augustine's innate tension concerning sexuality coupled with the devastating dismissal of his beloved concubine, one might speculate whether this person was properly equipped to write a treatise on the good of marriage. In light of this, it is less surprising that Augustine denigrated sexuality even within marriage and focused so much on the fallen aspects, famously considering sexual enjoyment for the fulfillment of lust a venial sin.<sup>628</sup> While he was rather consistent across his career as Christian bishop and polemicist that the problem with sexuality is lust, at the same time his own thought evolved rather significantly beyond his rather dour perspective in *de Bono Coniugali*.<sup>629</sup> Even as the regretted decision to abandon his concubine and additional pressure to accept celibacy (which, he noted, as practiced by Ambrose appeared to him as "painful")<sup>630</sup> left him ready to accept his life as bishop, it must be questioned whether he was in any state to provide positive evaluation of marriage, and indeed as the results show, he was not. Unfortunately, scholarship has tended to focus heavily if not often exclusively on his comments in *de Bono* (and a handful of sermons which have substantiating rhetoric) with

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<sup>628</sup> "Sexual relations for the satisfaction of lust were judged sinful even within marriage, though fidelity to the bond of marriage made this disorder a minor sin." J. Patout Burns Jr. and Robin M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 456. "Tellingly, this type of sexual union is never anything but sinful in Augustine's judgement. It constitutes a 'venial sin', forgiven on account of its marital context, which also wards off the mortal sins of 'adultery and fornication.'" Ellis, "Ambivalence," 36.

<sup>629</sup> Dour in respect that a text devoted to the topic of the good(s) of marriage instead provides a generally negative and secondary evaluation of the institution, focusing almost exclusively on its practical and social goods with minimal exposition on its sacred identity. Further, *de Bono* denigrates marriage as being of spiritually inferior status and goes so far as to indicate that the primary (or sole) reason a Christian would even contemplate marriage is that s/he is unable to conquer lust, cf. *de Bono* 10.10; Hunter, "Marriage," 536.

<sup>630</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* VI.3.

only secondary attention given to more developed works. This, in turn, has left a decidedly negative portrait which has been widely caricatured as distrustful of sexuality and overtly dismissive of marriage. This is clearly seen in the claim that “Augustine concluded that marriage, of itself, made no contribution to the Christian life.”<sup>631</sup> It is not surprising that one would arrive at this conclusion given the sort of invective that Augustine gives in *de Bono* but is this a warranted summary of Augustine’s developed view?<sup>632</sup>

Even as Augustine stands as one of the most prolific authors in human history, his work *De Civitate Dei* stands apart as a seminal work of philosophy, history, and theology. Completed in a serial format (much against his desires) over more than a decade, this fascinating and intimidating work presents the evolution of Augustine’s thinking on a wide variety of topics. In light of this, it will be demonstrated that Augustine’s perspective of sexuality and marriage should be determined primarily *not* on the basis of his work in *de Bono Coniugali*, as much of scholarship has done, but instead on the more developed *Civitate Dei*. This is seen most clearly in the fact that topics which Augustine avoided in the earlier work he answered in the later, specifically whether the pre-fallen humans would have procreated via sexual intercourse. It is not without some comedic irony that Augustine writes of this issue that “It would be tedious to inquire and to discuss which of these opinions is true” in *de Bono* while returning to the question to answer it in some detail in *Civitate Dei*.

Considering that the entire fourteenth book of *Civitate Dei* is constructed around the question of “how would they [the first humans] have produced children if they had remained

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<sup>631</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 474.

<sup>632</sup> It should be noted that while Burns and Jensen do demonstrate awareness of *Civitate Dei* they use it only sparingly and generally secondarily while regarding *de Bono* as their primary source for comments on the subject. Power points out that “later in *De Civitate Dei* he conceded that some duly controlled desire may have been present in Paradise, though he would prefer to think otherwise.” Power, *Veiled Desire*, 106. In general, scholarship has found little of positive value in Augustine’s views of sexuality and marriage.

without sin”,<sup>633</sup> it is necessary to understand the larger argument that advances Augustine’s mature theology on key points. In essence, the issue of pre-fallen sexuality drives at the heart of the nature of sin and its effects by contemplating sin’s function in the Fall and its consequences. Sin, for Augustine, originates in the soul or interior of a person as reflected in the choices of the will and thereby affects the external world through sinful actions and their results.<sup>634</sup> Thus, the essence of sin is the willful turning away from God’s judgment and replacing it with one’s own which is clearly evidenced in the falls of both the Devil and the first humans.<sup>635</sup>

But from whence does this evil will come? For Augustine, sin is the only aspect of creation not created by God; rather God created the conditions under which a will could choose to accept or reject divine sovereignty, and in both cases (the Devil and Adam/Eve) the will failed and turned evil by sinning.<sup>636</sup> Consequently, the “effect of that sin was to subject human nature to all the process of decay which we see and feel, and consequently to death also.”<sup>637</sup> The purpose for allowing this was to impress God’s good sovereignty on the minds of his created beings which desires “free service [that] was in that creature’s own interest.”<sup>638</sup> The fundamental cause of sin, pride, was then given free reign as just punishment by God against the rebellious creatures, and the consequence was the disease of lust, a universal condition of mortal humanity defined by an uncontrollable desire for domination.<sup>639</sup> This is felt most keenly in sexuality,

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<sup>633</sup> Augustine, *Civitate Dei* XIII.24.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid, XIV.3.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid, XIV.4.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid, XIV.11. This notion also led to the somewhat awkward claim that the Devil “made himself; for the devil was made by sinning, not by nature.” *On Genesis - Against the Manichees* II.28.

<sup>637</sup> Augustine, *Civitate Dei*, XIV.12.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid, XIV.15.

<sup>639</sup> Ellis argues that lust for Augustine refers to the broader concept of *libido dominandi* or the lust of



however, which is in Augustine's mind nearly completely ruled by lust as demonstrated through the lack of willful control over sexual organs.<sup>640</sup> Because of this loss of control, humanity became ashamed of its sexual organs and sought to hide them with clothing, and this sense of shame and guilt continues to pervade through social mores of modesty.<sup>641</sup> Thus Augustine returns to his original purpose, to answer whether sexuality would have existed in the sinless Edenic state. He writes:

There are, however, men at the present time who are evidently unaware of the bliss that existed in paradise. They suppose that children could not have been begotten except by the means with which they are familiar, namely, by means of lust, which, as we observe, brings a sense of shame even in the honorable state of matrimony... They assert that children would not have been born in paradise, but outside it, which is what in fact happened... For myself, however, I have no shadow of doubt that to increase and multiply and fill the earth in accordance with God's blessing is a gift of marriage, and that God instituted marriage from the beginning before man's Fall, in creating male and female... If anyone says that there would have been no intercourse or procreation if the first human beings had not sinned, he is asserting, in effect, that man's sin was necessary... It follows that, if there had been no sin, marriage would have been worthy of the happiness of paradise, and would have given birth to children to be loved, and yet would not have given rise to any lust to be ashamed of... Then why should we not believe that the sexual organs could have been the obedient servants of mankind, at the bidding of the will, in the same way as the other, if there had been no lust, which came in as the retribution for the sin of disobedience?<sup>642</sup>

Accordingly, the felt effect of lust is the dissociation between soul and body through the disobedience of the flesh to its master, the will of the soul. This serves, therefore, as a just

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mastery/domination. Daryl Ellis, "The Ambivalence and Lust of Marriage: with and beyond Augustine towards a theology of marriage as consecrated sacrifice." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66, no. 1 (2013): 38. Ellis' main contribution to the topic is a critique of Augustine's over-reliance on 1 Corinthians 7 as a hermeneutic of contractual obligations, instead holding up Ephesians 5 as a corrective to focus on the sacrifice and sacramentality of marriage.

<sup>640</sup> Augustine, *Civitate Dei*, XIV.16.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid, XIV.17-20. Sociologists may quibble with Augustine's somewhat narrow conceptions of modesty here, but the argumentation stands regardless in general outline if not in specific examples.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid, XIV.21-23. Apologies for the excessive quote but it is a condensation of a large and complex argument and bears witness in its primary form.

punishment by God precisely because it is symbolic of the disobedience of humanity, as the flesh (human) refused to do the bidding of the soul (God) so now humanity must feel this through the lack of control over the physical body, the warring of the flesh with the spirit. It must be remembered too that lust is not the sole privilege of the reproductive organs, but rather that they are the most distilled representative of its effects. Once again, this lust is a mirrored reflection of the original sin, born of pride, that seeks to replace the sovereignty of God with the mastery of the self (which leads, ironically, to being enslaved to sin). Specific to sexuality, it makes the flesh act of its own accord; rather than the soul having mastery over the flesh, too often it is reversed, which accords with common experience that sexual drives (libido) make people do stupid things.<sup>643</sup> Even further, the implantation of lust in the sexual experience also provides a vehicle for Augustine to explain how sin is transmitted between generations. All humanity was in seeded potential of the first humans and thus all sinned in and through them; this is passed on through the only way new humans are begotten: sexuality. Here Augustine gives a clear description of the process whereby human sexuality was twisted from being a powerful good of paradise into the ambivalent and dangerous reality of the contemporary dispensation.<sup>644</sup>

Yet one point continues to remain unclear in this line of argumentation: does sexuality persist after death in any meaningful fashion? Augustine appears at times to accept somewhat uncritically the assumption that the Synoptic saying that persons “will not be given in marriage nor will they marry” in the resurrected state equates to some sort of a-sexual existence.<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> Augustine would caution still that such indiscretions are still a product of the will which gives in, thus one is still responsible for one’s own actions regardless of the lusting of the flesh.

<sup>644</sup> Cavadini puts it well: “The heart that is configured by pride, that is, love of self over God, will take greatest pleasure in its own use of power... Such pleasures are not innocent and ultimately break down communion of persons rather than contribute to it.” John Cavadini, “The Sacramentality of Marriage in the Fathers,” *Pro Ecclesia* XVII, No. 4 (2008), 448.

<sup>645</sup> Treated in chapter three. Cf. Augustine, *Civitate Dei* XV.17.

Perhaps realizing his own ambivalence on the topic, Augustine addressed this issue directly, if only briefly, in the concluding book of *Civitate Dei* where he considered the heretical Gnostic notion that women would be changed into males in the eschaton<sup>646</sup> to which he responds:

Thus while all defects will be removed from those bodies, their essential nature will be preserved. Now a woman's sex is not a defect, it is natural. And in the resurrection it will be free of the necessity of intercourse and childbirth. However, the female organs will not subserve their former use; they will be part of a new beauty, which will not excite the lust of the beholder - there will be no lust in that life - but will arouse the praises of God for his wisdom and compassion, in that he not only created out of nothing but freed from corruption that which he had created.<sup>647</sup>

Thus, Augustine refines his vision of the afterlife in a rather peculiar manner, envisioning sexual organs as a form of adornment on the resurrection body that will no longer provide any use or function other than beauty. Yet is such a view warranted? Indeed, it is not. Augustine spent a significant amount of effort establishing a clear basis for considering the pre-fallen state to be inclusive of sexuality without the taint of lust; so why did he make this move in assuming that sexuality will cease entirely in the resurrection save as bodily adornment? From this passage a particular assumption of Augustine becomes clear in his description of female sexuality, that "it will be *free of the necessity* of intercourse and childbirth."<sup>648</sup> Couple this with the previously cited praise for a woman patiently enduring without pleasure the sexual advances of her husband and it becomes clear that while Augustine did make significant conceptual strides in his understanding of marriage and sexuality, he never quite came to terms with the activity of sexuality and continued to presume that it is primarily for the gratification of the male as taking

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<sup>646</sup> This is evidenced by the final saying of the Gospel of Thomas which concludes with Peter's rebuke of Mary that her femininity makes her unworthy followed by Jesus' claim that he will make her worthy by making her male (114).

<sup>647</sup> Augustine, *Civitate Dei* XXII.17.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid, emphasis added.

pleasure in the female (with the potential good of procreation and fidelity as proper bi-products). Thus, women will no longer be burdened with this necessity as sexual organs will be mere façades and no longer functional.

But is sexuality and progenation really the burden that Augustine makes it out to be?<sup>649</sup> Or did he fall victim to the same tendency to conceive of sexuality solely in light of present circumstances, which is precisely the error of those that claim sexuality did not exist prior to the Fall? Conceptually, Augustine laid the foundations for a more positive evaluation of sexuality through his defense of the state of sexual union in Eden prior to the Fall but was unable to follow his logic through to its ultimate conclusion. Perhaps it was his ascetic tendencies or his problematic sexual experiences that led him to these conclusions, but psychological evaluations of historical figures must remain anti-dogmatic in their assertions to be sure.<sup>650</sup> Even regardless of his motivation for doing so, what he concludes concerning the non-function of eschatological sexuality does not follow from his own conceptual development. While the relegation of resurrected sexuality to mere adornment most certainly fits with Augustine's predisposition to ascetic austerity and sexual purity as described above, his own theories concerning the resurrection body give precedence for challenging this conclusion. In *Civitate Dei* Augustine considered the comparison between the paradise state of Eden and the resurrected state. The primary distinction is that the first humans were not inherently immortal or otherwise

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<sup>649</sup> Again, the burdensome nature of sexuality implied by Augustine appears to be heavily determined by the Roman conceptions of sexuality prevalent in his culture. Women were the passive receptacles of both the sexual advances of men and mere incubators of embryos which were entirely derived from the male. In this sense, Augustine envisions a state where women are freed from the necessity of being said receptacles, but it remains questionable whether this cultural implication is accurate or whether it is overtly determined by patriarchal prejudices and thus untenable.

<sup>650</sup> Some small hint is provided in Semon 161.11 that a "greater love has imposed a greater burden on virgins" thus in some sense he feels it necessary to demonstrate the superiority of celibacy because of its greater challenge.

imperishable, as with the resurrection body, but rather their immortality was contingent on the miraculous nutrition of the tree of life.<sup>651</sup> Following from this, Augustine considered the question of whether resurrected bodies will need to eat or be capable of such, to which he answers:

The bodies of the righteous, after the resurrection, will not need any tree to preserve them against death from disease or from extreme old age, nor any material nourishment to prevent any kind of distress from hunger or thirst. This is because they will be endowed with the gift of assured and inviolable immortality, and *so they will eat only if they wish to eat; eating will be for them a possibility, not a necessity.*<sup>652</sup>

Within this recognition lies the essential rub, the point of incoherence in Augustine's claim that the resurrection body will be gendered but not sexual. Augustine could conceive of an Edenic state wherein sexuality could be experienced without the guilt and shame associated with lust, then for what reason does he conclude so simply that sexuality will cease to function in the eschaton? Augustine concluded that because the *need for procreation* will be past in the state of regeneration therefore the command to be fruitful and multiply will no longer apply.<sup>653</sup> While it might be granted that the need to procreate will pass away in the timelessness of the resurrection, even so, as Augustine writes here so clearly, eating will be an option but no longer a necessity as the body will no longer *need* the nourishment it offers. Thus, only the joy of eating, of partaking in the bountiful gift of a good creation, will remain, no more hunger, no more necessity. Why, then, can this logic not equally be applied to human sexuality particularly as expressed in the marriage union? If lust is, as Augustine described it, the obsessive desire to control and dominate

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<sup>651</sup> Augustine, *Civitate Dei*, XIII, 20.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid, XIII.22, emphasis added. Also cf. Sermon 242A.3, "Christ too, when he rose again, ate some food because he was able to, not because he needed to. There will be no hunger there."

<sup>653</sup> A claim itself that should be challenged on the basis of the rabbinic context for the phrase "like the angels" in reference to the resurrected state, which was conceived as one of total abundance, including new children/families, as discussed in chapter three.

which drives the hunger of the sexual drive, is it not possible that the great healer of humanity can work to cleanse lust and shame from sexuality both in the present through the fulfillment of marriage vows and in the resurrection through the purification of the renewed state?<sup>654</sup>

### *Living in the Shadow of Augustine's Legacy*

Of all the social covenants of human society, marriage stands alone in the Christian tradition due to its primacy in the Genesis account and remains the only social institution that predates the fall, as Augustine emphasized. At the same time, marriage has received its greatest challenges in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and it is of vital importance in the present age to consider the nature, foundations, and ultimate conclusion of the marriage covenant. To this end, the present study has demonstrated through the life and teachings of Augustine a deeply rooted ambivalence that is derived largely from a dialectic tension between the desire for purity and the search for love's fulfillment. Though the ascetic tendencies of his age impressed themselves on him deeply, Augustine did not simply follow his intellectual forebears, be they Manichean, Neo-Platonist, or Christian, in decrying sexuality as inherently sinful. Yet neither did he laud sexuality uncritically; rather, his position demonstrates a synthesis of ideas which allows for both the inherent goodness of sexuality and marriage as part of a wholly good creation while also explaining the negative characteristics as the degrading effects of lust. Even while this presentation of ideas provides a powerful and helpful corrective to either extreme, wholesale rejection or uncritical acceptance of sexuality, the question remains whether

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<sup>654</sup> It should also be noted that despite Augustine's general denigration of sexuality which has been the conceptual foundation of this study, he did also provide some positive teaching on marriage that demonstrated an advanced consciousness of gender relations, extolling men to live up to the standards and commitments practiced by their wives. "Wives preserve their chastity, while husbands are not prepared to do so." Sermon 132.2. No doubt Augustine's own failures following the dismissal of his beloved concubine contributed to this statement and his consistent advocacy against the looser sexual morals accepted for men at the time.

one should identify sexual desire entirely with this concept of lust, as Augustine himself seems often to do. At the same time, in envisioning the state of the pre-fallen humans, Augustine argues forcefully for a view that allows for sexuality without the taint of lust.

Thus, one might pose the question whether this lust-less copulation was also desirous in any way.<sup>655</sup> As argued above, Augustine also laid the foundation for a fuller view of the resurrected state with his comments on eating. Even as the necessity of hunger and nutrition are removed, the resurrected body is still capable of eating, but why? For the sole enjoyment of the act itself. Not to scratch an itch, so to speak, nor feed a hunger, but just for the joy of eating. Augustine demonstrates all the pieces necessary to complete a picture of the resurrection which leaves a tentative door open to the notion that sexuality will not be abolished entirely, but rather purged of lust. So too, this allows for a potential view of marriage which Augustine himself was unable to picture; while he praised the joyless sex of the dutiful wife submitting herself to the advances of her husband in the hope for children,<sup>656</sup> contemporary Christians may instead conceive of the marriage bed itself as the place for sexual transformation that points toward the perfected bliss of the eschaton. Thus, in marriage, and only there, can the practice of sexuality attain the fullness God intended for it through sacred commitment in the love of the other instead of merely the fulfillment of one's own lusting.

Even so, contemporary Christians must also beware of simply rejecting Augustine's preference for chastity out of a misguided sense of modern liberation from prior sexual mores. In an age addicted to sexuality, laced deeply with the narcotics of lust in advertising, media, and

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<sup>655</sup> As noted above, Augustine leaves room for this option particularly in Sermon 278 that cites that it is not the enjoyment (desire) of sexuality with a spouse that is wrong, it is the immoderation of the act. Implicitly this indicates that sexual desire in proper moderation (free of lust) would cease to be wrong.

<sup>656</sup> This bears, it might be remarked, significant similarity to his understanding of his mother's marriage to his father.

cultural expressions, Augustine offers a helpful reminder that while God does look upon sexuality as a good of creation, the Lord does not do so uncritically. So, it is that in a world which prides itself on its unrestrained sexual expression, the very embodiment of sin, that Christian marriage offers the one and only mode of meaningful expression that allows the individual to partake, at least partially, in the wholesome goodness of sexuality as God intended it, from Eden to the eschaton. Everything that is not pleasing to God is allowed to exist for now, for the moment which is passing away:

And so, whatever the physical or seminal causes that play their part in the production of living things, by the activities of angels or of men, or by the intercourse of male and female in animals or human beings... It remains true that only God most high can create the actual natures which are thus affected in different ways, each in its own kind. His hidden power, penetrating all things by its presence, yet free from contamination, gives existence to whatever in any way exists, in so far as it exists at all. For the absence of God's creative activity would not merely mean that a thing would be different in some particular way; it simply could not exist.<sup>657</sup>

Augustine gives contemporary Christians a powerful insight into the aim and goal of marriage (and existence more generally). Not only does marriage provide humanity with the only acceptable exercise of sexuality, it also has the potential to create love that will transcend the ages into the eternal bliss of the resurrection, both in the exchange of loving embrace between faithful spouses as well as the potential for begetting beloved children thereby. Thus, in a world obsessed with its own measures, God has clearly laid out a plan that has existed even before humanity fell to our own desires and judgments, and it was this plan that Augustine held as the image of goodness in a corrupted world. The corruption, however, is limited to the present age; so one may ask of Christian marriage, when the corruption and lust for domination has been shed and cast off, will there be anything left? That is a question that every Christian spouse must ask

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<sup>657</sup> Augustine, *Civitate Dei* XII.26.



for him/herself.

Despite this nuanced and complex foundation for a positive evaluation of sexuality and marriage, the Augustinian synthesis gave way in the late medieval era to the rise of Scholasticism and the reinvigoration of Aristotelean methods that asked essentially empirical questions of theological issues. Given the social prevalence of marriage and its historical affiliation, as described above, with the early sacramental tradition, it would come to be listed by the Scholastics as an official sacrament of the Roman Church. The definitions they crafted, however, introduced foreign and untenable ideas that resulted in perversions to which the early Reformers reacted, whereby marriage's sacramental status became a casualty of their conflict.

### **SCHOLASTICISM AND PROTESTANT REFUTATIONS**

With the extensive library of Augustine serving as the theoretical foundations of the emergent medieval Roman Catholic religio-cultural synthesis, the essential outlines of sacramental theology had been established in the debates with Donatism and Pelagianism. Baptism and Eucharist served as the core of the Christian ritual identity and functioned as visible signs of the movement of invisible grace. It was not the working of the officiant or communicant in the sacramental rite that effected the transference of grace in this system; rather, the ritual elements signified the singular offering of Christ on behalf of humanity universal. The sacrament was conceived by Augustine as consisting of multiple layers, including the material elements, the province of the Church, which were intended to reflect the faith of the communicant in accepting the invisible salvation of Christ. An individual entered the Christian community through the gateway of baptism, while the regular enactments of the Eucharist reflected ongoing participation in the work of the Church serving the world as the body of Christ.

This totalizing sacramental theology allowed for the complete transfusion into culture by the Church in the medieval Catholic system, whereby every stage of life was essentially baptized by the Christian faith. Marriage was thereby accorded a definitive sacramental role in the conduct of the Church in forming the most fundamental bonds of society. Initially, however, regional cultural distinctions had meant that observances of sacramental rites, including marriage, were conducted with considerable localized variations. By the logic of Augustine, it is not the ritual itself that saves, so there is no need to require specific elements be offered for a sacrament to be effective; rather, the essence of the sacrament is found not in the material signs but instead in the faith of the participants in the universally offered grace of Christ. While still striving for essential theological foundations to be universal to the Church against heresies, Augustine did not generally seek to mandate universal ritual requirements on the basis that Christ works in all settings and among all peoples, so regional variations should be allowed and expected. However, as the Roman pontificate took increasing social powers in the wake the barbarian invasions of Rome and the political-social divisions with Constantinople, the systemization of medieval Western Christianity had begun. This progressive centralization of power in the Roman See resulted in the development of canon legalism which increasingly mandated specific criteria for the implementation of the sacramental rites, which would reach its pinnacle in the Scholastic movement of the late medieval period. Through the integration of rediscovered Aristotelean principles, the Scholastics debated concerning the specific causative relationships involved in the dispensing of sacraments which in turn led to the refutations of the Reformers. As a consequence of the problematic Scholastic formulas, it shall be argued that the Protestant backlash swung too far in the opposing direction; in rejecting marriage as a sacrament, its theological value was decidedly impugned, resolving in a legacy that opened the door to tacit

acceptance of divorce, and an ultimately inadequate understanding of the role of marriage in the Church.

### *Scholastic Systemization*

In the wake of the barbarian invasions of Italy and northern Africa in the early fifth century, the context of Augustine's tenure as bishop of Hippo, the Eastern and Western segments of Christianity drifted apart, particularly in cultural respects due to the separation of civic powers resultant from Byzantine's general abandonment of the Roman homeland. The Catholic leadership, particularly Gregory the Great, had to reform its role in society through the rapid expansion of political function, especially through influencing monarchical succession. As Catholicism became increasingly standardized, it was Augustine whom the ecclesial leaders relied upon for conceptual and systemic foundations. In particular, early Medieval Catholicism conceived that the role of the Church was to imbue otherwise mundane living with the presence of the living Lord.<sup>658</sup> The main mechanism for this process was the establishment of a series of practices adopted from the general framework of social ritual – from birth to death, and everything in between, every celebration and every cause to mourn, all of it was baptized in a conceptual sense in the name of Christ. In this way, sacrament served for centuries as the basis of the role of the Church in the world and followed closely the formulations of Augustine.

All of this changed rather remarkably with the rise of the academic system and the development of Scholasticism. With the Western European re-discovery of Aristotle, the philosophical systems of Catholic Christianity were inexorably altered along fundamental methodological lines. Augustine was a prime example of the height of late antiquity Latin

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<sup>658</sup> Cf. Martos, *Doors*, 48.

education and heavily influenced by Neo-Platonism which had incorporated certain key ideas from Aristotelean philosophy while still maintaining an essentially transcendentalist stance in line with Plato.<sup>659</sup> Accordingly, the fundamental deductive framework had been inherited by Augustine; this is especially evident in the basic metaphor of the magisterial *De Civitate Dei* (City of God) which divides the present earthly reality from the transcendent heavenly abode in a manner demonstrative of the Platonic method. At the base of this is the absolute distinction between human and deity, finite and infinite;<sup>660</sup> accordingly, perfect knowledge exists only for God. The perceived world is a reflection of the mind and design of God, but it is at present as through a mirror darkly.<sup>661</sup> Faith is the requisite key for unlocking true knowledge of the divine, but this knowledge was always limited by nature of the present mortal coil. Writing of the tension of divine hiddenness and revelation, Augustine writes:

However, when we reach that judgment of God... then it will become plain that God's judgments are perfectly just... At that day too, it will become evident by what just decision of God it comes about that at this present time so many, in fact almost all, of the just judgments of God are hidden from mortal perception and understanding. However, in this matter one thing is not hidden from the faith of the devout; that that is, that what is hidden is just.<sup>662</sup>

The functional epistemological presupposition herein is the inherent limitation of human knowledge concerning divinity thereby suggesting an innate skepticism toward the claims of the sensory world as being incomplete without the rational and transcendent reality that stands

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<sup>659</sup> The Neo-Platonists would not have recognized this nomenclature which is a differentiation of contemporary historical scholarship, rather they would simply have understood themselves as Platonists who “purported to be a revival of Platonism, but was in fact a synthesis of Platonic, Aristotelean, Stoic, and Pythagorean elements.” O’Meara, *Young Augustine*, 130.

<sup>660</sup> This notion is inherited into Reformed theology in the Calvinistic phrase “the infinite qualitative distance between God and humanity”.

<sup>661</sup> “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” 1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV.

<sup>662</sup> Augustine, *Civitate Dei* XX.2.

behind the material which gives it form. Even as the divine is beyond human perception unaided through revelation, unlocked by faith, the Christian is able to trust that the workings of salvation, otherwise hidden, are “just”. Accordingly, Augustine’s theology was confident in the promises of salvation, and provided a strong conceptual structure, demonstrated above, concerning the role of the sacramental rites in the Church, yet even so, he remained committed to the inscrutability of divine will which remains always beyond the grasp of mortal minds. It was precisely this epistemic humility which was eroded by the Scholastic tradition in their quest to define the precise causative mechanisms involved in the processes of salvation through integrating inductive methods from the rediscovered works of Aristotle.

Even as Aristotle did not outright deny the transcendent Forms of Socratic-Platonic philosophy,<sup>663</sup> his inductive methodology gave conceptual preference to the role of experience in the acquisition of knowledge. Rather than the Form of Good<sup>664</sup> giving shape to every good action (the Platonic position), Aristotle argued that the definition of “goodness” emerges from analogous experiences that fit a general preferable association.<sup>665</sup> This inductive methodology would gradually be assimilated (and thereby subjugated) via the Neo-Platonists mentioned above

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<sup>663</sup>As Socrates left no written record, it is difficult to separate his positions from those of his disciple Plato, who gave systematic shape to the queries of his teacher.

<sup>664</sup> Capitalization here denotes the notion of the absolute Idea/Form which cannot be experienced but can be known.

<sup>665</sup> “What sort of goods would one call good in themselves? Is it those that are pursued even when isolated from others, such as intelligence, sight, and certain pleasures and honours? Certainly, if we pursue these also for the sake of something else, yet one would place them among things good in themselves. Or is nothing other than the Idea of good good in itself? In that case the Form will be empty. But if the things we have named are also things good in themselves, the account of the good will have to appear as something identical in them all, as that of whiteness is identical in snow and in white lead. But of honour, wisdom, and pleasure, just in respect of their goodness, the accounts are distinct and diverse. The good, therefore, is not some common element answering to one Idea. But what then do we mean by the good? It is surely not like the things that only chance to have the same name. Are goods one, then, by being derived from one good or by all contributing to one good, or are they rather one by analogy?” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross, I.6., accessed 5/19/17, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>.

in the time of Augustine, but with the rediscovery of Aristotelean manuscripts by the late-medieval Scholastics, inductive and essentially empirical methods gained sudden prominence.<sup>666</sup> The migration of Aristotelianism into medieval theology was focused in the Dominican order and came to its pinnacle formulation in the exhaustive writings of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>667</sup> An essential shift between the methods of Augustine and Aquinas, which in turn contributed to the voluminous innovations of the latter, was on the specific nature of the function or efficacy of salvation and the role of the Church therein. As described above, Augustine had been quite consistent on the point against both Donatists and Pelagians that it was God alone that saved the sinner; it was by no human work, either by the actions of the individual or of the Church, but solely the activity of God, specifically of Christ on the Cross, whereby salvation is effected; while Aquinas agreed in principle, he and the Scholastics still sought to define the specific processes whereby salvation was offered.

Even as Augustine insisted on the efficacy of salvation by divine prerogative alone, the precise mechanism whereby this was effected was not enumerated, and for good reason. The very nature of faith itself was opposed to the idea that humans could completely comprehend the divine mysteries involved in the providence of salvation. Though Augustine was by no means anti-intellectual, much the opposite, yet he also maintained a specific and consistent humility that prevented him from asking questions of the divine process which are beyond purely human answers. It was precisely this issue which the Scholastic Aristotelian method overturned by their utilization of the inductive methodology which sought to understand cause-effect relationships

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<sup>666</sup> To be clear, Aquinas sought to create what he believed was a synthesis position between the deductive and inductive methods, as particularly evidenced throughout the *Summa* which consistently pits the two positions against one another and seeks to find a synthetic medium (thereby also prefiguring the rise of dialectic method to replace the transcendental and empirical traditions of the Platonic/Aristotelean divide).

<sup>667</sup> Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan. *The Christian Tradition vol. 3* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 268-307.

via analogous experiences. Specific to the issue of the sacraments, the Scholastics moved well beyond the scope of Augustine by seeking to understand the precise formula involved in their invocation. Between Augustine and Aquinas, there had arisen in Catholic Christianity a series of seven rites that were given special preference and consideration, coming into specific enumeration in the writings of the Scholastic Peter Lombard who claimed that these rites were “causes as well as signs of grace, and this made them different from sacramental (*sacramentalia*) which were signs but not causes of grace.”<sup>668</sup> This language of causation was the inevitable result of the Aristotelean emphases which sought to understand cause-effect relationality as the primary epistemological foundation in contrast to the deductive Platonic transcendentalism which had been foundational to Augustine.

Having opened the door to further investigation, the Scholastics took to Aristotelianism rather as adventurers seizing upon newly discovered treasure, whereby inductive methods allowed for a new set of questions not previously treated. As it related to the sacraments, they were conceived not merely as signs but also causes of grace. The phrase which developed out of this Scholastic inquiry was “that the effects of the sacraments were caused *ex opera operato*, literally “by the work worked,” or “from the doing of the thing done”.<sup>669</sup> While the theoretical basis of this phrase in the Scholastic usage still followed Augustine, that the work done in the sacrament was the work of Christ on the cross, even still the investigation did not stop there.<sup>670</sup> Rather the question remained, what are the necessary conditions in order for this work to be received? Thus, “the sacraments always offered or caused grace but it was not always

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<sup>668</sup> Martos, *Doors*, 51.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>670</sup> Scholastics differentiated three aspects or realities involved in the sacrament: the sign (*sacramentum tantum*), the reality (*res tantum*), and their synthesis (*sacramentum et res*), which was similar to, but not identical with, Augustine’s tripartite definition of sacramental rites discussed above.

received.”<sup>671</sup> This led, in turn, to the development by canon lawyers to consider when sacraments were legitimate or not, concluding with four requirements: proper matter, form, minister, and intention; if any aspect of the rite was incomplete then the sacrament was not effective.<sup>672</sup>

The key problem with this conceptual shift in the wake of Scholasticism was that it asked of the sacraments improper questions and thereby arrived at invalid conclusions. Augustine had been clear in his refutations of the Donatists and Pelagians that salvation was entirely divine work and even as the Scholastics agreed with this in theory, Aristotelean methods opened the door to investigations that resulted in a calcification of ecclesiology that began to consider the sacraments as the possession of the Church and thus the salvation they effected were as well. It was this soteriological point of contention that fueled the refutations of the Magisterial Reformers; yet even as they corrected the legalist tendencies of Medieval Catholicism, they also inherited untenable assumptions from Scholasticism that corrupted their sacramental theologies.

### *Reformation Refutations*

With the rise of Scholastic theology, the Catholic tradition integrated an essentially inductive mode of inquiry into its ecclesiology which rendered the sacraments as causes rather than signs of grace.<sup>673</sup> Salvation, accordingly, increasingly became understood as the possession of the Church as its singular purveyor. Even as Augustine had worked hard against the Donatists to establish that Christ works both in and out of the orthodox churches to effect grace in the world, such that even heretics might be saved since perfect theological knowledge is

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<sup>671</sup> Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 67.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid. For example, if a partner in marriage withheld consent, then the marriage was annulled.

<sup>673</sup> It is instructive to note that Eastern Orthodoxy, as discussed above, maintained the mysterious qualities of the sacrament and never attempted a systematic formulation of their inner workings as developed by the Scholastics.



unattainable, this was effectively compromised by the Scholastic tradition through the introduction of inductive methodology which sought answers that were by their nature beyond empirical investigation. The conclusions of the canon legalists thereby maximalized the role of the Church in salvation in an untenable fashion which, in turn, bred the unrest undergirding the Reformation.

The role of the sacraments in the development of the Reformation is considerable and pervasive, as many of the initial protests as well as the resulting schisms were along lines concerning the role and administration of the sacraments. The Anabaptist tradition, for example, was defined principally, though not solely, according to its rejection of pedo-baptism. Divisions between Reformers also regularly flowed along sacramental lines, such as the well-known distinctions among the Magisterial Reformers, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, concerning the functionality of the Eucharist resulting in views labeled as Transubstantiation or Consubstantiation. The sacraments featured as the principle base upon which Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520)<sup>674</sup> followed, as he examined each sacrament in turn and identified what he perceived to be the violations of tradition by medieval Catholicism.<sup>675</sup> Luther defended the sacramental nature of three of the seven as numbered by the Scholastics: Eucharist, baptism, and penance. Heavily influenced by Augustine, Luther was consistent that a principle perversion of the medieval Catholic tradition was its over-emphasis on the sign as effective of grace: "For in every sacrament the sign as such is of far less importance than the

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<sup>674</sup> Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, 167-293.

<sup>675</sup> Of the central importance of this document in Protestantism James White writes, "*The Babylonian Captivity* stands as the most important single treatise shaping all Protestant sacramental life. Though frequently not acknowledging the source, virtually all Protestant theologians reflect the treatise's main points." *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 17.

thing signified.”<sup>676</sup> Even while recognizing this, Luther’s consequent denials of the remaining four sacraments (confirmation, marriage, ordination, last rites) demonstrates a problematic inheritance from the Scholastic tradition. The central issue which Luther, and the Reformation more broadly, assumed was that the discussion of whether a ritual was properly considered a sacrament was defined by whether or not that activity was an active component in imparting salvation. As Luther offered in his cursory dismissal of confirmation, “Still, these things cannot be called sacraments of faith, because there is no divine promise connected with them, neither do they save; but sacraments do save those who believe the divine promise.”<sup>677</sup>

The very idea that sacraments are those activities which save a person is at its root an untenable notion inherited from the Scholastic tradition. Even as Luther, and the Reformation more generally, condemned the legalism of Medieval Catholicism, it continued to assume that the sacrament was, properly understood, the vehicle or instrumental cause (to use the Aristotelian category employed by Aquinas) of salvation, even if there was an increased emphasis on faith as the operative mechanism for deployment rather than strict ritualism as associated with medieval canon law. Accordingly, life activities that were not considered essential or directly correlative to salvation, narrowly understood, were stripped of their sacramental status. While the Reformers were right to reject the Scholastic conclusions concerning the sacraments, at the same time their rejection was not nearly radical enough, as it assumed that sacraments were the instrumental vehicles of salvation rather than symbolic reenactments signifying the eternal and universal.<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>676</sup> Luther, “Babylonian Captivity” 2.12.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid, 5.3.

<sup>678</sup> Zwingli’s memorialist view of Eucharist, adopted widely in Baptist traditions, emphasizes the symbolic aspect to be sure, but in its attempt to resist superstitions rejects actual spiritual involvement in the rite itself, leaving it merely as a memorandum of the last supper. This de-spiritualization has led, as it is widely noted in Baptist ecclesial commentaries, to a de-emphasis on Eucharist and its lessened importance in liturgy.

This misappropriation of Scholastic methodology further accounts for the subsequent schisms as the Reformers could not find agreement as to the efficacy of the sacrament.<sup>679</sup> Was the bread miraculously turned into the body of Christ when taken in the Eucharist or was the form of the bread changed while the accidents remained constant, or maybe the whole thing was just a memorial?<sup>680</sup> Yet the uniting presupposition undergirding these divisions was the instrumental method of the Scholastic that sought to understand the precise cause-effect relationship involved in the administration and reception of the sacrament serving thereby as the vehicle of grace. Even as Luther rightly recognized that the emphasis should be on the reality which stands behind the sign, the Aristotelian assumptions of the Scholastics lived on in the Reformation through the rejection of the other five sacraments as well as the schisms over the proper nature of the two remaining sacraments.

In evaluating the relative value of the medieval worldview, contemporary interpreters must be wary of uncritically accepting the caricature developed from the Protestant reactions against the abuses of medieval Catholicism. At the heart of the medieval perspective was the totalizing Christendom of Augustine whereby the salvation of Christ flowed as a river through every aspect of life, from birth to death. Every occasion for praise or mourning was effectively baptized into the Christian Gospel through liturgy and ritual that consistently reminded every Christian of their total and utter dependence on the grace of Christ. This was the original essence of the concept of sacrament, the integration of the sacred into the mundane, as an infusion of the Gospel of grace into the difficulties of everyday life. Even as the Protestants rightly rejected the

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<sup>679</sup> Even as they generally agreed in reducing their number to two as most Protestants did not follow Luther in accepting Penance as a legitimate sacrament, which was also dropped by Lutheranism.

<sup>680</sup> Zondervan's title *Four Views on the Lord's Supper* ed. John Armstrong (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) is a helpful introduction to the main lines of division concerning the efficacy of the Eucharist meal.

legalism of Medieval Catholicism, their rejections were unfortunately founded on categories inherited from the Scholastics which asked the wrong questions, and resulted increasingly in the wrong answers.

The sixteenth century in Catholic Europe was a time of great cultural change, as the long-standing power base of Rome was challenged both politically and theologically by the Northern Europeans centered in the Germanic and later English lands. The Reformation was sustained politically by the increasing sense of nationalism in the northern lands which caused the Teutonic and Angle rulers to question their reliance on the Holy Roman Empire supported by the papacy. In the midst of this, Martin Luther inexorably altered history with his public renouncements of many of the medieval Catholic practices which led ultimately to the Reformation. Within this historical current, Luther was the first to reject openly the Catholic formulations concerning marriage, particularly the formulas of the Scholastics. Luther was himself an Augustinian monk, and so it was only natural that during his early career he followed Augustine's thinking on many subjects including marriage. The first clear indication of turning away from the Augustinian position on marriage can be found in his *Babylonian Exile of the Church* (1520) which questioned specifically the legitimacy of translating *mysterion* into *sacramentum* and claims the association by Paul in Ephesians is a mere allegory:

Now we nowhere read that he who marries a wife will receive any grace from God; neither is there in matrimony any sign of divine institution, nor do we anywhere read that it was appointed of God to be a sign of anything; although it is true that all visible transactions may be understood as figures and allegorical representations of invisible things. But figures and allegories are not sacraments, in the sense in which we are speaking of sacraments.<sup>681</sup>

Here Luther argued that there is no clear biblical precedent for connecting marriage to

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<sup>681</sup> Martin Luther, "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (1520), cited by Buitendag, "Marriage in the Theology of Martin Luther", 449.

salvation and thus summarily dismissed the Ephesians text, even if indirectly, as mere allegory and not indicative of marriage being commensurate to salvific signs of grace.<sup>682</sup> Further, he goes so far as to claim that marriage has no “sign of divine institution”, thus abrogating the generally held position that Adam and Eve serve to indicate the divine inauguration of marriage.

Consequently, Luther conceived of marriage as functioning within his two kingdoms paradigm, such that there is an earthly and heavenly realm.<sup>683</sup> Marriage was concluded by Luther to be entirely a matter of the earthly realm with no ultimate consummation in salvation and thus was not a sacrament.<sup>684</sup> Yet Luther’s argument that marriage is not linked with salvation<sup>685</sup> is rather speculative considering the many biblical references to marriage in spiritual and even salvific terms beyond Ephesians, as demonstrated throughout the present study. In light of the regular use of marriage as denoting the relationship between God and Israel in the Hebrew Bible and the ministry of Jesus, which included direct teaching confirming marriage while condemning divorce, Luther’s claim is at best debatable. Even further, his argument that the Ephesians text is

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<sup>682</sup> Luther even goes so far as to suppose that the sacramental claim itself is the product of weakness and ignorance, “Let then matrimony be a figure of Christ and the Church, not however a sacrament divinely instituted, but one invented in the Church by men led astray by their ignorance alike of things and of words. So far as this invention is not injurious to the faith, it must be borne with in charity; just as many other devices of human weakness and ignorance are borne within the Church, so long as they are not injurious to faith and to the sacred writings.” Luther, “Babylonian Captivity” (1520), 6.9.

<sup>683</sup> The two kingdoms idea was one set forward initially by Augustine in his treatise *Civitate Dei* but was further elaborated by Luther such that the earthly realm is fated to pass away and be absorbed entirely by the heavenly realm. By assigning marriage to the earthly, the consequence is that it is fated to pass away in the consummation of history and has no functional place in the heavenly realm save as a memory of the prior state.

<sup>684</sup> Buitendag, “Marriage in the Theology of Martin Luther,” 452-453. Johnson points out further that this theoretical trajectory opened the door to looser acceptance of divorce due to Luther’s consequent rejection of the long standing Catholic tradition of indissolubility, Johnson, “Marriage as Covenant in Early Protestant Thought,” 127.

<sup>685</sup> It should be remembered that Luther was specifically rejecting the medieval Catholic conception of sacrament and the ritual administration as primary to its efficacy but regardless the effect is the same: marriage is separated from Grace and therefore disconnected from salvation. Further, his points concerning the efficacy of faith in the administration of Grace as central over and above ritual proscriptions was apt for the time, but contemporary Catholicism has modified its position greatly and is more amenable to this position today.

mere allegory ultimately follows from an *a priori* conclusion concerning marriage. Thus, if one already believes that scripture does not link marriage and salvation, then the Ephesians text will seem as mere allegory. Unfortunately, despite these severe conceptual difficulties, Luther's basic conclusion that marriage is entirely a matter of the present earthly existence has been tremendously influential on Protestant theologians through to this day.

So too did John Calvin adopt a generally congruent position to Luther concerning marriage as an aspect of the earthly realm,<sup>686</sup> thus not an aspect of salvation and thereby not sacramental. However, unlike Luther who remained largely a spiritual figure with only secondary political associations,<sup>687</sup> Calvin's great experiment in Geneva<sup>688</sup> meant that he had to figure out how to institute the Protestant perspective on marriage into a real life legal structure.<sup>689</sup> The central defining goods of marriage for Calvin were once again taken from Augustine, namely procreation, fidelity, and sanctity.<sup>690</sup> Procreation was conceived as the basis for the community or state, another element of the earthly realm, marital fidelity was the divine answer to the natural sinful tendency toward concupiscence,<sup>691</sup> and sanctity was understood not sacramentally but

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<sup>686</sup> This shows through particularly early on with Calvin as he initially took the position that the Church should not wield any political authority over marriage, as it was entirely an earthly or secular matter, although as it will be shown below, he did not maintain this position as he was increasingly called upon to define marriage socially and legally as well as theologically.

<sup>687</sup> This is not to say that Luther did not have any contact with politics, but he certainly never wielded the sort of legislative authority that Calvin would in Geneva.

<sup>688</sup> For an exhaustive survey of Calvin's evolving legislation concerning marriage in Geneva cf. John Witte Jr., "Between Sacrament and Contract: Marriage as Covenant in John Calvin's Geneva." *Calvin Theological Journal* 33, no. 1 (April 1, 1998): 9-75.

<sup>689</sup> Witte points out that Calvin initially insisted that the church had no business in making legal policies concerning the *adiaphoria* (secondary things) including marriage, but as disputes arose he was forced into shaping policies concerning marriage. Witte, "Between Sacrament and Contract," 19.

<sup>690</sup> *Sacramentum* was conceived no longer as a ritual but instead as the love between spouses as being sanctified by God but this element was less developed likely at least partially due to its connotations of Catholic ritual function.

<sup>691</sup> Therefore, this is another element obviated in the eschaton when lust is no longer a hindrance. This

rather covenantally.<sup>692</sup> In regards the legal basis of marriage, Calvin was clear: sexual function. The reasoning followed that the lack of sexual function would obviate all three of the purposes of marriage and this came to its radical conclusion in the legal proscriptions of Calvin in Geneva that only sexually active and potentially fertile marriages were legitimate.<sup>693</sup> Consequently, Calvin allowed for the annulment of marriages that did not fit these conditions whereby a husband could separate from his wife on the grounds that she was not sexually forthcoming, so-called frigidity, or because she had passed the age of childbearing.<sup>694</sup> While Calvin certainly intended well in establishing these precedents, the result was an unmistakable trajectory toward the easy acceptance of divorce and the submitting of marriage over to secular culture to define.

While Calvin's focus on marriage as a sacred covenant arbitrated by God to provide the foundation for human society is certainly a positive teaching,<sup>695</sup> his typical approach of taking a concept to its most radical and ultimate conclusion demonstrated the problems with the focus on procreation via sexual function as the central purpose of marriage.<sup>696</sup> For those that are unable to have children or be sexually active, Calvin's decrees are clearly too harsh and systematically

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teaching follows from a reading of 1 Cor 7:2 that emphasizes marriage as a remedy to sexual immorality.

<sup>692</sup> Johnson, "Marriage as Covenant in Early Protestant Thought," 128-129.

<sup>693</sup> "Sexual dysfunction, Calvin insisted, was an absolute barrier to marriage, for it vitiated all three purposes of marriage... Calvin called for automatic annulment of any marriage of a permanently dysfunctional party." Witte, "Between Sacrament and Covenant," 49.

<sup>694</sup> While Calvin was certainly not supportive of divorce, he took his own precedents to their ultimate conclusions (as was his way) which resulted in this strange proscription allowing for annulment on very subjective (and ultimately unverifiable) grounds. How would a court of law know whether a person was infertile or frigid exactly?

<sup>695</sup> It should also be noted that this teaching is certainly not unique to Calvin or Christianity. The Stoics taught a remarkably similar perspective on the nature and role of marriage.

<sup>696</sup> It is also questionable whether the logic is sound concerning lack of sexual activity being a definite negation of the fidelity and sanctity of a marriage. There are certainly marriages that continue to exhibit these virtues even when sexual activity is impossible due to injury or infirmity.

deficient. To define marriage in such narrow terms loses a great deal of the meaning of the institution and certainly loses the special and sacred meaning of the relationship hinted at by Paul and the other biblical writers. Thus, while Calvin offers some valuable teaching concerning the covenantal nature of marriage, his radical conclusions must summarily be dismissed as inadequate and problematic. Ultimately, the teachings of Luther and Calvin, theological and legal, led to the problematic legacy in Protestantism that minimalizes the theological value of marriage and largely acquiesces its definition to secular perspectives.

### *Consequences of De-sacramentalization in the Protestant Tradition*

The legacies of the classical Reformers were greatly influential in the diversification of the Protestant movement, which in the nineteenth century entered a new phase with the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher, widely considered the originator of Liberal Protestantism. Luther's writings and the precedents of Geneva reigned as dominant in Protestant discussions of marriage and Schleiermacher continued the trend with his own particular additions.<sup>697</sup> Already by his time the debate over sacraments had become generally presupposed by both sides, the Catholics continued to number the sacraments as seven while Protestants typically restricted them to two, baptism and Eucharist, with some traditions eschewing the sacrament nomenclature entirely, preferring instead the language of "ordinances", following Zwingli's memorialist view. While Schleiermacher had very little to say specifically on the topic of sacrament and even less on marriage, he did lay out a clear, if brief, argument in *The Christian Faith*:

Marriage was only brought in because Scripture uses of it the term 'mystery' which the term 'sacrament' displaced; but not only had it as a permanent state no

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<sup>697</sup> While beyond the scope of the present study to develop fully, the Anglican Church, it should be remembered, was formed at least partially by the desire of Henry VIII to divorce his wives which fits this trajectory as well.



similarity to our two ordinances...but in addition it has no place here because as a divine moral institution it has existed from the beginning quite irrespective of the mission of Christ.<sup>698</sup>

In many regards, the legacy of Luther is clearly evidenced in Schleiermacher, as he made four essential arguments herein of remarkable similarity. First, the evidence in support of marriage as sacrament, intimating the Ephesians text, is merely semantic, resting on an improper translation of *musterion* into *sacramentum*.<sup>699</sup> Second, marriage does not bear sufficient similarity to the two sacraments/ordinances accepted by Protestants, baptism and communion.<sup>700</sup> Third, marriage is a moral institution, echoing Luther's bifurcation of earthly and heavenly, which has existed from the beginning.<sup>701</sup> Finally, that it has existed "quite irrespective of the mission of Christ", presumably indicating that it is a social institution that exists outside the province of the Church in universal humanity and thus not specifically a possession of the Christian faith as such. His conclusion thereby affirmed the same trajectory as Luther and Calvin and excluded marriage as non-sacramental and entirely earthly.

Schleiermacher's first argument falls back on the same issue of interpretation with Ephesians and is heavily influenced by *a priori* conclusions as argued above.<sup>702</sup> The indication

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<sup>698</sup> Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith* (Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 2011), 659.

<sup>699</sup> It should be noted too that Schleiermacher is rare among Protestant theologians in that he not only recognizes the existence of Eastern Orthodoxy, but even briefly engages with it and fairly represents it. He even goes so far as to claim that his arguments are not valid against their teachings which maintain the original meaning of *musterion* and don't succumb to the Protestant critiques. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 658.

<sup>700</sup> While, as it argued below, this is vague, it would appear that the primary quality Schleiermacher sought was the direct connection with the ministry of Jesus, but again it is questionable to what extent this connection should go and where the precise line of demarcation should be. Certainly, "no similarity" should be considered hyperbolic.

<sup>701</sup> Schleiermacher does go beyond Luther on this point at least, as he indicates the divine origin of the institution, even if he relegates it to a moral, *visa vi*, material realm contrasted with the spiritual mission of Christ.

<sup>702</sup> Essentially the issue is that too often the categorical argument for only two sacraments subsumes actual vigorous interaction with the individual sacraments that are excluded and quick to fall back on presupposed arguments.

that marriage is dissimilar to baptism and Eucharist quite simply is not well enough defined to interact with critically, as the dissimilarity is more presupposed than explained. What specific element is present in baptism and Eucharist that is lacking in marriage? Schleiermacher never offers any further elaboration on the point, but it is likely that the Scholastic assumption that a sacrament, properly defined, is the instrumental vehicle of grace looms behind this assertion. The final claims that marriage existed from the beginning without reference to the mission of Christ is highly problematic<sup>703</sup> considering that people bathed, ate bread, and drank wine prior to Jesus as well, yet this holds no difficulty for baptism and Eucharist being accepted as sacramental.<sup>704</sup> In both cases, Christianity took preexisting social rites and gave them specifically Christian connotations, sanctifying the mundane.<sup>705</sup> Finally, perhaps most problematic is his conclusion that marriage is unrelated to the mission of Christ, thereby unrelated to salvation. On what grounds he arrives at this conjecture is unclear but the result, whether intended or not, demonstrates the liberal trajectory to reduce the efficacy of Christ to a personal, moral, or social transformation irrespective of the ontological reality of the world and its eternal fate.<sup>706</sup> If marriage is indeed irrespective of the mission of Christ, then a major and central feature of a great many lives is left unaffected by the Gospel.<sup>707</sup>

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<sup>703</sup> Even further, this assertion creates a divide between Christ and creation that conflicts with the cosmic Christology of John 1 and Colossians 1, which posits Christ as an eternal principle through which all reality owes its existence, both in origination and ongoing.

<sup>704</sup> This argument is advanced by Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 378.

<sup>705</sup> Stylianopoulos also points out that divine grace was also at work in the Old Testament and thus not a unique element of the New Covenant even if it achieved its most perfect revelation therein. Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, "Toward a Theology of Marriage in the Orthodox Church." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22, no. 3 (September 1, 1977): 270.

<sup>706</sup> This is remarkably reversed in the teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy which fully recognizes the ultimate significance of the mission of Christ as altering the very essence of reality on a universal scale as argued above.

<sup>707</sup> In contrast to Schleiermacher, Thomas and Qualls puts it quite clearly, "[w]ith the coming of Jesus, everything changes. That includes marriage." David M. Thomas and Charles Qualls, "What Makes Marriage a

Schleiermacher's liberal trajectory was extremely influential to the Protestant tradition and continued the Reformation trend toward the secularization of marriage.<sup>708</sup> In the twentieth century, Karl Barth reacted against Schleiermacher's often thin liberal theology and attempted to replace it with his own "neo-orthodox" (more accurately, neo-Calvinist) focus on the sovereignty of God and the authority of revelation. Yet at the same time, even in reacting against Schleiermacher<sup>709</sup> Barth still betrayed his own continuation of the Protestant trend toward the de-sacramentalization of marriage and its abandonment to secular culture. Barth treated the topic of the sacrament debate over marriage in a lengthy footnote wherein he rehearsed many of the typical Protestant arguments such as questioning the translation of *mysterion* into *sacramentum* and dismissing Ephesians as allegorical.<sup>710</sup> So too did Barth condemn Catholic notions of sacramental efficacy *ex opere operato* and in particular reacted against the medieval Catholic view that the sacrament was mutually dispensed between baptized spouses thus centering on the vow and rite itself as the conveyer of grace.<sup>711</sup> Barth's fuller treatment of the topic of marriage in many regards bypasses the question of sacrament entirely, as the debate is treated in a footnote and never again entertained. In place of a sacramental definition of marriage, Barth instead followed the Calvinistic tendency to focus on the positive social values of the institution which

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Sacrament?" *Family and Community Ministries* 22, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 10. If marriage is irrespective of the mission of Christ, then the words from the throne in Revelation 21:5 that all things are made new would be a lie.

<sup>708</sup> To de-sacramentalize is, particularly in this context, to secularize, because it allows society and culture to dictate the role and nature of marriage, thus to secularize it.

<sup>709</sup> Oddly, Barth does not engage with Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* on this point but instead quotes a sermon which makes the claim that marriage is "a work of eternal love which is itself eternal" Barth, *Dogmatics* III.4, 124. It is particularly peculiar that Barth does not engage with *Christian Faith* on this as his position is remarkably similar to Schleiermacher's, perhaps something he sought to avoid.

<sup>710</sup> Barth, *CD* III.4, 122 f.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid*, 124-5.

he numbers as seven.<sup>712</sup> Marriage, for Barth, has a significant place in the topic of creation, more specifically anthropology, but, in the end, is so much chaff left behind in the eschatological consummation of history with little ultimate theological value.

Recent Evangelical Protestant systematic theologians have generally continued the same basic trajectory as their predecessors in rejecting the medieval Catholic definitions of sacrament while relegating marriage to the realm of the earthly. For example, Millard Erickson's lengthy volume *Christian Theology* does not explicate marriage at all in relation to the question of the sacraments, and instead focuses rather exclusively in rejecting the medieval Catholic notion of *ex opere operato*.<sup>713</sup> Similarly, Stanley Grenz argues in favor of the language of ordinance against sacrament as only those directly instituted by Christ and which represent acts of communal commitment.<sup>714</sup> Once again, Grenz only tangentially and categorically rejects marriage as fitting this definition without clear argumentation and offers only the sweeping claim: "When measured by these criteria, many of the rites observed by certain Christian traditions do not qualify as acts of commitment in the sense of gospel ordinances" including marriage.<sup>715</sup> Following the same basic trajectory, Reformed theologian Michael Horton offers a direct assessment of marriage but only briefly: marriage "is not identified in Scripture as a *means of grace*. In fact, marriage was instituted as a creation ordinance and is shared with non-Christians, though covenant families, even with one believing spouse, are holy (1 Cor 7:14)."<sup>716</sup> Horton thus allows for the

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<sup>712</sup> According to Barth, marriage is 1) a divine command, 2) a task, 3) a full life-partnership, 4) exclusive (monogamous), 5) lasting, 6) freely chosen, and 7) communal. *CD* III, 183-240.

<sup>713</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1018-1021.

<sup>714</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 519.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>716</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 775. Italics added to emphasize the smuggled in Scholastic definition of sacrament as an instrumental means of grace.

sanctification of marriage on a somewhat limited basis while still rejecting it as a means of grace or sacrament, once again assuming the Scholastic definition uncritically. Taken together, recent Evangelical Protestant systematic theologians demonstrate the ultimate consequences of the rejection of marriage as a sacrament.

The most common feature among these recent and otherwise comprehensive theologians is the relative dearth of treatment of the topic. While it may be objected that the topic of marriage is not one of relevance to systematic theology, this objection betrays the assumption that marriage is not theological and is ultimately circular, relying on presupposition rather than actual argumentation.<sup>717</sup> To even claim that marriage is not a proper theological topic, a compelling critical argument should be offered in support yet is not given by any of the three representative examples given above.<sup>718</sup> Even further, what few arguments supplied to reject marriage as a sacrament tend to utilize a straw man out of antiquated medieval Scholastic Catholic theology that is quite simply, as it has already been demonstrated, not in service any longer.<sup>719</sup> The deficiencies of the Protestant trajectory resultant from the initial rejection of marriage as a sacrament are thus painfully manifested by recent Evangelical Protestant theologies.<sup>720</sup> Not only is the question itself not sufficiently treated by otherwise systematic authors, the tendency to

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<sup>717</sup> So too, this argument would not apply to Grenz whose work *Theology for the Community of God* is methodologically geared toward exploration of the relationship of theology to community. If marriage is not to be found in a volume dedicated to Christian community, then where will it be defined and defended?

<sup>718</sup> This is to say that it is an unfortunate consequence of the de-sacramentalization of marriage that contemporary Protestant theologians simply assume that marriage is an earthly topic and thus irrelevant to theology.

<sup>719</sup> The general pre-occupation with condemning the phrase *ex opere operato* demonstrates this myopia in light of the renovations of Vatican II.

<sup>720</sup> It is telling to note that a recent evangelical treatment of marriage that is otherwise well cited and has a very in depth argument for the earthly side of marriage has trouble formulating a distinctive argument for the hope of something more than just the mortal in the marriage covenant through language of “Already-but-not-yet”, M. Gay Hubbard and Alice P. Mathews, *Marriage Made in Eden* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 175-202. Of eleven endnotes in the chapter concerning the future and theological value of marriage, five are references to theologians from only two sources.

reject marriage as sacrament has a clear, if unintended, consequence of diminishing the spiritual nature of the institution and thereby allowing secular perspectives to replace Christian ones, as readily evidenced by the trend toward idle acceptance of divorce in contemporary Protestantism. It has thus been demonstrated that the rejection by the Classical Reformers concerning marriage as a sacrament has led to an historical legacy that relegated marriage increasingly to the purely social realm and effectively stripped it of its theological significance. The vacuum produced by this process has as a consequence been filled by secular voices that have offered alternative renderings. In order for contemporary Christians, particularly Protestants, to defend religiously significant marriage against the forces of secularism, it is imperative to reconsider its rejection as a sacrament and critically assess the processes that led to this conclusion.

### *Reopening the Sacramental Conversation*

Sacramentalism in Christian tradition arose naturally out of the symbolic-liturgical worldview of the ancient Hebrews as transformed by the ministry of Jesus and the apostolic church. One of the uniting features of orthodox Christianity in the turbulent early centuries was the consistent claim that it is the work of Christ alone that effects salvation, a claim maximalized by the writings of Augustine of Hippo. On the particular role of the sacraments, he was clear that they were symbolic references to an ultimate transcendent reality; they were the signs or markers pointing beyond themselves to the divine work of providence in history. Two particular rites emerged as central to the Christian identity, baptism and Eucharist; further, the theological definitions of the Patristics and Augustine in particular reinforced that the ritual activity itself was not salvific. Rather, the eternal grace of God offered by the divine Son was the power of salvation to which the sacrament points as, in the classic phraseology, the visible sign of invisible

work. Even as humans could understand in a limited sense the nature of salvation through the various ritual aspects, such as the bread and wine symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ, but it was equally clear that such understanding had distinct boundaries. While one could grow to better comprehend the significance of salvation through experience of the sacraments, it was not for the human mind to attempt to apprehend the instrumental efficacy of the activity of salvation.

It was precisely on this point of seeking the cause-effect relationships involved in the sacraments that led the Scholastic tradition astray and Western Christianity followed as a result. Through the attempt to define the minimal standards for an efficacious administration of a sacrament, the Scholastics effectively applied the inductive methodology of Aristotle to a problem best left to transcendental investigation and a fair dose of humility. In effect, “the scholastics, in trying to fit all seven sacraments into a procrustean bed of form (words), matter (physical elements), and minister had imposed on them definitions which were not intrinsic to them.”<sup>721</sup> Even as the Reformers rightly reacted against this, they unwittingly inherited key presuppositions that caused their rejections to follow the framework and methods of the Scholastics.<sup>722</sup> So Protestants rejected the numbering of the Scholastics but accepted their mode of inquiry, thereby differing in conclusions but sharing untenable presuppositions. It has thus been argued that this perspective should be challenged for its attempt to raise human knowledge of divine activity to an unachievable degree through pseudo-empirical investigation into soteriological instrumentality. One cannot simply study the process of salvation as a physicist studies gravity, or as a chemist defines compounds: God is beyond empirical verification and

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<sup>721</sup> James White, *Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith*, 16.

<sup>722</sup> White points out that Luther was also limited by a narrow sense of institution, so that a sacrament must not only be directly related to salvation but directly instituted by God. “Had [Luther] appealed to the freedom of an earlier age than the scholastics’, there would have been no problem.” Ibid, 25.

thus salvation, which is entirely of divine prerogative, is as well.

John Colwell has argued for the renewal of dialogue concerning the nature and role of the sacraments in Protestantism in *Promise and Presence*. At the basis of his theory concerning sacramentality, which owes greatly to the theology of Augustine, is grace, of which he writes:

The legitimacy or otherwise of the various uses of this word 'grace' then ought properly to be determined with reference to this essentially theological definition: whatever other tests of legitimacy may be applied, it is only ever valid to speak of grace... if the reference is genuinely to 'grace', to that which is gracious, to that which is freely given, to that which is never at our disposal, to that which is beyond manipulation.<sup>723</sup>

If the sacraments can be freed of their Scholastic definitions and the more holistic Augustinian perspective be thereby renewed, then grace can be understood to saturate the life of the Church as it fulfills its mandate to be the body of Christ in this world. An important, even vital, step in this direction is to reconsider marriage, one of the most pervasive and existentially essential human relationships, in a theological mode by reopening the discussion whether it should be properly considered a sacrament. While renewing the sacramental identity of marriage will not act as a silver bullet in the debate with secularism over definitions of marriage and sexuality, it will provide solidarity with the Orthodox and Catholic perspectives and offer a rich theological legacy upon which to establish contemporary views of this most important institution.

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<sup>723</sup> Colwell, *Promise and Presence*, 29.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.  
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.<sup>724</sup>*

This study has set out to provide a coherent presentation for why Christian theology should consider marriage as explicitly sacred, and, in particular, advanced comprehensive argumentation for renewing its place as a sacrament in Protestant theology. As the final destination of this journey is drawing near, there are two questions left to consider: where have we been, and where shall we now go? In order to solidify the structure of the thesis developed herein, a concise summation of the main ideas will be laid out followed by concluding remarks concerning how this might be further applied in apologetic contexts and advanced by future enquiry. Ultimately, it has been the aim of this study to reopen the conversation about the place of sexuality in Christian theology and demonstrate two biblically normative lifestyles that should both be considered as sacraments: marriage and spiritual celibacy.

### MAPPING THE SACRAMENTAL JOURNEY

In order to demonstrate the theoretical efficacy of the thesis, namely that Protestant theology should renew marriage as a sacrament, this study has offered an extensive survey through time and texts. Given the far-ranging nature of this journey, it is necessary now, at its conclusion, to retrace the steps that have been taken; in essence, the travels contained in this study can now be effectively mapped to draw together all the various parts into one cohesive whole. In certain significant regards, the beginning is definitional of the ending, as the basic

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<sup>724</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV.

framework of how marriage and sexuality more generally are intended to be configured in human existence is set up at the beginning of beginnings: Genesis. Man is created for woman, and woman for man. Their existences cannot be separated from their sexual identities which are primal; there is no indication of a pre-sexual state as imagined by some ancient thinkers. Neither is there substantive inequality between the sexes, for while Eve is created for Adam's completion, both equally bear the image and likeness of God and are thereby fully children of the Almighty. Just as the union of man and woman creates the loving embrace of existential fulfillment, this image of union and completion harkens to the end of ends, whereby humanity (the Church) is united in fullness with her bridegroom (Christ). In this sense, the Alpha and the Omega are continuous and congruent, as the beginning is also the end contained ultimately in the providence of the triune God.

Between the Alpha and the Omega, this study has developed a consistent narrative constructed by many generations but united by the totalizing love of God. From the progenitors struggling to survive in a harsh world surrounded by pagan idolaters, to the rabbis of the Diaspora holding to the Torah as a light against the storm of darkness, to the outcast sinners that were reborn in the forgiveness of Christ, marriage has persisted as an essential element in both social and sacred regards. The tapestry this study has woven includes many individual strands: Ruth's covenanted love for Naomi and Boaz, Solomon's passionate longing for his true love in life and beyond, Jesus' embodiment of love incarnate as the second Adam, Paul's instructions to those trying to understand the role of sexuality in the Christian community as well as his recognition of the symbolic representation of the ultimate consummation of Church and Christ in the eschaton. Despite the diversity of the texts that have been consulted, there has been a consistent and persistent infusion with Grace that lies at the heart of the Christian Gospel which

permeates every aspect of life and brings light to every darkness. Through the fires of history, the institution of marriage has been tried and tested many times, by challenges of polygamy and adultery, by ethnic regulations that tore apart families, by small-minded religionists that could not dream big enough to recognize that God is strong enough to re-create humanity in purity and perfection, by attempts to denigrate women to inferiority and subservience rather than exalt them as precious; through it all, marriage has persisted. But should it be considered a sacrament?

In addition to building a cohesive and comprehensive textual argument in favor of defining marriage as a divinely mandated sacred institution, this study has provided substantive historical research that challenges the sacramental theology established by the Scholastic tradition to which the Reformation reacted even while assuming certain untenable definitions. The essential problem with the Scholastic framework is its reinterpretation of the concept of the work of salvation as *ex opera operato*, which previously referenced the work of Christ done on the cross (which the sacraments symbolize) and instead came to indicate the work done by the ritual processes of the sacraments such as the minister, elements, and so forth. Yet Augustine had effectively argued against the Donatists and Pelagians a millennium prior that it was the perfection of Christ that saves, not of the Christian. In this view, the sacrament serves as the sign or signifier of Grace but not its cause in any instrumental fashion; otherwise, the salvation of the believer would be dependent on the actions of the Church, an unacceptable inference. Instead, sacraments are an opportunity to ritualize the business of life by recognizing the Grace of Christ infused into every aspect of living. Among this more general sacramentalism of the Christian life, marriage stands out as being specifically instituted at the beginning of creation and definitional of human existence, and further is held as especially sacred for its reflection of the ultimate consummation between Church and Christ in the eschaton.

So why did Luther and the other Reformers reject marriage as a sacrament? As it has been demonstrated, the primary contention between the Reformers and Scholastics concerned which rituals participated in the processes of salvation whereby the list was reduced to Baptism and Eucharist; accordingly, marriage was divorced from salvation. Yet the Reformer's assumed the Scholastic definition of sacrament as an effective cause of Grace, not simply its sign or symbol as with Augustine. Indeed, the so-called Radical Reformation rightly recognized this deficiency, yet rather than renewing the more original Augustinian view instead tended to reject the entire category of sacrament. As a consequence, the broader Protestant legacy has been largely consistent in its denials of marriage as a sacrament which, in turn, has tended to relegate it to purely social categories only tangentially connected to theological issues. While only a part of a larger puzzle, it is the contention of this study that this theological trend has contributed to the social crisis surrounding marriage and the struggles by the contemporary Christian community to articulate a satisfying definition in response to recent challenges. Hopefully, the conversation can be re-opened and marriage can be renewed as a sacred gift infused by the light of Christ as a beacon of Grace in a fallen world, as a sacrament. To this end, the study will now close with some preliminary remarks concerning its potential impacts moving forward.

### **WHAT'S IN A WORD? SACRAMENTS AS APOLOGETICS**

It is important to step back and consider the implications of an intense and extensive study as has been presented herein. Under what conditions will the thesis hold, and under what conditions does it fail? It has been the aim of this study to provide a coherent textual and historical argument in favor of Christian theology, particularly its Protestant varieties, renewing marriage as a sacrament. Even while there will certainly be those who remain unconvinced, as

long as they give critical thought to the topic then the study will succeed in promoting discourse and dialogue on topics which are often left to the wayside by theological voices. For those that are committed to the rejection of marriage as a sacrament, hopefully this study will raise significant questions as to whether this negation should continue to be maintained. Indeed, it is imperative to ask at a foundational level concerning the sacrament, what's in a word?

Consider the effect that a word can have through its cognitive associations and the ramifications of defining it in one manner in contradiction of another. What is a sacrament? Beyond theological circles, it is questionable how many contemporary Christians would express a clear definitive answer to such an inquiry. Yet over the course of Christian history persons have given their lives for their views on the subject. Is it simply some misbegotten superstition from an ancient pre-modern era? If so, then rightly has it been disregarded. But what are the implications of such dismissal? Over the course of the five centuries of the Reformation era, Protestant theologians from across the denominational spectrum have maintained a peculiar unanimity in their rejections of marriage as a sacrament largely echoing the basic premises established by Luther. But at what cost? What has been lost as a result of this theological trench-warfare? What exactly is being gained by still towing lines drawn in the sand centuries ago against theological positions that haven't been advanced for generations?

In contrast, consider what may be gained if the arguments of the sixteenth century can be set aside and a new era of sacramental theology be advanced. The biblical ethos explored herein may range over the course of millennia, but it is consistent and conclusive in its assessment of marriage as being the only acceptable expression of sexuality that will bring true existential fulfillment, as it was intended by God. Against the various historical denigrations of sexuality as inherently sinful, its goodness must be embraced by the Christian community, as it is indeed a

powerful expression of divine love (though it can also be abused to perpetrate great evils). But if it stops there, with marriage as simply the only place where sexuality can be expressed, then it is merely an outlet for desires of the flesh. If marriage is to be preserved as a distinctive marker of the Christian Church, it should be celebrated not only as a great gift of creation but even further as a powerful spiritual presence infusing day-to-day life with the Grace of Christ.

In the end of ends, what shall be the fate of marriage? In the Omega event, witnessed most clearly in the conclusion of John's Apocalypse, there will be a great winnowing whereby everything that is not pleasing to God will be relegated to the lake of fire.<sup>725</sup> What is left will rise anew whereby all tears will be wiped free and humanity will be cleansed to such an extent that we may dwell in perfect harmony with God in the abundance of the new heavens and the new earth. In conceiving of this existence, the Sadducees simply could not imagine big enough, or hope in a God strong enough to establish such perfect harmony whereby a woman married seven times would face no strife. The Christian Gospel proclaims that every limitation we try to import into the resurrection will be utterly overcome by total harmony and absolute abundance. In the meantime, Christians can prepare for this state of bliss and even begin to partake in it by devoting to one of two options: marriage or celibacy. If either is pursued with covenantal fidelity and thereby infused with the precious Grace of Christ, freely given and wholly undeserved, then the transcendence of the resurrection can be felt in the present, and the hope of reunion with our beloved spouses in an age of utter perfection can be maintained.

So, what's in a word? Protestant theology should reconsider its long-standing war of attrition against Scholastic theologies that have long fallen out of disuse. Generations of theologians have towed the lines they inherited, meanwhile the world has changed considerably,

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<sup>725</sup> Revelation 20:11-15.

and theology must respond to the challenges of a new age. Rather than look to innovation as the answer, perhaps the key is renewal of an ancient tradition which can be traced to the very origins of the Christian Church and even further into its Judaic roots. If the long-standing legacy of de-sacramentalization can be overturned, perhaps Protestant theology can find a new avenue with which to demonstrate the efficacy of the Christian Gospel in every aspect of life. Rather than treat marriage and sexuality as merely social issues, Christian theology should affirm them as sacred topics worthy of serious consideration. Ultimately, what is at stake is whether or not the Christian community can provide a compelling vision of human sexuality that can compete with the glittering advertisements of the sin-addicted world. In the end, there are two options for human sexuality: communion or consumption. It is therefore up to Christian theology and apologetics to examine this dialectic and demonstrate conclusively why sexual communion in the confines of holy matrimony or spiritually covenanted celibacy is to be preferred over the consumptive practices of the world that turn sexuality into a mere commodity devoid of its sacred potential.

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