



**BULLETIN OF  
ECCLESIAL THEOLOGY**

**Essays on Sexuality  
and Gender**

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# BULLETIN OF ECCLESIAL THEOLOGY

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## EDITORIAL

The Church needs theology and theology needs the Church. That, in a chiasm, is the vision of the Center for Pastor Theologians, and of this, the Center's journal. To make the same point, focusing on the pastoral office: for the full health of both pastoral ministry and the theological enterprise, the relationship between the two should be one of mutual interdependence and service.

The Church needs theology. Historically, the Protestant Churches have conceived of the pastoral office as, at its heart, a ministry of Word, prayer, and sacraments, and therefore as a properly theological office. The church grows and is built up in love through the ascended Christ's gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers: ministers of the Word of God (Eph. 4:11-16). Christ the Cornerstone rules his people by his Word (Eph. 2:20). For the church to be effective in the world, it is therefore necessary above all other things that she have ministers who study, do, and teach the Word (Ezra 7:10). This is the consistent pattern of the Scriptures. First Moses, then Joshua. First Ezra, then Nehemiah. First Levitical priests who serve in the sanctuary and teach God's Law, then Davidic kings who rule with a wisdom shaped by the Law. First the ministry of Word and sacrament, then faithful service in the world. Untheological pragmatism will not work; the church needs theology. We therefore need deep, and faithful theological reflection to help us understand and love God's Word, and live faithfully in God's world.

Theology needs the Church. We give thanks to God for the work of biblical scholars, theologians, historians, and many others serving in the academy and the seminaries. Without their ministry, the church would be poorer. Without their teaching and guidance, none of the CPT's fellows would have the intellectual equipment to think and write and pastor. But, although there is a right division of labor between theologians serving primarily in the academy and those serving primarily in the church, pastors have a central responsibility to teach the church, and therefore to think theologically.

Most pastors will, rightly, do this almost exclusively through their preaching and teaching in a local congregation. A few, though, will also

undertake a wider theological ministry, writing books and blogs and resources to help a wide range of Christians think and live faithfully. But, beyond this more popular level of theological writing, it is our belief that a few pastors should also seek to write theology in a somewhat higher register, theology that seeks particularly to shape and inform the ministry of other pastors and those training for pastoral ministry. This “ecclesial” theology is what this journal aims to offer.

The *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* (BET) is a little different from most other theological journals. Rather than seeking submissions more broadly, it grows out of the CPT’s two annual Fellowship Symposia. As part of these gatherings, CPT pastors present papers responding to a particular book or topic. In past years, these have included the theme of resurrection and pastoral ministry, Kevin Vanhoozer’s *The Drama of Doctrine*, and James Hunter’s *To Change the World*. We also have the privilege of hosting a distinguished guest scholar who responds to papers, guides our discussions, and offers his own reflections on the topic at hand. BET will publish some of these papers to make this research more widely available. In this way, we hope that CPT will not simply talk about ecclesial theology, but, in the pages of this journal, will model it.

Each issue of the journal will therefore be organized around a particular theme. The book reviews will reflect this. Unlike most journals, our reviews section will not be limited to recent publications, but will include older works that shed light on the topic. However, it is not a bibliography with an overgrown garden of annotations. Nor does it pretend to be exhaustive. Rather, we review a representative sampling of works that we consider helpful—a smorgasboard of theology, biblical studies, historical theology, popular works, texts that have influenced wider cultural narratives, and also some fiction relevant to the theme. In including a wide range of genres and types of books, we hope to cover a variety of resources that will be helpful to preachers, and we intend to resist the fragmentation of the modern university and promote a more holistic approach to learning wisdom.

This year, led by Dr Peter Leithart of Trinity House Institute, the fellows responded to John Paul II’s teaching on the meaning of the human body, sex, gender, marriage, and singleness in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. In a sexually giddy world that is spinning faster and faster out of control, these themes could not be more relevant to pastoral ministry, Christian discipleship, and the mission of our congregations. John Paul’s rich biblical and philosophical explorations provided stimulating conversation, some of the fruits of which are here presented. We hope that they will calm our giddiness and re-orient our thinking so that we can help dizzy people get off the floor to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.

In what follows, Gerald Hiestand considers the pressing pastoral issue of sexual boundaries in dating; Owen Strachan expounds a theology of womanhood that pays close attention to the meaning of the female body; David Morlan offers some theologically informed exegetical notes on Ephesians 5:22-33; Matthew Mason examines what Theology of the Body might have to say on issues of same-sex sexuality and contemporary gender confusions; and Christopher Bechtel explores the metaphor of



church as body to consider how John Paul's spousal anthropology might inform our ecclesiology.

We hope that, taken as a whole, this inaugural issue of BET will stimulate further research and reflection, will help pastors understand and teach with clarity and confidence on these and related topics, and will play a small part in encouraging the development of a new generation of pastor-theologians.

Matthew Mason  
*Article Editor*



## NAKED CHURCH: A TRINITARIAN ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE BODY

CHRISTOPHER BECHTEL\*

In his extraordinary treatment of the human body, John Paul II weaves exegesis with theological insight to establish the givenness of humanity's physicality.<sup>1</sup> The breadth and range of his argument caution the reader of TOB against hasty critical analysis of the book. At the same time, one can criticize even so sweeping a work as TOB, if not for what it does say then for what it does not.

This article expands on one under-developed facet of John Paul II's theology of givenness: the physicality of the church. To be sure, in TOB, he has not wholly neglected a theology of the church, but, with particular reference to the church's physicality, the book is suggestive rather than the definitive. A full-bodied investigation of the church as the physical presence of Christ, in relation to the givenness of the body, remains to be developed. Here, I shall extrapolate a theology of the human body into a theology of the ecclesial body, revealing the church, naked on earth as it is heaven.

John Paul II does not refer to the church as naked, but the term is apt; the naked church, like the naked human body John Paul II exposes so completely, is the church in itself, viewed in its truest sense. Like the human body, the naked church is both physical and given by the Gift-giver himself.<sup>2</sup> A physical theology of the church must grapple with the myriad parallels between the human body and the body of the Christ. And, admittedly, sterling treatments of ecclesiology do so already.<sup>3</sup> However, within TOB lies the seed of a fresh perspective for ecclesiology and, by implication, for those who compose the *ekklesia*.

Since a full physical theology of the church lies beyond the confines of this paper, the focus here falls upon seeing the church, like the human body, as the visible emblem of the Gift-giver's love toward humanity. This is the heart of the naked church. Part 1 shows the human body and the ecclesial body in mutually illuminating parallel. John Paul's own intimations of an ecclesiology function as a springboard. Part 2, again expanding on TOB, establishes the trinitarian backbone of the ecclesial body. Part 2 sketches a biblical theology of the ecclesial body's purpose. Part 4 argues that the ecclesial body, like the human, retains a certain sacramentality, expressed chiefly in the spousal love of worship. Taken together, these four considerations provide an avenue into the heart of a

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\*Christopher Bectel is the Pastor of Evergreen Church, in Salem, Oregon.

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), hereafter cited as TOB.

<sup>2</sup> TOB, 11:1-13:1.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1995).

physical ecclesiology, and the theology of the human body articulated by John Paul II gives rise to the theology of the ecclesial body latent in Scripture.

## I. BODIES IN PARALLEL

The warrant to juxtapose the human body with the ecclesial body arises from Scripture, as John Paul II demonstrates. He draws several Pauline passages to link the human and ecclesial bodies. However, the Pope reads the comparison primarily for its insights on the human body, rather than for how the human body illuminates the ecclesial body.

His first audience on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 feeds his reflections on purity, arguing that in this passage, Paul “wants to teach the recipients of his letter the right understanding of the human body.”<sup>4</sup> However, reading with the grain of 1 Corinthians 12 suggests that Paul intends not to instruct them about their mortal bodies but to compel the divisive believers at Corinth to redouble their efforts at unity.<sup>5</sup> After all, the image of the body occurs late in a letter that has repeatedly addressed ecclesial unity. Closer examination of 1 Corinthians 12 shows that Paul uses the human body to illuminate the ecclesial body, not vice versa as the Pope suggests.<sup>6</sup>

Another key passage for linking human and ecclesial bodies is Ephesians 5, which John Paul II exegetes with extraordinary insight. However, again his focus on the human body prevents a full clarity regarding its parallel with the church. Similarly, the exposition of Colossians 1:18 (“And he is the head of the body, the church”) overlooks the connection between the human and ecclesial bodies, addressing instead continence for the kingdom. Not surprisingly, the cognate texts of Ephesians 1:22; 4:15-16; and 5:23 provide no insight for the matter either. In TOB, John Paul finds a theology of the human body within these passages because, like a master distiller, he has pursued a complex, rich and smooth creation, juxtaposing unexpected components to produce an astonishingly unified blend of ideas. But, while Scripture warrants the parallel between the human and ecclesial bodies, the Pope has neglected to draw it, at least in the direction Scripture suggests most intuitively.

That said, John Paul’s reading of these and other texts has fostered the seminal insight of his theology of the body: the givenness and givability of the human body.<sup>7</sup> Here is a characteristically pithy expression of the matter: “This is the body: a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and therefore a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs.”<sup>8</sup> If this is the human body, and the

<sup>4</sup> TOB, 55:6.

<sup>5</sup> For a summary of the unifying themes in 1 Corinthians, A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 36-41.

<sup>6</sup> For a compact summary of the implications, O. Tjørhom, *Visible Church, Visible Unity: Ecumenical Ecclesiology and "The Great Tradition of the Church"* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2004), 44-45.

<sup>7</sup> This theme recurs throughout TOB, e.g., “The human body...contains...the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and—through this gift—fulfils the very meaning of his being and existence,” 15:1.

<sup>8</sup> TOB, 14:4.

corporate people of God are, in Pauline language, called the body of Christ, then is not the church also a witness to creation's givenness and Love's generosity? John Paul II whispers the possibility: "Through a total gift that springs from love, he [Christ] formed the church as his body and continually builds her."<sup>9</sup>

The closeness of the parallel between human and ecclesial bodies cries out for more description, and a physical theology of the church builds upon this foundation. The ecclesial body receives its existence as a gift within the physical sphere. The Anglican minister, Samuel J. Stone, encapsulated this biblical teaching in his poem, "The Church's One Foundation," as he reflected on the crisis gripping his denomination.<sup>10</sup> In Stone's famous words, the church "is his new creation by water and the word." And, of course, Stone himself is no innovator but derived his line from Ephesians 5:26. As John Paul II explains, this verse portrays the church as the recipient of "redemptive and spousal love" that is the fullest expression of love, which the church then mirrors as a response of love.<sup>11</sup>

The human and ecclesial bodies share Love as a common origin. They also require the same nourishment for full expression of their being: relationship. The Pope refers to lonely Adam in the garden as incapable of fulfilling his true essence. Indeed, with Love pulsing in his veins he can only find it "by existing 'with someone'—and, put even more deeply and completely, by existing 'for someone'."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the church exists with and for another being. Chiefly, of course, that other, the supreme Other, is Christ himself, whose body the church is.<sup>13</sup> The church, like humanity as a whole, depends upon relationality, an unobstructed flow of reciprocal love between itself and its Creator. In this way, the parallel with the human body expands, for the human body, as a constituent part of the human being, derives its *telos* from providing a visible representation of God. Daniel Migliore summarizes well, "Being created in the image of God means that humans find their true identity in coexistence with each other and with all other creatures."<sup>14</sup>

Although Scripture does not identify the church as the image of God, the parallel between the human and ecclesial bodies allows for this inference.<sup>15</sup> For now, what matters is to see the necessity of relationality for the ecclesial body in parallel with relationality for the human body. In both cases, existence as well as essence depend upon it. For, as John Paul explains, the creation account in Genesis 2 indicates that the man was incompletely human until the woman joined him. The human body is only fully itself when in relationship with another and for another—

<sup>9</sup> TOB, 90:5.

<sup>10</sup> B. Stone, *A Reader in Ecclesiology* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 143.

<sup>11</sup> TOB, 91:8.

<sup>12</sup> TOB, 14:2.

<sup>13</sup> Buber's observations about the necessity of the functional pair in all relationship holds true even with Christ and the church. See *I and Thou* (W. Kaufman, trans.; New York: Scribner, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> D. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 125.

<sup>15</sup> See Section 3 below. Also S. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 482-485.

what John Paul calls the “spousal” dimension of the body.<sup>16</sup> This is the fulfilment of the physical body. It is also the fulfilment of the ecclesial.

## II. TRINITARIAN BACKBONE

As noted above, TOB merits little criticism for its comprehensive approach to the human body. Its lacunae largely concern related topics, such as the subject to hand. Still, John Paul II might have provided a more robust trinitarian window onto humanity’s physicality. To speak of God at all is to speak of a triune deity.<sup>17</sup> Even more, there is no love for God to overflow into humanity if not for the inner-trinitarian love that binds together the three persons. T.F. Torrance grasped the complexities of this dynamic:

[T]hat God is Love as this loving One in Christ and in the Spirit means that in their interpersonal reciprocal relations the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are the Communion of Love which the One God eternally is in himself and indeed is also toward us. It is as this ever living and acting Communion of loving and being loved that God is who he is, the perfection and fullness of Love that will not be confined within the Godhead but freely and lovingly moves outward toward others whom God creates for fellowship with himself so that they may share with him the very Communion of Love which is his own divine Life and Being.<sup>18</sup>

John Paul II hints at this perichoretic wonder when he mentions “the mystery of Truth and Love, the mystery of divine life.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, he admits that the gift of love permits “a participation in the divine nature,” but created humanity cannot receive the fullness of the gift since it belongs only to “the Trinitarian communion of persons.”<sup>20</sup>

But TOB lacks substantive reflection on how the Triune nature of the Gift-giver relates to human identity and activity. More development of the “mystery of divine life” could only have buttressed the insights on the ramifications of the divine life; after all, the bulk of TOB concerns just how the overflow of divine love impacts human life in the body.

Other theologians of the twentieth century have capitalized on the significance of inner-trinitarian love, perhaps chief among them, John Zizioulas. Zizioulas, unlike John Paul II, explored the ecclesiological implications of inner-Trinitarian love.<sup>21</sup> His sensitivity to trinitarian dynamics enabled him to tune into the high-register ramifications of God’s essence as Love. To Zizioulas, the church finds its essence in its fellowship with Christ; her being is communion. As the body of Christ, the church is given by the Father, to the Son and as the Son’s body, sustained by the Spirit. Love from three corners penetrates the church as

<sup>16</sup> TOB, 14:5.

<sup>17</sup> An accessible argument to this effect is T. Peters, *God as Trinity* (Louisville: WJK, 1993), 13-16.

<sup>18</sup> T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), 165-66.

<sup>19</sup> TOB, 19:4.

<sup>20</sup> TOB, 95b:4.

<sup>21</sup> J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

each member of the Trinity participates in the work of the other, giving itself for the other so that being in communion becomes the life pulse of the church just as in the godhead.<sup>22</sup>

A fuller trinitarian theology would have permitted John Paul II to create a wider and more secure theological foundation for reflecting upon the givenness of the human body.<sup>23</sup> By focusing (even if by default) on the unified nature of God, the Pope verged on truncating the deity's identity, and, more concerning, he allowed little room for exploring the source of the love that humanity receives and reflects. To be sure, spousal love is the love of the Triune God, and humanity mirrors spousal love only because Father, Son and Spirit have generated and reflected that love for eternity. So, although not explicitly, John Paul II does deal with the inner life of the Trinity. At the same time, an overt discussion of the immanent Trinity would have opened still further avenues of fruitful reflection on the nature of spousal love.

A theology of the ecclesial body needs a trinitarian backbone for precisely the same reasons TOB would have benefitted from a more robust doctrine of God. Firstly, reflection on the church of Jesus Christ is necessarily trinitarian. Miroslav Volf explains,

One can construct a private relationship with Christ as little as one can create a private relationship with the triune God...To believe in Christ accordingly means to "enter" into this corporate personality and for that reason also into communion with others.<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, as intimated above, the *raison d'être* of the church mirrors that of the human individual. Spousal love, then, though obviously not expressed in marital intimacy, remains the supreme vehicle for the church to fulfil her identity. Only a trinitarian substrate nurtures ecclesial love and life for the ecclesial and human bodies alike.

### III. BEING THE BODY

The ecclesial body shares with the human body the task of transferring "into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God."<sup>25</sup> The human body is a communication made visible; John Paul II employs the phrase "the language of the body," seeing the body itself as an expression of deep reality.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, James Jordan observes, "Human beings might be called the visible words of God, though perhaps 'fleshly words' might be better. We are words in

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<sup>22</sup>N. Loudovikos, "Christian Life and Institutional Church" in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and Church*, 125-132.

<sup>23</sup>To be fair, he provides a skeletal understanding of the Trinity, noting Father-Son relations in the church's creation, but he omits discussion of the Spirit, TOB, 95a:5-7. At best, then, this is a hopeful trinitarianism but hardly satisfactory.

<sup>24</sup>Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 33. Further research on a Trinitarian theology of the ecclesial body would engage John Paul II's successor, Cardinal Ratzinger, the future Benedict XVI. Volf is indebted to Ratzinger's ecclesiology.

<sup>25</sup>TOB, 19:5.

<sup>26</sup>TOB, 104:4.

the sentences of the Divine Book of the Kingdom.”<sup>27</sup> Of course, individuals do not devise their own body-cum-language but, led by Christ, they re-learn what sin has erased from their corporeal memories.<sup>28</sup>

Yet just as the human body mysteriously provides physical representation of the deity, so the corporate people of God create the physical entity demonstrating his qualities to the world. Corporate responsibility to bring God’s presence to earth fell first to ancient Israel, as Yahweh called a tribe of former slaves to construct his residence on earth.<sup>29</sup> The tabernacle construction account in Exodus 35-40 tells a consistent story: God elected to use people to build his earthly dwelling. And this choice is significant, for, as is well known, Israel’s Scriptures attribute creative power to God alone (e.g., Gen 1, Job 38). God’s choice to draft his people demonstrates his self-giving love, for, rather than displaying himself by fiat, he gave his love and enabled a people to reflect it.

There is substantial overlap between Exodus 25-31 and 35-40.<sup>30</sup> Scholars, predictably, dispute the value of the repeated material in Exodus 35-40. Yet no scholar has located a rationale for the passage in the corporate participation required for the tabernacle’s construction. Yet, from the outset, the many people of God act as the one people of God. Their task is to provide a physical location so that that the invisible deity might rest among them and that they, in turn, may take up the challenge to display his qualities.<sup>31</sup> Though slightly anachronistic, it is not inaccurate to see in ancient Israel the work of the ecclesial body: physical representation of God to the visible world.

Israel, of course, failed her mission. But Yahweh’s zeal to make his presence known physically to his world continued. The Gospels burgeon with evidence of Jesus’ identity as the continuation of Israel’s story, not least in regards to the project of displaying God to the world. The contested fulfilment passages in the Matthew lay a foundation for reading Jesus as Israel’s replacement. In his body, Jesus presented God bodily to the world, as numerous passages in John make clear (e.g., 1:14). Most notably, Jesus identifies himself as the temple of God, much to the bafflement of his audience.

This brief biblical theology sketches the arc of Scripture’s interest in the presence of God rendered visible for the physical world. Just as Israel feeds Jesus’ identity as the human agent responsible for presenting God to the world, so Jesus-as-temple-builder informs Paul’s understanding of

<sup>27</sup> James B. Jordan, *The Liturgy Trap: The Bible versus Mere Tradition in Worship* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2008), 62.

<sup>28</sup> R. Greco, “Recent Ecclesiastical Teaching,” in *John Paul the Second and Moral Theology*, (C.E. Curran and R.A. McCormick, eds.; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), 145. Cf. *TOB*, 105:3.

<sup>29</sup> For recent scholarship in this vein, M.B. Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth: Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle* (FAT II, 50; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> T. Dozeman provides a table comparing the sections, *Exodus: A Commentary* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 430.

<sup>31</sup> As C.J.H. Wright concisely explains, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 330-331. Also, W. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), particularly for discussion of Yahweh’s presence as the bedrock of Israel’s corporate, religious identity.



the early Christians. In 1 Corinthians he writes, “You are God’s field, God’s building” (3:9) and “Do you not know that you yourselves are God’s temple and God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (3:16). On account of Jesus’ obedience, fulfilling Israel’s mission, the corporate people of God—Christ’s body on earth—once again receive the task of presenting God to the world through physical means.

Paul’s ecclesiology in 1 Corinthians is also shot-through with trinitarian agency. The equality of Father and Son appears in Paul’s opening greeting (1:1, 3) and thanksgiving (1:9); believers enter relationship with the one God because of the Father’s call and the Son’s saving action. While the work of Christ is the primary expression of divine action (e.g., 2:2), he depends upon the Spirit (e.g., 3:11). In fact, Paul explicitly claims that believers have “received...the Spirit who is from God” (3:12), and, consequently, the “mind of Christ” is theirs (3:16). In the lyrical words of John Donne, believers receive the “three-person’d God” through a triangulated barrage of batterings, each equally loving and necessary but no one sufficient in itself. Humanity participates in the divine life (2 Pet 1:4) as the whole deity, Father, Son and Spirit collaborate in love.

Colin Gunton argues forcefully that a major impediment to a robust Trinitarian ecclesiology is an exaggerated gulf between pneumatology and Christology.<sup>32</sup> To Gunton, the agency of the Son receives overemphasis while the Spirit floats in the ether; after all “the wind blows where it wishes” (John 3:8). To recover its trinitarian bedrock, a biblical ecclesiology requires a corrected view of Son and Spirit.<sup>33</sup> But Gunton may overstate the case, for the root of the problem is not relating Son and Spirit but understanding the humiliation of the Son and the fullness of his humanity.<sup>34</sup> In this, however, Gunton is correct: analysis of Spirit and Son has been “docetic in direction, producing a tendency to conceive the motive force, so to speak, of Jesus’ life as being the eternal Word.”<sup>35</sup> Consequently, ecclesiology, tethered immovably to Christology, bears hints of an inverse docetism in which the church only appears to be the physical presence of Christ on earth.

Yet Paul clearly teaches a sacramental relation between Christ and the church. The mystery parallels the sacramental theology John Paul II identifies in the human body. A full embrace of this mystery and its parallel with the human body is essential to avoiding a heretical (docetic) conception of Christ’s body, the church. And greater attention to the pneumatological nuances of 1 Corinthians is a sure way forward.

Paul’s special interest in 1 Corinthians 3 is the corporate identity of the people of God, as the plural pronoun indicates. Antony Thiselton underscores Paul’s concern, “Here Paul is not saying that each individual Christian is a temple within which God’s Spirit dwells, but rather that

<sup>32</sup> Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 68.

<sup>33</sup> At this, one might despair of rapprochement given the chasm of dispute created by centuries of wrangling over the relation between Son and Spirit, on which see R. Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 201-220.

<sup>34</sup> On so-called *kenotic* Christology, C. Stephen Evans, ed., *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 68.

the Spirit of God dwells in the Christian community *corporately as a community*.<sup>36</sup> The circle thus closes. Like ancient Israel, the corporate people of God bear responsibility for creating a physical emblem of God's presence.

The Corinthian community's social ethic derives from its identity as the reflector of God himself. Paul tolerates no excuse for disunity: "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (3:17).<sup>37</sup> This law of retribution resembles the small but notable sections of *lex talionis* found in the Hebrew Bible;<sup>38</sup> not only does the Lord promise repayment in like kind, but, in both cases, he redresses crimes against the body, here ecclesial, there human. Brevard Childs contends that ancient Israel did not implement the laws literally but heralded them as guides for ideal ethical behavior.<sup>39</sup> Regardless, the point remains: the Lord despises actions that jeopardize the display of his physical presence.<sup>40</sup> And a supreme, ordinary means of that self-revelation is the corporate life and practice of his people. The church is the body—the physical presence—of God in the world.

On this point, Petrine ecclesiology squares with Pauline. Peter, like Paul, reflects a thick understanding of ancient Israel's vocation as the stewards of God's presence. As in 1 Corinthians, a trinitarian substratum suffuses 1 Peter, enabling the apostle to declare believers "living stones...built up as a spiritual house" (2:5). These individuals have been chosen by the Father, for membership in the Son, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit.<sup>41</sup> The designation "spiritual house" contrasts with the Jerusalem temple; it cannot imply that Peter is disinterested in the physical representation of God's presence. After all, Peter recognizes what John Paul II has labored to demonstrate: the human person is necessarily physical. He expects a physical existence in the life to come when God will "restore" his people after their sufferings (5:10). Peter, then, holds that God's people corporately provide a residence for God within the physical world; God's presence appears through his people.

From Peter and Paul, building on the long arc of Israel's story, the corporate people of God exist to display the fullness of God to the world. The grammar of "tabernacle" and "temple" infuses their ecclesiology with an expectation that what John Paul hears in the language of the human body also sounds forth from the ecclesial body. As noted above, the Pope identifies the human body as a sacrament. This bears development in relation to the ecclesial body.

<sup>36</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 316, emphasis original.

<sup>37</sup> Intentionally or not, Paul echoes Old Testament depictions of Yahweh's wrath for abuse of the temple, e.g., Ezekiel 8:16-19, Joel 3:5.

<sup>38</sup> Exodus 21:23-27, Leviticus 24:17-22, Deuteronomy 19:16-21.

<sup>39</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1974), 94.

<sup>40</sup> As implied by Dozeman's suggestion that the *leges talionis* synthesize Israelite law, *Exodus*, 536. Cf., B. Jackson, "Revolution in Biblical Law: Some Reflections on the Role of Theory in Methodology," *JSS* 50.1 (2005): 91, n. 21.

<sup>41</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright denies that the Trinitarian reference in 1 Peter 1:2 signals any relations within the godhead, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 255. But, if each person participates in creating the diaspora believers, at a minimum, the persons co-operate. It is no great leap, then, to assert their mutual inherence and love.

## IV. SACRAMENTALITY AND WORSHIP

In TOB, the strongest expression of the human body's sacramentality arises in analysis of marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33.<sup>42</sup> Within the Roman Catholic tradition, John Paul II unsurprisingly presents marriage between man and woman as a sacrament,<sup>43</sup> but he rightly grounds assessment of marriage in a theology of the body.

According to the generally recognized meaning the sacrament is in fact a "visible sign." "Body" also refers to what is visible; it signifies the visibility of the world and of man. In some way, therefore—even if in the most general way—the body enters into the definition of sacrament, which is "a visible sign of an invisible reality," namely, of the spiritual, transcendent and divine reality. In this sign—and through this sign—God gives himself to man in his transcendent truth and in his love. The sacrament is a sign of grace, and it is an efficacious sign. It does not merely indicate and express grace in a visible way, in the manner of a sign, but produces grace.<sup>44</sup>

In light of the parallels noted above between human and ecclesial bodies, a full reading of the body extends the sacramentality of the human body to the ecclesial. After all, under the broad understanding of sacrament, the corporate people of God function precisely as John Paul describes the human body. Together, God's people signify the invisible reality of God's presence. The ecclesial body becomes a sacrament.

Oddly, however, John Paul II downplays the sacramentality of the church. Quoting *Lumen Gentium*, he prefers merely to compare the church to a sacrament.<sup>45</sup> And, later, he refers to "the sacramentality of the Church" only to qualify that reference as "the sacramentality of Christ's union with the Church."<sup>46</sup> Yet, the ecclesial body has received the duty of displaying God's love, and the proper discharge of that duty signifies the love itself.

Support for the church's sacramentality comes from beyond the Western philosophical and theological tradition of John Paul II. Alexander Schmemmann, an Orthodox priest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, identified the church as a sacrament of grace, at least by extension. More specifically, he viewed corporate worship of God as signifying the invisible reality of God for the world. Arguing *a fortiori*, Schmemmann contends that corporate worship is the sacramental expression *par excellence*, since even life in the world bears sacramental power.<sup>47</sup> The argument requires the fundamental assumption that man is essentially a creature made for communion with God through worship, in Schmemmann's words, "*homo sapiens*, '*homo faber*'...yes, but, first of all,

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<sup>42</sup> John Paul II refers to the human body's sacramental quality multivalently, sometimes in relation to the body itself (e.g., TOB, 19:3-5) and sometimes in relation to the body given in marital intimacy (e.g., TOB, 103-104).

<sup>43</sup> M.G. Lawler provides a concise expression of this doctrine, *Marriage and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 11-15.

<sup>44</sup> TOB, 87:5.

<sup>45</sup> TOB, 93:6.

<sup>46</sup> TOB, 98:8.

<sup>47</sup> Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 120-21.

*'homo adorans'*."<sup>48</sup> When God's image bearers, recreated in the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), gather for worship, they participate in the fulfilment of human existence, signalling the loving being of God in their corporate activity. Worship enables sacramentality.

On analogy with the human body, the ecclesial body—the bride (Rev 19:7)—expresses spousal love to her Lover by finding her entire being in devoted self-giving to the Other.<sup>49</sup> John Paul II hints at the place of worship within the theology of the body; the liturgy of the church parallels the self-giving love husbands owe their wives.<sup>50</sup> Yet even without the Pope's whisper on the liturgy, worship's function within the body paradigm is clear. The ecclesial body gives of itself by joining the voices of the many members into the voice of one.

A glimpse at Revelation provides a further clue to the relevance of worship in the ecclesial body. Following the victory over Babylon the Great (Rev 18), John witnesses torrents of praise, as the chorus in heaven lauds the Lamb for his triumph (19:6-8). He impulsively mimics the great multitude, only to receive the angel's rebuke: 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God' (19:10). The sequence implies that worship is the activity of heaven because God, through the Lamb, has perfected his people, the bride.<sup>51</sup> She becomes what she worships. No longer is she prone to idols and their deadness, for the former things have passed away' (Rev 21:4). To the contrary, she is now fully alive, basking in the full life of Life itself (John 14:6). When perfected, the bride mirrors her Spouse. In Charles Wesley's immortal phrase, Christ "emptied himself of all but love," and the eschatological body of Christ responds by emptying herself of all but worship. As the church's gift of self reflects the love of the Triune God back to God himself, worship becomes the ecclesial body's fullest expression of spousal love. This supreme act of self-effacement fulfils the church's purpose, just as spousal love completes the human person.<sup>52</sup>

Worship, like all components of ecclesial life, depends upon trinitarian agency, not only to constitute the ecclesial body performing worship but to inspire, validate and receive the worship. The activity of the Trinity enriches the view of worship as total fulfilment of the church's being. Not only does worship mirror the spousal love of God, but, more specifically, worship enables the church to follow in the Master's steps. With Hebrews 2:12 as impetus, Reggie Kidd develops an entire theology of worship around the notion that Christ is the quintessential worshiper since he offered himself wholly to the Father.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

<sup>49</sup>The church-as-bride features heavily in TOB, 87-103, as John Paul II explores the analogy between male-female relations and those of Christ and the church. But the emphasis falls on the constitutive love of Christ and the male, not the equally spousal love of the church and the female.

<sup>50</sup>TOB, 117a:6.

<sup>51</sup>Beale, *Revelation*, 946.

<sup>52</sup>TOB, 15:5, "the human person...cannot fully find himself except through the gift of self."

<sup>53</sup>R. Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). Heb 2:12 puts Ps 22:22 in the mouth of Jesus: "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."

And the church, drawn by the Spirit to follow Christ, offers its worship to the same Father but only because of the Son's.<sup>54</sup> Worship, then, doubly fulfils the church.

In this life, however, the bride has not met her groom. She practices but falters. Her worship is imperfect, for she too often pursues worship for self rather than giving it for the other. In developing a theology of the human body, John Paul all but predicts this selfish worship as he explores how, in the sexual arena of marriage, a man and woman desire the other for self-gratification rather than longing to give of self out of worship (love) for the other.<sup>55</sup>

The ecclesial body faces a similar temptation in worship: feigning the gift of self while actually withholding it and using the Other for self-gratification. The Old Testament produces myriad examples of God's people worshipping for their own satisfaction rather than out of self-sacrificial love in response to the unparalleled love of Yahweh (e.g., Jer 7:1-4). Jesus himself confirmed God's pursuit of worshipers not in name only but 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:23-24). Paul's Corinthian correspondence implies the universality of objectifying God; Paul chastises the believers for using corporate worship as the vehicle for achieving self-exaltation (e.g., 1 Cor 11:17-34).

Imperfect worship notwithstanding, the ecclesial body pursues right worship in much the same way men and women, in spite of proclivity to violating the gift, strive for truly spousal love. Purity for the human body stems from the work of God; the Spirit gives life (John 6:63). Yet, of course, the Spirit's re-creative breath works in tandem with the atonement wrought by the Son and the gift of the Son by the Father. Trinitarian agency is inevitable. Additionally, as the body of Christ, the physical representation of God in the visible world, the church must really act. Passivity has no place in the ecclesial body any more than in the bodies of men and women that compose the church. John Paul II expresses the call to action with piercing clarity: "The fact that we 'were bought at a great price' (1 Cor 6:20), the price of Christ's redemption, makes precisely a new special commitment spring forth, namely, the duty of 'keeping one's own body with holiness and reverence'."<sup>56</sup>

In other words, out of love and respect for Christ, the church must endeavor to keep itself pure, to worship by the Spirit rather than the spirit of this age. After all, the heavenly multitude in John's vision, commended the Bride herself for she had "made herself ready" (Rev 19:7). The ecclesial body must reciprocate the love she has received, and in this way, she yet again models the eternally reciprocal inner-Trinitarian love. God grants agency to his people, corporate and individual, because God is Love, and love creates more love. Thus the overflow of God's love to his people becomes the engine of their love to him. "The love that turns the sun and other stars" turns his people toward himself.<sup>57</sup> Gregory of Nyssa identifies the Spirit as the "principle of unity between God and creature," integrating the people of God into

<sup>54</sup> Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 100.

<sup>55</sup> TOB, 32:6.

<sup>56</sup> TOB, 56:5.

<sup>57</sup> Dante, *Paradiso* xxxvi.v.145.

God himself in order that Triune love may fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.<sup>58</sup> The church requires love for life and receives love from God because the church is the body of Christ, the presence of God in the world until the day when God himself shall re-appear in the flesh.

### CONCLUSION

Christopher West draws on Augustine to assert that “the deepest desire of the human heart is to see another and be seen by the other’s loving look.”<sup>59</sup> If such is possible for two humans, then perhaps, by analogy, it is also feasible for humans as they gaze upon another physical body, the church of Jesus Christ.<sup>60</sup> This paper has endeavored to provide just such a loving look at the ecclesial body. Following West, himself deeply influenced by John Paul II, the purpose goes beyond creating knowledge, for this is no voyeuristic look. Rather, the point is to stir up new love for the ecclesial body. But, of course, just as to know a human being is to receive a glimpse of the Creator, so also gazing upon the church. In the end, then, the aim of the paper is to create more love for the one who is Love itself so that the church may “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15).

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<sup>58</sup> H. U. von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa* (M. Sebanc; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 168.

<sup>59</sup> West, *Theology of the Body Explained*, 93.

<sup>60</sup> Such was true of the first man and woman: “seeing and knowing each other in all the peace and tranquillity of the interior gaze, the ‘communicate’ in the fullness of humanity,” TOB, 13:1.

## A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO PREMARITAL SEXUAL ETHICS: OR, WHAT SAINT PAUL WOULD SAY ABOUT "MAKING OUT"

GERALD HIESTAND\*

One of the more vexing issues facing pastors today is the question of premarital sexual ethics. Simply put, we pastors are not quite certain how to counsel singles and teens regarding appropriate sexual boundaries. Of course, we clearly teach that sexual intercourse should be reserved for marriage. But beyond this, there is no consensus among evangelical clergy about where the boundaries should be drawn. Instead we tend to push the burden of this question back onto singles. One pastor typifies the counsel regularly given by evangelical clergy:

You may want me to tell you, in much more detail, exactly what's right for you when it comes to secular boundaries [in dating relationships]. But in the end, you have to stand before God. That's why you must set your own boundaries according to His direction for your life. ... I want you to build your own list of sexual standards.<sup>1</sup>

But do we really mean to say that Christian singles should "build their own list of sexual standards"? Certainly this can't be right. Is oral sex permissible? Fondling? Mutual masturbation? Passionate kissing? No one seems to really know. Certainly Christian singles don't know.<sup>2</sup> And the confusion here is no small matter. There is every reason to suspect that our lack of clear direction regarding premarital boundaries is putting singles in a precarious position. The September/October 2011 edition of *Relevant Magazine* includes a remarkable update regarding evangelical sexual ethics.<sup>3</sup> In the article, "(Almost) Everyone's Doing It"

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\* Gerald Hiestand is the Senior Associate Pastor of Calvary Memorial Church and Executive Director of the Center for Pastor Theologians.

<sup>1</sup> Jeramy Clark, *I Gave Dating a Chance: A Biblical Perspective to Balance the Extremes* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2000), 108-09.

<sup>2</sup> According to one study, the percentage of evangelical teens who believe it is "always or sometimes appropriate for two people who are in love, but not married" to engage in the following activities is as follows; embracing and some kissing (97%); heavy French Kissing (81%); fondling of breasts (35%); fondling of genitals (29%); sexual intercourse (20%). See Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *Right from Wrong: What You Need to Know to Help Youth Make Right Choices*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994), 278.

<sup>3</sup> Tyler Charles, "Almost Everyone's Doing It," in *Relevant Magazine*, September/October, 2011. The article gets its data from the National Survey of Reproductive and Contraceptive Knowledge, conducted by the National Campaign to

author Tyler Charles, drawing upon data gathered by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy, informs us that forty-two percent of evangelical singles between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine are currently in a sexual relationship, twenty-two percent have had sex in the past year, and an additional ten percent have had sex at least once. Assuming the accuracy of Charles' data, this means only twenty-percent of young evangelicals have remained abstinent.<sup>4</sup>

Even if the survey's data were wrong by half, the numbers would still be concerning. And as a pastor, I am indeed concerned. In my own experience, I see a significant amount of confusion and compromise among Christian teens and singles, particularly as it relates to premarital sexual ethics. Sometimes Christians flounder because the church fails to address crucial issues; sometimes they flounder because the leaders of the church address crucial issues wrongly. Both the former and the latter are at work here. On the one hand, evangelical scholars and theologians have devoted little attention (if any) to the issue of premarital sexual ethics; we've left it to popular-level books to plumb the Scriptures' teaching on this matter. And when pastors do speak explicitly to this issue, we send a confusing and mixed message. We've told Christian singles that it's fine (or at least might be fine, or at least we can't say it's not fine) to prepare the meal—just as long as they don't consume it. We've left the door open to sexual foreplay, while insisting that singles refrain from consummating that foreplay. In essence, we're telling Christians singles that it is (or might be) permissible to start having sex, just as long as they don't finish. It is little wonder then, that many Christian singles—while largely agreeing that intercourse should be reserved for marriage<sup>5</sup>—find themselves unable to live out their own ideal.

If the pastoral community is unclear on this issue, it is little wonder that singles are likewise unclear. Given the present lack of consensus within the pastoral community, this essay will explore the New Testament's sexual ethic with a view to constructing an objective, Christocentric sexual ethic for all premarital relationships. Supported by both a "movement" hermeneutic and a "Christocentric" hermeneutic, this essay will conclude that fidelity to the trajectory and ethic of Scripture necessitates *reserving any and all sexual activity for the marriage*

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Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy, Dec., 2009. The survey can be found online at: [http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/fogzone/PDF/survey\\_questionnaire.pdf](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/fogzone/PDF/survey_questionnaire.pdf), accessed October 24, 2011.

<sup>4</sup>There may be reasons to suspect the survey does not represent a completely accurate picture of evangelical sexual conduct. For a helpful analysis regarding the methodology of the survey, see Kevin DeYoung, "Premarital Sex and Our Love Affair with Bad Statistics," n. p. [cited 16 December 2011]. Online: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/12/13/premarital-sex-and-our-love-affair-with-bad-stats/>.

<sup>5</sup>Charles goes on to note that "76 percent of evangelicals believe sex outside of marriage is morally wrong." See "Almost Everyone," 65.



*relationship*. Or to state it again, the New Testament conveys—both theologically and exegetically—that all premarital relationships are to be completely non-sexual. Or one more time: premarital “making out” is a sin.<sup>6</sup> We begin with a brief look at the New Testament’s sexual ethic.

## I. A BRIEF LOOK AT THE NEW TESTAMENT’S SEXUAL ETHIC

The sexual mores of the first-century Greco-Roman world were in most every respect more liberal than our contemporary culture. Prostitution was viewed as a legitimate way for a man to satisfy his sexual urges; keeping a personal mistress or a slave for sexual gratification was normal for those who could afford such things;<sup>7</sup> homosexual sex between men and boys, while not without its critics, was largely viewed as normal and permissible. But the one place where the Greco-Roman culture was more conservative than our contemporary culture was the way in which it viewed premarital sexual relations between a man and another man’s virgin daughter.

The ability of a respectable young woman to find a suitable marriage partner was, in no small part, contingent upon her father’s ability to prove her chastity. Since a daughter’s contribution to the family was often found in her ability to secure a socially or economically advantageous marriage, a father in the ancient world typically took great pains to protect the sexual integrity of his daughter’s reputation until the day of her marriage. Respectable young women did not leave the home unescorted, and the practice of cloistering (i.e., where a young woman was kept in the home and secluded away from any male nonrelatives) was often employed. In fact, respectable young virgin women in the ancient world were, in many respects, not easily afforded the opportunity to engage in sexual misconduct.<sup>8</sup>

Given the cultural dynamics of the ancient world, New Testament proof texts on premarital sexual ethics are in short supply. In a culture

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<sup>6</sup> In many respects, this essay represents an extended defence of the opening two chapters of my book (written along with Jay Thomas), *Sex, Dating and Relationship: A Fresh Approach* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> So Plutarch, in his *Conjugal Precepts*, 16, “If an ordinary man is licentious and dissolute in his pleasure and sins a bit with a prostitute or a servant, his wife should not be indignant or angry but should reckon that out of respect for her he transfers his drunken behaviour, license, and lust to another woman.”

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that female promiscuity never occurred; only that it was generally condemned in ways that male promiscuity was not. For more on the opportunities for female promiscuity, see Robert M. Grant, “A Woman of Rome: The Matron in Justin, 2 Apology 2.1-9,” in *Church History*, 54 no. 4 D, 1985, 461-72. For a detailed discussion regarding the general cultural context of the New Testament, see Susan Treggiari, “Marriage and the Family in Roman Society,” and David W. Chapman, “Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism,” both in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken Campbell (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003). Also William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2007), 234-40, as well as Barry Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 183-90.

that prized female virginity, utilized arranged marriages, and often practiced cloistering, the authors of the New Testament had no need to be overly specific regarding chastity rules for premarital relationships. Simply put, the reigning ethic—even in the pagan culture—was, “keep your hands off my daughter.” Thus we cannot expect the Bible to offer us a detailed list about which activities (e.g., fondling, kissing, oral sex, etc.) are permissible in premarital relationships.

Yet despite the lack of an explicit statement about “how far is too far” in premarital relationships, the New Testament does offer us a clear sexual ethic: *sexual relations are to be reserved for the marriage relationship*. Adultery (Romans 2:22), homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9), prostitution (1 Corinthians 6:12-20), fornication (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8), and polygamy (1 Timothy 3:2) are all explicitly condemned in the New Testament. Additionally, the New Testament uses the term *πορνεία* (sexual immorality) as a “catch all” term to forbid all extra-marital sexual activity. As has been shown by New Testament scholars, the New Testament’s use of *πορνεία* is properly understood against the backdrop of the Torah, and thus adultery, fornication, bestiality, incest, homosexuality, and prostitution—all condemned by the Torah—fall within its semantic range.<sup>9</sup> We find a working example of this basic ethical framework, specifically as it relates to premarital sexual activity, in 1 Corinthians 7:1-9. Discussing celibacy and marriage, Paul writes,

I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion (ESV vss. 7-9).

Here Paul is responding to a series of questions posed to him by the Corinthians. Many at Corinth viewed celibacy as the ideal Christian state. Even married individuals, it seems, were attempting to live a celibate life.<sup>10</sup> Paul notes his own commitment to celibacy and agrees

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<sup>9</sup> Etymologically, *πορνεία* referred to prostitution or fornication, but was frequently used more broadly to denote any and all forms of sexual misconduct. For an analysis of the use of *πορνεία* in the New Testament, see Raymond Collins, *Ethics and the New Testament: Behavior and Belief* (New York: Cross Road Publishing Company, 2000), 80-83; William Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2010) 71-76. Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 73. The terms *ἀσέλγεια* (sexual immorality, impurity) and *κολή* (sexual immorality, lasciviousness), also function as general terms denoting sexual misconduct, but are used in the New Testament with less frequency. For the full range of terms denoting sexual misconduct, see the entry in Louw-Nida on sexual misbehavior (88.271-88.282).

<sup>10</sup> My brief reconstruction here follows the standard interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7, i.e., that Paul is addressing a form of asceticism. For interpretations along these lines, see Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2004), 77, and Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S. J., SP (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 253. Contra this reading, see Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness*, 173-211. In either case, my central point above remains valid regardless the extent to which the ascetic question is resolved.

that celibacy is indeed ideal for increasing one's capacity to serve in Christ's kingdom. Yet Paul recognizes that the ability to live a chaste and celibate life is a unique gift from God—one that God has not given to everyone. Given the ever-present temptation toward sexual immorality, Paul instructs those who have a strong desire for sexual intimacy (i.e., "burn with passion") to fulfill that desire within the context of a marriage relationship.

The ESV rightly glosses "to burn" (from *πυρῶσθαι*) as "to burn with passion" (vs. 9). Viewing unfulfilled sexual desire as a "burning" was a common enough metaphor in Paul's world. The picture of lovers "afire with love" and lying in each other's arms "on fire" is found throughout Greco-Roman literature.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, Paul's analysis of sexual desire is common to his times; his solution, however is unique. In the ancient world, the solution to "burning" with sexual desire was release through intercourse. In other words, sex—not marriage—was the solution to passionate burning.<sup>12</sup> But for Paul, the marriage relationship is the only legitimate context for satisfying one's sexual passions. To attempt celibacy without the *χάρισμα* (*gift*) would be a mistake. Indeed, Paul not only recommends marriage as a bulwark against sexual temptation, but in fact commands it (note Paul's use of the imperative form of *γαμέω*—*to marry*—in verse 9). Failure to seek legitimate means of sexual release places oneself in harm's way, and creates temptation toward illegitimate sexual activity. Those who have a strong desire for sexual intimacy must not continue to "burn" indefinitely, nor seek to quench that burning in illegitimate ways outside the marriage bounds. The sexual ethic here is clear: sexual activity is to be reserved for the marriage relationship. The working assumptions that drive Paul's logic in 1 Corinthians 7 are operative throughout the New Testament. The church—in keeping with this New Testament ethic—has historically viewed sexual relations as appropriate only within the context of a monogamous, permanent, heterosexual marriage.<sup>13</sup>

Thus far we have broken no new ground. Nearly all evangelical pastors and ministry leaders agree that sexual activity should be reserved for the marriage relationship.<sup>14</sup> But it is here that evangelical sexual

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<sup>11</sup>Xenophon of Ephesus, *An Ephesians Tale* 1.3.3, and 1.9.1. For additional examples see L. A. Alexander, "Better to Marry than Burn: St. Paul and the Greek Novel," in R. F. Hock et al., *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (SBLSymS 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 235-56. See also Sirach 23:17, "Desire, blazing like a furnace, will not die down until it has been satisfied; the man who is shameless in his body will not stop until the fire devours him."

<sup>12</sup>See the helpful comments of David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 274-75.

<sup>13</sup>Only in relatively recent times has this sexual ethic been questioned. The contemporary rise of homosexuality, combined with a post-modern way of reading texts, has raised questions about the church's traditional sexual ethic. For a detailed analysis of the New Testament's sexual ethic, see Collins, *Ethics and the New Testament*; Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament*; Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*.

<sup>14</sup>The Colorado Statement on Biblical Sexual Morality offers us a standard evangelical articulation: "Sex outside of marriage is never moral. This includes all forms

ethics begin to flounder. Our problem is not that we have failed to recognize the New Testament's prohibition against premarital sexual activity; rather we have failed to fully reckon with the reality that there is more to sexual activity than intercourse. Oral sex, fondling, and mutual masturbation, for example, are all sexual activities. It is inconceivable that the New Testament's ethic—insofar as it is an extension of the Torah—intends to leave room for such activities outside of marriage. Once we embrace the biblical ideal that sexual activity must be reserved for the marriage relationship, the question, "How far is too far?"—a perennially vexing question for singles—is easily answered. If an activity is sexual, it is to be reserved for the marriage relationship.

Yet for the sake of clarity we must press this further. Beyond the seemingly obvious activities above, there is real confusion among evangelicals about what constitutes sexual activity. There are a wide array of physical activities that are inherently non-sexual; holding hands, a kiss on the cheek, a peck on the lips, hugging, walking arm in arm, etc., are all non-sexual activities. While sexual arousal may indeed accompany such activities, the activities themselves are not inherently sexual. But there are other physical activities that are exclusively sexual. It is these activities (at least) that must be reserved for the marriage relationship. But how are we to tell which is which?

Perhaps the most objective way to determine the sexual nature of an activity is to consider it against the backdrop of the family relationship. Within the context of family relations, there are certain physical forms of affection that are inappropriate (fondling, oral sex, etc.). And the reason they are inappropriate is precisely because such activities are sexual. Thus we can quickly intuit which activities are sexual by considering an activity within the context of the family relationship. If an activity would be *sexually* inappropriate between a mother and a son, then that action is clearly of a sexual nature. Or again, the activities that we intuitively exclude from family relationships *because those activities are sexual*, are, in fact, sexual activities. To clarify, note here that this way of identifying sexual activity is not primarily concerned about what *I* would (or would not) do with *my* mother, but rather about what is deemed to be generally appropriate between biological relatives. While a particular man might never hold hands with his mother (given the interpersonal dynamics of their relationship), that same man would not view it as sexually inappropriate for a mother and son to hold hands. If Genesis 26:8-10 is any indication, even ancient pagan cultures have distinguished between sexual and non-sexual activity *via* the context of the family relationship.<sup>15</sup>

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of intimate sexual stimulation that stir up sexual passion between unmarried partners." Quoted in Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 370.

<sup>15</sup> Even in ancient pagan Greek culture (not known for espousing a moderate sexual ethic), familial relations were assumed to be non-sexual. See Alcibiades' comment

This criterion becomes enormously helpful when considering appropriate premarital boundaries, particularly as it relates to one of the most common activities in contemporary dating relationships: passionate kissing. Many (perhaps most) Christian dating couples regularly engage in passionate kissing. And for the most part, evangelical pastors and leaders have not provided definitive, biblical counsel here. Clearly some forms of kissing are non-sexual. Fathers kiss their children, and sons their mothers. But there are other forms of kissing that men reserve exclusively for their lovers. And the reason they do so is because such forms of kissing are sexual. When we consider passionate kissing against the backdrop of the family relationship it quickly becomes clear that passionate kissing is not merely affectionate, but sexual. Under no circumstances would it ever be appropriate for a brother and sister to engage in passionate kissing. Thus we conclude the following:

- 1) All sexual activity must be reserved for the marriage relationship.
- 2) Some forms of kissing are sexual. Therefore,
- 3) Sexual forms of kissing must be reserved for the marriage relationship.

The logic of the above is, I believe, inescapable. In order to legitimize sexual forms of kissing in a premarital relationship, one would need 1) to provide a cogent rationale for why passionate kissing is not sexual; or alternately, 2) to legitimize sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship. The first is counter-intuitive to the way human sexuality actually functions. The second runs counter to the ethic of the New Testament.

The objective definition provided by the family test is not the last word on sexual purity. There is, of course, more to purity than how one behaves with the body (Matthew 5:27). And every "objective" boundary can be worked around by sin-inspired creativity. But in spite of its limitations, it does provide a solid framework for clearly identifying which bodily activities are inherently sexual. Humans are embodied beings; as such, we need an embodied ethic. While it *may* be a sexual act for a particular man to look at (talk to, etc.) a particular woman, it is *always* a sexual act when he does something with her that would be sexually inappropriate between immediate blood relatives. To be sure, there may be good reasons to refrain also from non-sexual acts of intimacy outside of the marriage relationship.<sup>16</sup> If Jesus condemns even

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regarding his attempted seduction of Socrates, "My night with Socrates went no further than if I had spent it with my own father or older brother!" (Plato's *Symposium*, 219d).

<sup>16</sup> Even non-sexual touch can arouse sexual desire. Further, physical affection (whether sexual or not), makes a statement about one's intentions, and often creates misplaced expectations. For a discussion about the mixed messages men and women send to each other via non-sexual interaction, see my *Raising Purity: Helping Parents Understand the Bible's Perspective on Sex, Dating, and Relationships* (Rolling Meadows, Ill.: Iustificare Press, 2010), 53-100.

the look that leads to inappropriate sexual desire, how much more the touch (sexual or not) that leads to inappropriate sexual desire. But while wisdom may often call for a more restrictive posture than what is required by the family ethic, it never calls for less.

Pastors and ministry leaders have been sending a mixed message about premarital sexual activity. On the one hand, in keeping with the sexual ethic of the New Testament, we've clearly articulated that sexual activity should be reserved for the marriage relationship. But on the other hand we've largely ignored—or actually legitimized—sexual forms of kissing. We are in effect saying that while sexual activity is not permissible in premarital relationships, sexual activity is permissible in premarital relationships. If the preceding sentence doesn't make sense to the readers of this essay, it's not making sense to singles either.

At its heart, the New Testament ethic calls for premarital relationships to be completely non-sexual. Sexual forms of kissing fall afoul of this ethic, likewise any activity that is sexually inappropriate between immediate blood relatives. Simply put, if an activity is inherently sexual, it is to be reserved for the marriage relationship.

## II. πορνεία THEN AND NOW: MOVING BETWEEN THE ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURES

For many, the above argument will suffice as a clear explication and contemporary application of the New Testament's teaching on premarital sexual ethics. But some will want more. With the rise of postmodernity, the need to take seriously the cultural distance between the world of the Bible and our own has been increasingly felt. Is it legitimate to import the Scripture's vision of sexual ethics directly into today's culture? After all, the world of the Bible knew nothing of contemporary dating relationships. As we've seen, the New Testament was not forced to provide specific guidance about premarital sexual boundaries. In what sense, then, can we ask the Bible to speak to an issue that does not find an exact parallel in the culture of the Bible?

I'm not at all certain the cultural distance between the world of the Bible and our own is as insurmountable as some suggest. To point out that the Bible does not mention dating relationships is a *non sequitur*. Of course it doesn't. But it *does* offer us a clear sexual ethic for unmarried men and women—*sexual activity is to be reserved for the marriage relationship*. And it is this explicit sexual ethic that must inform contemporary premarital relationships. Evangelicals err when they allow transient cultural structures (i.e., dating relationships) to negate Scripture's clear transcultural sexual ethic. As N. T. Wright correctly observes,

We cannot relativize the epistles by pointing out the length of time that has passed between them and us, or by suggesting any intervening seismic cultural shifts which would render them irrelevant or even misleading. It is an essential part of authentic Christian discipleship both to see the New Testament as the foundation for the ongoing [mission of the church] and to

recognize that it cannot be supplanted or supplemented....That is what it means to live under the authority of Scripture.<sup>17</sup>

That there is cultural distance between the ancient world of the Bible and today is true enough; but the mere observation of this fact does not suffice as an adequate objection to the central claim of this essay.

However, as with any paradigm shift, marshaling all the available data is important. What follows is a preliminary offering of three distinct theological readings of the Scriptures that support the premarital ethic argued for above. The first two approaches draw upon the work of unlikely allies—Christian Smith and William Webb. The last approach looks closely at the intra-canonical movement of the Bible regarding sexual morality. We begin with Smith.

#### A. A CHRISTOCENTRIC READING OF SEX: SEXUAL UNION AS A TYPE OF CHRIST'S SPIRITUAL UNION WITH THE CHURCH

In his provocative book on hermeneutics, *The Bible Made Impossible*, Christian Smith argues that the only right way to read and apply the Bible is to examine its ethical teaching through the lens of Christ and the gospel. The Bible, Smith argues, does not offer us a discernibly coherent and unified stance on any one topic. Thus, for Smith, all attempts to arrive at a “biblical” position on any topic (e.g., sexual ethics, finances, relationships, politics, etc.) are doomed from the start. Instead we are to use the Bible solely as a means of understanding Christ and the gospel. Smith writes,

The Bible is not about offering things like a biblical view of dating—but rather about how God the Father offered his Son, Jesus Christ, to death to redeem a rebellious world from the slavery and damnation of sin....This is not to say that evangelical Christians will never have theologically informed, moral and practical views of dating and romance.... They may and will. But the significance and content of all such views will be defined completely in terms of thinking about them in view of the larger facts of Jesus Christ and the gospel.<sup>18</sup>

Smith goes on to muse, “Perhaps God has no interest in providing to us [through the Bible] all of the specific information people so often desire...perhaps God wants *us* to figure out how Christians should think well about things like war, wealth, and sanctification.”<sup>19</sup> According to Smith, Christians are to use the Bible as a means of gaining a picture of Christ and the gospel, and then use this picture as a means of

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<sup>17</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 125-26.

<sup>18</sup>Smith, *Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicalism Is Not A Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Brazos Press, 2011), 111.

<sup>19</sup>Smith, *Bible Made Impossible*, 112.

developing one's own appropriate ethic. In some instances, a Christocentric reading of the Bible may lead us in a different direction than the actual stated imperatives of the New Testament.

I do not here highlight Smith's work because I find it to be the best representation of a Christocentric hermeneutic. Indeed, I find Smith's approach significantly problematic.<sup>20</sup> But insofar as critics of my position on premarital sexual ethics tend to resonate with Smith's work, I intend to show that Smith's Christocentric hermeneutic—like the more traditional Christocentric readings of other evangelical scholars—actually supports the central argument of this essay.

Fortunately, when it comes to sexual ethics, searching for a Christocentric starting point need not take us long. As it happens, Paul provides us with an obviously Christocentric reading of sex in Ephesians 5:30–32. In what is certainly the New Testament's most developed treatment of sex and marriage, Paul pointedly describes the sexual relationship within marriage as an image of the spiritual relationship between Christ and the church. For Paul, sex and marriage typologically point beyond themselves to an ultimate fulfillment in Christ's marriage to the church. Which is to say, sex is fundamentally about Christ and the gospel. Note carefully the significance of the last sentence of verse 32 within its context.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, *and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church* (ESV, emphasis added).

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<sup>20</sup> Smith's proposal represents a radical departure from the way the Bible has been historically read by the church catholic (not just evangelicals). It's one thing to note, as Smith does so effectively, the difficulty Christians have had in ascertaining the Bible's teaching on a given topic (what Smith calls the problem of "pervasive interpretive pluralism"). It's quite another to deny, as Smith seems to do, that such a teaching even exists. Smith cites the "four views" books produced by evangelicals (e.g., four views on the second coming, etc.) as evidence of pervasive interpretive pluralism. Smith overreaches here. The fact that we do not have total agreement on a given issue does not mean that we have no agreement. Evangelicals may have four views on the Lord's return, but we all believe he is coming again. As far back as the Fathers, the moral imperatives of Jesus and the Apostles as encoded in Scripture and properly interpreted, have been looked to as binding on and by the church. Certainly Smith is correct that there are many things in Scripture about which God has not given us a full picture. But the church, broadly and universally construed, has not shared Smith's severe pessimism about the legitimacy of attempting to discern and apply the imperatives of Scriptures—however difficult this may be to do well. In my estimation, a hermeneutic driven by Smith's hyperbolic fear of biblicism truncates the church's capacity to speak definitively and objectively about ethics and morality—something Christians sorely need today. For a more balanced hermeneutic that takes seriously the challenges of applying the biblical imperatives across cultures, see Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2005), and N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1992), 121–44.



Paul is here discussing the relational dynamics of Christian marriage. And as he gives instruction to husbands and wives about how they are to treat one other, he draws a tight parallel between human marriage and Christ's relationship with the church. The way Christ treats the church, Paul tells us, serves as the pattern for the way in which a husband is to treat his wife. And the way the church relates to Christ is the way a wife is to relate to her husband. But by what logic does Paul ask husbands and wives to relate to one another as Christ and the church? The answer is found in verse 32. The sexual oneness of human marriage, Paul tells us, "refers to Christ and the church." Drawing upon the ancient marriage formula of Genesis 2:24, Paul reveals that sexual oneness within marriage was created by God to serve as a typological foreshadowing of the spiritual oneness that has now begun to exist between Christ and his church. The New Testament's many references to the church as the "bride" of Christ, and to Christ as the "bridegroom" further highlights this parallel. Additionally, many of Christ's parables use the wedding motif as an illustration of his return and consummate union with the church. And the book of Revelation explicitly refers to the wedding supper of the Lamb as inaugurating the dawn of the eternal age.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The church has traditionally understood the marriage relationship through a typological framework. So 2 *Clement*, "Now I do not suppose that you are ignorant of the fact that the living church is the body of Christ, for the Scripture says, 'God created humankind male and female.' The male is Christ; the female is the church," 2 *Clement* 14:2. Also Augustine, "It is of Christ and the Church that this is most truly understood, 'the twain shall be one flesh,'" *On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism*, 1.60. And of course Catholic theology views the marriage relationship in a sacramental (and thus typological) sense. See Thomas, *Summa* III.42.1, and John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, (Boston, Mass.: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), cat. 87-102. The Reformers—given Reformation polemics—were less sanguine about highlighting the typological (and thus potentially sacramental) nature of the marriage relationship. But Calvin, commenting on Ephesians 5:23, nonetheless states, "Christ has appointed the same relation to exist between a husband and a wife, as between himself and his church," *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians* (trans. William Pringle; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 317-18. So too Luther, while denying that types are inherently sacramental, still affirms, "Christ and the church are... a great and secret thing which can and ought to be represented in terms of marriage as a kind of outward allegory," *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (trans. A. T. W. Steinhauser; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1970), 223. Edwards, who did not share the Reformer's reservations, stated explicitly, "[Christ is] united to you by a spiritual union, so close as to be fitly represented by the union of the wife to the husband," "The Excellency of Christ, 1758" in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, (eds. Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 186. Barth also follows this pattern in his extended comments on the relationship between men and women. See his *Church Dogmatics*, III.2, 285-324. Many modern evangelical commentators embrace this typological interpretation as well. See O'Brien's, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 428-36; Ray Ortlund, Jr., *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1996) 152-59; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians: Word Biblical Commentary*, (Dallas, Tx.: Word Books, 1990), 352-53; and John Stott, *The Message of the Ephesians*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1979), 230-31.

What Paul says here about marriage is equally true about sex itself. True Christian marriage cannot be constituted apart from sexual union. The phrase “οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν” (*the two shall be one flesh*), used in 5:31 speaks specifically about sexual union, not simply marital union in a general, legal sense. (See 1 Corinthians 6:16 where Paul deploys the identical “one flesh” phrase to denote sexual union with a prostitute.) Within the context of the Ephesians passage, the metaphor of bodily union (i.e., head to body) is tied intimately to the sexual relationship. For Paul, sex establishes and creates the bodily union upon which true marriage is based.<sup>22</sup> Thus Paul’s statement that marriage is a type of Christ’s relationship to the church is at the same time a statement that sexual union is a type of Christ’s spiritual union with the church (again see 1 Corinthians 6:16–17 for this close parallel).

And of course this makes sense when we consider the relational dynamics of sex. Sex, when understood from a Christocentric framework, is the mutual self-giving and joyful receiving of the husband and wife. John Paul II, in his *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, pushes back against the Cartesian depersonalization of the body and rightly presses home the point that man does not simply *have* a body, but in a certain sense *is* a body. Thus sex, as the union of male and female bodies, is properly (and theologically) understood as a form of personal communion—a “gift of self.” Thus, when a man pursues a woman sexually, what he desires (even if he does not realize it) is not simply the surrendering of her body to him as a material object, but rather her *personal* openness to receive him as a gift. In sex the man offers himself to the woman as a gift, and he finds his joy in her opening herself to receive him as the gift he offers of himself. And she, for her part, finds her joy in yielding herself to another before whom she is vulnerable, who seeks her joy in the giving of himself, who uses his strength to bless rather than totalize. And in this way she too is gift to him, for she gives herself as gift to him in that she opens within herself a place for him to dwell, trusting and receiving the man’s gift of self, and returning it in like kind. Most significantly, this mutual giving and receiving of the self may result in new life—a child; the man places his very life in the woman, and she receives and nurtures it (and thus him) in an expression of personal communion so profound that it actually has the power to instantiate the *imago Dei*.

All of this finds its deepest meaning in Christ’s relationship with the church. We give ourselves as gift to Christ in the free surrender of ourselves, that we might joyfully receive him as gift. He *himself* is the gift of grace that we receive, and we *ourselves* are the gift that we give to Christ. We find our joy in opening to him and making room for him to

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<sup>22</sup>In the ancient world—far more than today—sex was viewed as the means by which a marriage was constituted. However, even in the ancient world there was more to marriage than sex (e.g., see John 4:18 and the woman at the well). Marriage in the ancient world began at betrothal—generally a formal agreement between the families of the bride and groom. For more on marriage in the ancient world, see Ken M. Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003).

dwell within us, and he finds his joy in placing himself—and thus his life via his Holy Spirit—inside of us, and being joyfully received by us. Thus Paul frames for us a view of sex and marriage whereby they are not ends in themselves, but rather are *types* of something higher, pointing to the deeper reality of the believer's union with Christ. Just as the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb in the Old Testament foreshadowed Christ's atoning sacrifice in the New, so too the mutual self-giving and joyful receiving of spousal love "refers to Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:29).<sup>23</sup>

Even without considering the explicit imperatives in the New Testament, Paul's Christocentric reading of sex provides us with a theological framework for thinking about the whole of sexual ethics. Because sexual union functions as a living witness of the spiritual oneness between Christ and the church, our sexual conduct should be patterned after the way in which Christ and the church relate spiritually. The prohibitions against homosexuality, polygamy, incest, prostitution, fornication, bestiality—indeed all forms of *πορνεία*—find their ultimate explanation against the backdrop of this reality.<sup>24</sup>

And most significantly, it is within this Christocentric framework that we can begin to think constructively about premarital sexual activity. Were we to look beyond the direct imperatives of Scripture (as Smith would have us do) and construct our own premarital sexual ethic based exclusively on a Christocentric reading of sex and marriage, we would be pointed toward a conclusion consistent with what I've argued for above. God has ordained sex as a means of foreshadowing the one-spirit relationship between Christ and the church; therefore we misuse our sexuality when we express it outside the context of the marriage relationship.

Most fundamentally, our sexuality has not been given to us simply for our own use and pleasure. We are not self-referential. As *eikons* made in the image of God, all of our humanity—not least our sexuality—exists as a means of representing the One in whose image we have been made. Premarital sexual activity therefore, must be assessed in light of this fundamental context of meaning. Given the theological and typological import of sexual relations, it is difficult (if not impossible) to justify *any* amount of sexual activity outside the context of the marriage relationship, even if that sexual activity stops short of intercourse. The

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<sup>23</sup>This typological reading of sex can be found throughout the church's history. Among the Fathers, Origen is noteworthy; see his *Commentary and Homilies on the Song of Songs*. Medieval exegetes likewise read spousal love in this way. See especially St John of the Cross', *Spiritual Canticle*, and Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. For recent interpretations, see John Paul II's, *Man and Woman*, especially 500-03, and Peter Leithart, "The Poetry of Sex," n. p. [cited 17 January, 2012]. Online : <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2012/01/the-poetry-of-sex>.

<sup>24</sup>In brief, homosexuality fails to denote the union of the masculine and the feminine (i.e., the strong and the vulnerable); prostitution, divorce and adultery fail to denote Christ's single-minded fidelity to his bride; incest fails to portray the union of dissimilar natures (i.e., the divine and human). See Gerald Hiestand, *Raising Purity*, 156.

man who uses his sexuality in a premarital relationship fails to use his sexuality in a way consistent with the ordained intent of sex. God calls us to reserve our sexuality for the marriage relationship, because it is only in the marriage relationship that the image of Christ's relationship to the church can be lived out.

#### B. WILLIAM WEBB'S "MOVEMENT HERMENEUTIC:" MOVING FROM THE ANCIENT CULTURE TO THE BIBLE

Beyond a Christocentric reading of sex, William Webb, in his important book, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*, offers us a second reading of Scripture that supports the premarital sexual ethic of this essay. Webb's hermeneutic, like Smith's, is concerned with navigating between the world of the Bible and our own. Key to Webb's thesis is the idea that we must observe the "movement" of the biblical text as it relates to its host culture. In some cases (e.g., slavery) the Bible represents movement away from the host culture toward a more *generous* ethic. In other cases (e.g., homosexuality) the Bible moves away from the host culture toward a more *restrictive* ethic. This "movement" of the Bible in relation to the host culture helps us discern the spirit of the text with a view to application in our contemporary context. When we see the Bible adopting a consistent posture on a given topic (e.g., always constrictive), we appropriately project and apply this posture in our current context.

I have reservations about certain aspects of Webb approach,<sup>25</sup> but I find his emphasis on movement insightful. Most saliently for our purposes, Webb examines the "movement" of Scripture as it relates to sexual ethics (homosexuality, specifically). Webb rightly observes that the Bible consistently offers a more rigid sexual ethic than that of the host culture.<sup>26</sup> The Torah's strict sexual code represented a significant departure from the culture of the ancient near east. Sexual cultic activities common in the ancient world are forbidden by the Torah; homosexuality is strongly condemned. Prostitution—a practice as old as

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<sup>25</sup> Webb (not unlike Smith) asks us to consider the possibility that Scripture is pointing to an "ultimate ethic" beyond the pages of Scripture. Thus for Webb, in many instances we will need to "move beyond" the teaching of the Bible and develop an ultimate ethic that captures the "spirit" of the original text. See *Slaves, Women, and Homosexual: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2001), 33. Webb is to be commended for grappling with the difficult reality that the Bible's ethic (particularly as it relates to the Torah's statements about women, slavery, war, etc.) often seems less judicious than that of contemporary society. But Webb does not sufficiently consider how the "intra-canonical" movement of the Bible (explicated in well-formed biblical theology) can provide an "ultimate" ethic without moving beyond the pages of the New Testament. Which is to say, all trajectories in Scripture reach their consummation with the advent of Christ and the dawn of the New Covenant. For an extended critique of Webb along these lines, see Thomas Schreiner, "William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*: A Review Article," *SBJT* 6 (2002): 46-64.

<sup>26</sup> Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, 39-40.

humanity, and often celebrated in pagan worship—is severely chastised. The Levitical purity codes likewise banned incest and bestiality. About the only common ground one can discern between the sexual ethics of the ancient near east and that of the Torah is a mutual rejection of adultery, and fornicating with another man's virgin daughter.

The same constricting movement can be seen as we move from the Greco-Roman world to the New Testament. The sexual ethics of the Greco-Roman culture differed little from the pagan culture of the Old Testament. Homosexuality in Greco-Roman culture was socially acceptable; likewise concubines, prostitution, and cultic sexual worship. Fornication was considered inconsequential, as long as it occurred between a male and his prostitute/mistress/slave. For its part, the New Testament offers a sexual morality just as counter to the Greco-Roman culture as does the Torah to the Canaanite culture. And indeed Jesus' sexual ethic as contained within the Sermon on the Mount pushes the discontinuity to an even deeper level. Not only does Jesus condemn sexual immorality, but he condemns even the *desire* to commit sexual immorality. Again, the only common ground between the world of the New Testament and the larger Greco-Roman culture is a mutual rejection of adultery, as well as a mutual rejection of fornication between a man and a respectable virgin.

The Bible's posture here is consistent. Throughout the canon's development, the biblical movement has always been toward a more constrictive sexual ethic than that of the pagan culture. Webb rightly concludes that this consistency indicates we must not "loosen" the Bible's sexual ethic regarding homosexuality. Webb's conclusion is equally appropriate regarding the whole of sexual ethics. Given the overall movement of Scripture, the instinct to see a more restrictive premarital sexual ethic is well founded.

North American culture is not yet as pagan as first century Greco-Roman culture. But certainly the sexual revolution of 1960's began a sea change regarding our culture's vision of sexual morality that put it severely—and increasingly—at odds with the New Testament.<sup>27</sup> Webb's movement hermeneutic is not sufficient in itself to establish the premarital ethic being argued for in this essay. But if we wish to embrace a sexual ethic that is consistent with the Bible's historic engagement with the culture, it seems almost impossible to legitimize or remain ambivalent about premarital sexual activities such as oral sex, fondling, or passionate kissing. Such ambivalence fails to fully reckon with the way the Bible has consistently served as a conservative and restricting element for the people of God in light of pagan sexual ethics. Or again, a contemporary sexual ethic that allows for sexual activity prior to marriage does not do justice to the sort of cultural distance the Bible has regularly put between the City of God and the City of Man.

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<sup>27</sup> Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*, 13.

### C. INTRA-CANONICAL MOVEMENT: THE GRADUAL REDUCTION OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY FROM CREATION TO NEW CREATION

Webb's insight above is helpful. But even more instructive is the *intra-canonical* movement of the Bible regarding sexual ethics. Not only do we observe a constricting movement as we transition between the pagan culture and the Bible, but we also see a constricting movement within the Bible itself. The sweep of the biblical narrative can be assessed through four distinct epochs: from creation to Torah, from Torah to the New Testament, from the New Testament to the eschaton, and then finally into the eternal age.<sup>28</sup> As we will see below, salvation history points us toward a sexual ethic that is finally and fully realized only in the eschaton. In each epoch we observe a continual and gradual funneling of sexual activity into the structure of God's original typological design for sexual relations, which in turn leads inevitably then to the end of sex itself. This overall funneling movement strongly supports the premarital sexual ethic being advocated for in this essay. We will examine each epoch in turn.

#### 1. EPOCH ONE: FROM CREATION TO TORAH.

The Genesis account clearly establishes—and indeed encourages—the sanctity of the sexual relationship between husband and wife (Genesis 2:22-25). But beyond this, the biblical narrative makes it clear that God has not yet imposed upon his people a stringent sexual ethic. The patriarchs regularly engaged in polygamy, prostitution, incest, and the taking of concubines. Only adultery is met with God's firm disapproval (Genesis 20).

As is the case in much of the ancient world, sexual misconduct for the patriarchs was not so much about temperance and the need to master one's passions (as one finds in Plato, Aristotle, and Paul), but rather an important aspect of respecting one's fellow man. Consorting with a prostitute was not considered an impropriety (suffice she was paid; see Genesis 38:1-23), since she did not belong to anybody. But sexual relations with a respectable man's daughter, or with another man's wife, was viewed in the ancient world as a form of stealing.<sup>29</sup> Thus the offense was not primarily against an abstract "purity" law, nor was it principally against the woman involved in the incident. The offense was against the man to whom the woman belonged. (Note that the Lord's rebuke of David focuses on David's sin against Uriah. Nathan compares David's sin to that of a rich man stealing a poor man's ewe lamb; see also

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<sup>28</sup> The recognition that sexual ethics move along a trajectory need not lead us to the conclusion that God's ideal sexual ethic has evolved, or that sexual ethics are relative and arbitrary. Just as divorce was not God's ideal "from the beginning" (Mathew 19:8) yet was permitted—indeed legislated—due to hardness of heart, so too we can understand the progressive nature of biblical sexual ethics. See John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 267-77, for a helpful discussion regarding how the definition of adultery was progressively expanded by Israel from creation to the time of Christ.

<sup>29</sup> For an extended discussion here, see Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*, 144-63.

2 Samuel 12, 1 Kings 15:5.) Thus there was a sort of “natural law” instinct within the ancient world against the most basic forms of sexual immorality (i.e., adultery, and fornication with a man’s virgin daughter). But beyond this minimal ethic, neither divine revelation nor the culture constrained the males of the ancient world in their sexual conduct.

## 2. *Epoch Two: From Torah to the New Testament.*

The giving of the Mosaic Law represents the first real constricting movement of the Bible away from the sexual ethics of the pagan culture. Polygamy is still permissible, as are concubines; but incest (Leviticus 18:6), and prostitution—particularly of the cultic variety—is forbidden (Leviticus 18:29). Fornication with an unbetrothed virgin is penalized and discouraged (Deuteronomy 22:29). Divorce is regulated in a way that encourages monogamy (Deuteronomy 22:19, 29). Homosexuality and bestiality are banned under pain of death (Leviticus 19). It is not a coincidence that a more stringent sexual ethic coincides with the Lord’s indwelling of his people *via* the tabernacle. This begins to indicate that something more than property rights and “honor thy neighbor” is at work in divinely sanctioned sexual ethics. As the Lord’s indwelling of his people under the Old Covenant pointed typologically toward the indwelling of his people in the New Covenant, it is to be expected that biblical sexual ethics should develop in step with the approach of the anti-type. Sex is not merely about respecting the rights of one’s fellow man, but is in some way reflective of personal holiness in view of one’s union with God.

At the same time that sexual activity is being funneled more restrictively into the marriage relationship, the marriage relationship is itself celebrated. This period of redemptive history continues to affirm, along with the creation account, the beauty and worth of sex and marriage (Song of Songs, Proverbs 5:18-19). Though the Levitical purity laws tie together marital sex with ceremonial uncleanness, the overall force of this negative inference is offset by the celebration of sex in the Wisdom literature, as well as the Torah’s affirmation of children as a blessing from God.

## 3. *Epoch Three: From the New Testament to the Eschaton.*

The teachings of Jesus and the Apostles represent the third epoch of the Scripture’s sexual ethic. The New Testament assumes and affirms the sexual ethic of the Torah, and then moves beyond this to an even more constrictive sexual ethic. This constriction can be seen in at least four ways.

First, Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:27-30 regarding lust places an emphasis upon sexual purity not fully developed in the Torah.<sup>30</sup> Not only

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<sup>30</sup> So, John Paul II, “[The Law’ stance on sexual ethics] is not concerned directly with the order of the ‘heart’ but with the order of social life as a whole...” *Man and Woman*, 272. Whether one interprets Christ’s teaching in the Sermon as a higher ethic

must one maintain sexual purity as it relates to *sexual activity* (per the Law), but also as it relates to *sexual desire* (per the coming Kingdom of God). This ethic of desire, while perhaps seminally present in the Torah (e.g., “thou shall not covet”) is given a more central and penetrating focus in the New Testament.

Second, polygamy is at last laid aside. Though no longer practiced widely in the first century, the writings of the Apostle Paul formally codify the necessity of monogamy for the Christian community (1Timothy 3:2). Thus not only is marriage now the only context for sex, but marriage itself is limited to a single partner.<sup>31</sup>

Third, the New Testament’s teaching on divorce restricts sexual activity to a single life-long relationship. Under the Torah, divorce was legislated in a way that, while discouraged, left room for a man to have multiple marriages, and thus multiple sexual relationships. However one interprets the New Testament’s teaching on divorce and remarriage, it is clear that the New Testament holds out life-long monogamy as the ideal. The net effect is not only the limiting of sexual activity to a monogamous marriage, but the limiting of marriage itself to a single occurrence.

Fourth, and perhaps most notably, celibacy is for the first time highlighted as a positive—if not ideal—state. The personal examples of Jesus and Paul, as well as Paul’s explicit teachings in 1 Corinthians 7, all mark a significant shift away from the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28 and the general posture of the Torah toward marriage and children. Throughout much of the Old Testament, the people of God were given only a minimalist view of the “afterlife.” Consequently, a heavy emphasis was placed upon physical offspring as the means of “living forever.” But the close of the Old Testament and the advent of the New brought clarity regarding a future resurrection; thus the significance of children began to recede into the background, making way for a new embrace of celibacy. Under the New Covenant marriage is no longer the ideal state. While the New Testament continues to see sex and marriage as laudable, the in-breaking of the age to come reveals that we are moving toward an epoch where not only extra-marital sex will be discontinued, but even marital sex itself will be set aside. As Cyprian notes of consecrated virgins: “That which we shall be, you have already begun to be.”<sup>32</sup>

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than the Mosaic Law, or an illumination of the intent of the Law, it is clear that Christ’s overall ethic strongly pushes beyond sexual behaviour to the intentions and desires of the heart in ways that the Law did not fully do.

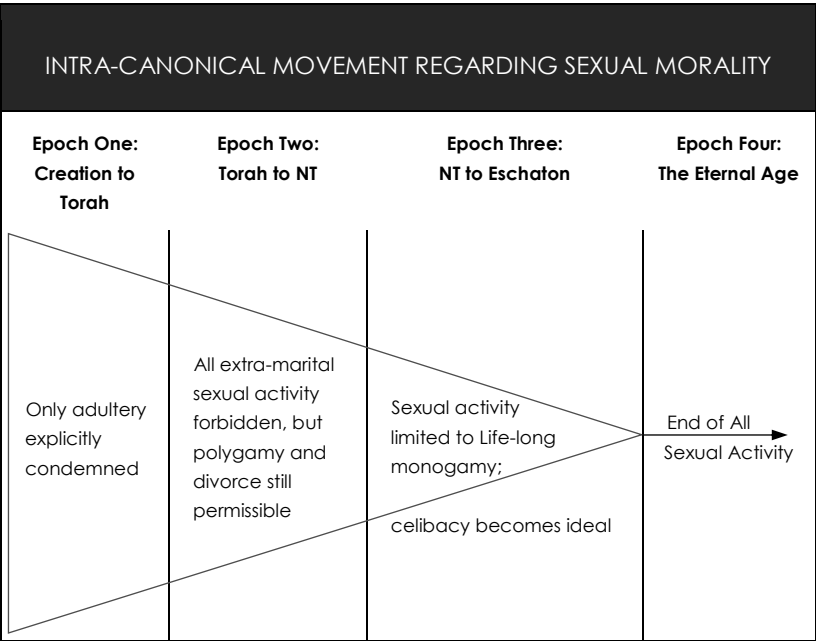
<sup>31</sup> Loader rightly observes, “Polygamous marriages gave men greater flexibility for what was seen as legitimate sexual expression,” *Sexuality in the New Testament*, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Cyprian, *The Treatises of Cyprian*, 2.22.



4. Epoch Four: The Eternal Age and Beyond

We arrive now at the fourth epoch. Jesus’ comments in Matthew 22:29-32 about the temporal nature of marriage reveal that marriage—and thus sexual relations—do not extend into the eternal age.<sup>33</sup> No longer will we marry or be given in marriage. The typological relationship between human marriage and Christ’s marriage to the church helps us make sense of this final abolition of sex. Once the anti-type has been fully realized, there is no longer a need for the type. In the same way that Christians no longer sacrifice the Passover lamb, so too human marriage will no longer be necessary as a pointer to Christ and the gospel. When the sun has risen to its zenith, the shadow is no more. Celibacy, then “points out the ‘eschatological’ virginity of the risen man, in which...the absolute and eternal spousal meaning of the glorified body will be revealed in union with God himself.”<sup>34</sup> It makes sense, then, that the New Testament’s emphasis on celibacy and permanent monogamy corresponds to dawning of Christ’s incarnation and his betrothal to the church.



<sup>33</sup> Barth rightly observes that Jesus’ comments here refer to the cessation of marriage, not the abolition of gender. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.2, 296. So to Augustine, who perhaps had more cultural pressure to argue for the abolition of gender (particularly femininity) at the resurrection. See *City of God*, 22.17.

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 419. See all of catechesis 75.

In sum we find ourselves now living at that point in the biblical narrative where sexual activity has been reduced to monogamous, permanent relationships, and celibacy highlighted as an ideal. Further, we are moving toward an age (an age which has already dawned) where sexual relations will be set aside all together. The figure below provides a visual representation of the Bible's movement from a broad, permissive sexual ethic, toward the ultimate absolution of sex and marriage.<sup>35</sup>

The implications are clear. Even without an explicit statement from Scripture about premarital sexual ethics, the overall trajectory of the Biblical narrative, as it moves from a broad sexual ethic toward the complete absolution of sex itself, strongly supports the limiting of all sexual activity—even minor sexual activity—to the marriage relationship. Given the trajectory of the Bible's sexual ethic toward complete abstinence, it is nearly impossible to suppose that premarital sexual activity such as oral sex, passionate kissing, fondling, etc., represents fidelity to the spirit and redemptive-historical movement of Scripture. Such a conclusion would unnaturally "widen" the assumed sexual norms of both Testaments, and run counter to the overall restricting trajectory of the Bible.

### CONCLUSION

Ambrose once said, "The condition of the mind is often seen in the attitude of the body.... Thus the movement of the body is a sort of voice of the soul."<sup>36</sup> Indeed it is. And nowhere does the voice of the soul speak louder than in our sexuality. Sex carries such significance in our lives because it was ordained by God to point toward that which is most significant—Christ's relationship with the church. Thus the misuse of sex damages us in ways that other bodily sins do not. As the Apostle Paul states, "Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body (1 Corinthians 6:18).

While "thou shalt not make out" is not as explicit as "thou shalt not commit adultery," the Bible does indeed offer us a clear sexual ethic: sexual activity is to be reserved for the marriage relationship. When we combine this sexual ethic with an intuitive understanding that sexual activity includes more than sexual intercourse, we can confidently conclude that all forms of sexual activity—even sexual forms of kissing—must be reserved for the marriage relationship.

For too long pastors and Christian leaders have neglected to provide definitive instruction about the appropriate boundaries of premarital relationships. Telling singles that the Bible has nothing explicit to say about premarital sexual activity beyond its prohibition against intercourse is an unacceptable fulfillment of our pastoral responsibility.

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<sup>35</sup> For a thorough biblical-theological treatment of this trajectory, specifically as it relates to celibacy and singleness, see Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness*.

<sup>36</sup> *On the Duties of Clergy*, 1.18.

The stakes are simply too high, and human sexuality simply too important.

The reigning premarital sexual ethic of evangelicalism is muddled and unclear. The pressing need of the moment is for evangelical pastors and leaders to articulate a clearer, more pastorally responsible premarital ethic—one that is biblically authoritative, theologically robust, and sufficiently objective.<sup>37</sup> May this essay be a step in that direction.

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<sup>37</sup> Embracing this ethic will inevitably necessitate a rethinking of contemporary dating relationships. For my views of on this, see Hiestand and Thomas, *Sex, Dating, and Relationships*.



MAN AND WOMAN HE CREATED THEM: SAME-SEX  
DESIRES, GENDER TROUBLE, AND GAY MARRIAGE  
IN THE LIGHT OF JOHN PAUL II'S  
THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

MATTHEW MASON\*

To the reader in 2013, there is an obvious lacuna in John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* (hereafter cited as TOB).<sup>1</sup> In over six hundred pages of rich catechesis on sex, marriage, and sexuality, there is no mention of same-sex sexual desire, gay marriage, or lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender experience. This is surprising from the historical perspective of the original catecheses;<sup>2</sup> thirty years later it leaves unanswered some of the most pressing questions of sexual ethics and public policy that face the church in the West. TOB does explore, at length, the meaning of gender and the body, but it does not address more recent accounts of the plasticity of gender. This article constitutes a partial attempt to fill that hole, drawing on TOB, and exploring what it might say a generation later about gender confusions, same-sex sexual desires, and gay relationships. It originated in a much longer paper that followed the biblical-theological structure of TOB, and explored what we can learn about this topic from the perspectives of creation<sup>3</sup> and fall,<sup>4</sup> redemption and consummation.<sup>5</sup> I hope to develop each of these perspectives more fully in the future, but the focus of this article is limited to the creational pattern for sexuality and gender, and its consummation in the marriage of Christ and the Church.

In relation to marriage, I shall attempt to recover a traditional definition, which includes procreation as one of its primary goods, but drawing on Christopher Ash's work, I shall locate the goods of marriage more broadly in the purpose of marriage to serve the kingdom of God. From this context, I shall assess recent claims in favor of gay marriage and consider the validity of same-sex relationships more broadly. Finally, I shall consider eschatology and ecclesiology in the light of Scripture's marital typology and apply this to our practice of discipleship

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\* Matthew Mason is Associate Rector at Church of the Resurrection, Washington, D. C.

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Given from September 5, 1979 to November 28, 1984.

<sup>3</sup> "Christ Appeals to the Beginning," TOB, 1-23.

<sup>4</sup> "Christ Appeals to the Human Heart," TOB, 24-59.

<sup>5</sup> "Christ Appeals to the Resurrection," TOB, 64-85; "The Dimension of the Covenant of Grace," TOB, 87-102.

in community, particularly as it relates to those called to a life of celibate chastity.

I regard the traditional understanding of biblical texts prohibiting same-sex sexual practices as established, and shall not articulate it here.<sup>6</sup> Rather, I shall assume it and build on it. This essay, in other words, is primarily an exercise in faith seeking understanding. There is a place for attempts to argue, for example, from a natural law perspective in favor of a traditional understanding of marriage, seeking to persuade non-Christians on grounds they might find convincing.<sup>7</sup> However, that is not my intention here. I hope that what I say will provide reasons for thinking that the Christian position on same-sex relationships is wholesome, coherent, and beautiful, but I am writing as a Christian pastor and theologian primarily for Christians, and particularly for other pastors. In other words, my purpose is pastoral rather than apologetic: I aim to teach healthy doctrine that will enable God's people to think his thoughts after him, and to live in joyful obedience to his word.

## I. CREATION: THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF MARRIAGE

John Paul begins with Jesus, who, in his controversy with the Pharisees, begins "in the beginning" (Matt 19:3-12).<sup>8</sup> When the Pharisees come to him with a question about the lawfulness of divorce, "Christ does not accept the discussion on the level on which his interlocutors try to introduce it...instead, he appeals twice to the 'beginning.'" (TOB 1:2) In considering same-sex sexualities, we must do the same. If we do not, our discussion of marriage and sexuality will float untethered to reality, and will not cut with the grain of the universe as it truly is. In current debates on gender and sexuality, appeal to Genesis will challenge widespread assumptions that sex, gender and sexuality are plastic, malleable into whatever form a particular individual may desire. In current debates on marriage, appeal to the beginning will challenge contemporary misunderstandings about the true nature of marriage. I shall consider marriage first, then sexual dimorphism.

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<sup>6</sup> For exegesis of the relevant texts in their canonical context, see Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 379–406; Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); David G. Peterson, ed., *Holiness and Sexuality: Homosexuality in a Biblical Context* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004): 1-50. The best articulation of a revisionist reading of these passages is James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> For excellent recent examples, see Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George, and Ryan T. Anderson, "What is Marriage?" *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 34.1 (Winter 2010): 245-87; Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York; London: Encounter Books, 2012); Alastair Roberts, "Just Cause Against Same-Sex Marriage: Why We Cannot Hold Our Peace," *Ecclesia Reformanda* 3.1 (2011): 48-73; Idem, "The Case Against Same-Sex Marriage. Part Two," *Ecclesia Reformanda* 3.2 (2012): 95-117; Idem, "The Case Against Same-Sex Marriage. Part Three," *Ecclesia Reformanda* 3.2. (2012): 118-39.

<sup>8</sup> "Christ Appeals to the Beginning," TOB, 1-23.

## II. MARRIAGE: INTROVERTED COMPANIONSHIP OR EXTRAVERTED SERVICE?

In their recent defense of the historic, conjugal definition of marriage, Girgis, Anderson, and George warn that redefining marriage to include same-sex partners will lead many to misunderstand marriage. “They will not see it as essentially comprehensive, or thus (among other things) as ordered to procreation and family life—but as essentially an emotional union.” This in turn will undermine assumptions about marital permanence and sexual exclusivity.<sup>9</sup> However, most people in contemporary western cultures already regard marriage as essentially a companionate or emotional union. Intercourse is no longer restricted to marriage and has been separated from procreation, and procreation is no longer understood as one of the primary goods of marriage. Thus, rather than same-sex marriage altering our understanding of marriage, the reverse seems more likely. It is our novel cultural understanding of marriage that makes same-sex marriage plausible, even obvious. If we understand marriage as an emotional union, on what grounds would we deprive gay couples of the right to marry, particularly given widespread acceptance and affirmation of same-sex love? Legalizing gay marriage will do no more than entrench the already accepted definition.

This companionate view of marriage also holds sway within the church, at least in the Protestant churches, often buttressed by a misplaced appeal to Genesis 2:18: “It is not good for man to be alone.”<sup>10</sup> Two recent conservative evangelical books on marriage, both very helpful in their own ways, illustrate this implicit redefinition.<sup>11</sup> Neither book reduces marriage to a means of meeting an emotional or sexual need; both are critical of such a self-centered view. Instead, they focus on marriage as a God-ordained means for spouses to love and serve one another sacrificially, and as a context in which they grow, as friends and lovers, into the likeness of Christ. However, even though one of the books contains chapters called “The Essence of Marriage,” “The Mission of Marriage,” and “Sex and Marriage,”<sup>12</sup> neither volume discusses procreation as one of the central goods of marriage, nor do they address the issue of raising children; they exclusively emphasize the character of the husband-wife relationship in relation to Christ. Both

<sup>9</sup> Girgis, Anderson, and George, *What is Marriage?* 7.

<sup>10</sup> For a representative sampling, including Protestants and Roman Catholics, academic and popular writers, see those cited in Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing; Leicester: IVP, 2003), 108-110.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Dutton, 2011); Paul Tripp, *What Did You Expect?? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). For a more problematic example, with a far greater emphasis on sex, see Mark Driscoll and Grace Driscoll, *Real Marriage: the Truth About Sex, Friendship, and Life Together* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012). A refreshing exception is Christopher Ash, *Married for God: Making your Marriage the Best it Can Be* (Leicester: IVP, 2007), especially chapter 3, “What is the Point of Having Children?”: “welcoming children [including nurturing them to serve God] is part and parcel of God’s plan for marriage. If you regard children as a curse and don’t want them, don’t get married!” (61).

<sup>12</sup> Keller and Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, chapters three, four, and eight respectively.

books contain much that is beneficial for marital and pre-marital counseling, but judged both by Scripture and historic Christian teaching, both are incomplete in their understanding of marriage.

To take one Protestant example of the older view—one that shaped the understanding of marriage in English and American society for centuries and that remains (theoretically) authoritative in most of the worldwide Anglican Communion—the *Book of Common Prayer's* marriage service calls for “due consideration of the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.”

First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.

Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.<sup>13</sup>

On this account, God ordained marriage for three reasons. The first and third (procreation and companionship) are inherent to the institution because they would have pertained even before the fall,<sup>14</sup> whilst the second (marriage as a remedy against sin and fornication) can be regarded as accidental because it is only necessary in a postlapsarian world. The importance placed on procreation and the nurture of children is common also to Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and even early Enlightenment accounts of marriage.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it is striking that, whilst contemporary evangelical views of marriage focus particularly on the third, and somewhat on the second of these goods, they usually pass over procreation in silence.

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<sup>13</sup> *Book of Common Prayer* (1662), “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony.” There are minor changes of wording, but the substance is identical with that of Cranmer's liturgy of 1552.

<sup>14</sup> Although there is some disagreement in church history over the presence of sexual differentiation, sex, and procreation in a prelapsarian world, the view that humans would have procreated sexually before the fall is, following Augustine's mature teaching, the consensus in the West (see Christopher Chenault Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* [New York, NY; London: T & T Clark International, 2007]; and also Paul Ramsey, ‘Human Sexuality in the History of Redemption’, *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 16.1 [1988]: 56–86). In the East there is some diversity, but the majority position, although not indebted to Augustine, appears to be the same (see John Behr, “A Note on the Ontology of Gender,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 [1988]: 363–72).

<sup>15</sup> John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).



For John Paul, the unitive and procreative goods of marriage properly belong together.<sup>16</sup> He reads Genesis 2:24 in the light of Genesis 1:28:

Uniting so closely with each other that they become “one flesh,” they place their humanity in some way under the blessing of fruitfulness, that is, of “procreation,” about which the first account speaks (Gen 1:28). Man enters “into being” in the consciousness that his own masculinity-femininity, that is, his own sexuality, is ordered to an end. (TOB 14:5)

In distinction from the lower creatures, for humans procreation is not the only purpose of the sexual act, because “The human body, with its sex” also “contains ‘from the beginning’ the ‘spousal’ attribute, that is, *the power to express love*” in the gift of the lover to the beloved. (TOB 15:1) John Paul speaks frequently and beautifully of sexual intercourse as a gift of self. It is not merely instrumental: the man must not turn the woman into an object, an instrument to gratify his desires, nor she him; but neither is it merely an instrument for reproduction; it can only be understood in the context of the mystery of the gift of the self in the “communion of persons.” But this gift, as man and woman give themselves and accept each other, is not to be separated from “the creative perspective of human existence which always renews itself through ‘procreation.’” (TOB 19:1) Indeed, it was precisely as Adam knew his wife that she conceived and gave birth to Cain (Gen 4:1). For John Paul, this knowledge “indicates the deepest essence of the reality of shared married life.” It is “part of the consciousness of the meaning of one’s body. In Genesis 4:1, when they become one flesh, the man the woman experience the meaning of their bodies in a particular way.” (TOB 20:4) As they give themselves to one another, and so discover together the meaning of their bodies, she conceives, and “the mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood.” Eve now stands before Adam as mother; and the meaning of his masculinity is revealed in “the generative and ‘paternal’ meaning of his body.” (TOB 21:2) Thus knowledge—union—and procreation belong together.

Christopher Ash’s treatment of Genesis 2 broadens the horizon of this sexual union ordered towards procreation. Ash argues from the overall context of Genesis 1 and 2 that God does not give the woman to the man to cure his loneliness. Rather, she is given to him because it is not good for him to be alone in his task of filling and subduing the world (Gen 1:28), and guarding and serving the Garden (Gen 2:15). Companionship is not the purpose, or end, of marriage. But neither is procreation. Both are marital goods ordered towards a higher end: serving God’s kingdom. Marriage “ought to be considered under the governing ethic of human responsibility (to the Creator) and of the

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<sup>16</sup> For the sake of this paper I shall bracket TOB’s teaching on artificial contraception, as the position we take on contraception need not alter our view of procreation as one of the central goods of marriage.

human task (over the creation).<sup>17</sup> Marriage is therefore not an introverted relationship, primarily aiming to meet the need of loneliness. But nor is its aim to produce an introverted family of parents and children. "They have children not for their own sakes as parents, nor for the children's sakes, but for the sake of contributing to the great task entrusted to humankind."<sup>18</sup> And so, in the Old Testament, procreation is strongly correlated with the task of fruitful work.<sup>19</sup>

As we argued above, to the extent that an introverted, companionate view of marriage holds sway (marriage as cure for loneliness) it will be proportionately difficult to argue that same-sex marriage is impermissible. But, in the beginning, God ordained marriage as a delightful context in which a man and woman would come to know themselves as male and female as they gave themselves to one another in love for the sake of worshipful obedience to their Creator and joyful service of his kingdom. The fullness of this knowledge, and an intrinsic part of serving his kingdom, was to be the fruitfulness of this marriage in procreation, which is a central aspect of the meaning of our creation as male and female and of the gift of self to the other. This understanding of the interconnected meanings of marriage, gender, and sexual relations immediately rules out the possibility of same-sex marriage. Arguably one can no more have a same-sex marriage than one can have a bovine horse, for same-sex marriage is inherently sterile; it cannot fulfill one of the basic goods that is central to marriage as an institution as it has always and everywhere been understood, namely that of procreation.<sup>20</sup>

Advocates of gay marriage commonly reply by citing the obvious examples of heterosexual marriages that are infertile. If infertile gay couples can't marry, why can infertile straight couples? However, such a response fails to attend to marriage as an institution. Individual marriages are not autonomous, but derive their meaning from the wider understanding of marriage as an institution outlined above. To focus so closely on individual instances of marriage, without paying attention to the "underlying institutional grammar" is to miss an important part of the picture.<sup>21</sup> Alastair Roberts draws a comparison with football (soccer!). "Many genuine football matches end in goalless draws, some without a single attempt on goal. The skill of goal-scoring is only one

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<sup>17</sup> Ash, *Sex in the Service of God*, 112-122. In common with many commentators, Ash treats Gen 1:28 and 2:15 as saying essentially the same thing, rather than recognizing that the former speaks of a kingly task in the world, the latter of our primary, priestly task in the Garden-Sanctuary. He therefore misses the liturgical significance of manhood and womanhood. On this see James B. Jordan, "Liturgical Man, Liturgical Woman: Part One," *Rite Reasons* 86 (2004); *idem*, "Liturgical Man, Liturgical Woman: Part Two," *Rite Reasons* 86 (2004). On the Garden as a sanctuary and Adam as a priest more generally, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT; Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 29-122.

<sup>18</sup> Ash, *Sex in the Service of God*, 157.

<sup>19</sup> Ash, *Sex in the Service of God*, 161-62. Ash briefly discusses Deut 28:30 (as a negative example of coordinated covenant curses) and, positively, Ps 127; Isa 65:20-23.

<sup>20</sup> cf. Girgis, George, and Anderson "What is Marriage?"; Girgis, Anderson, and George, *What is Marriage*; Roberts, "Just Cause."

<sup>21</sup> Roberts, "Just Cause," 68.

part of the game, and only one aspect of the striker's role. However, a form of 'football' without scoring would not be football at all."<sup>22</sup> Similarly, many marriages remain infertile, but a form of marriage in which procreation is no longer part of the definition of the institution would not be marriage at all.

We can go further. Given the close interconnections we have seen between marriage, sex, gender, procreation and knowledge, any form of sexual relationship outside of marriage is illegitimate. Although the sexual aspect of marriage is about much more than procreation, it is not, ultimately, about less. And, in Scripture, marriage is presented as the only licit context for sexual relations. Therefore, any kind of same-sex relationship, married or otherwise, is a denial of God's purposes in creating us as sexual beings. Same-sex sex cannot, by its very nature, be procreative. The nurture of children within a same-sex partnership relies on male-female fertility located outside the partnership itself, whether through adoption, or artificial means of conception involving a third party (sperm or egg donor, surrogate mother).

Moreover, the very structure of same-sex sexual relationships also fails to provide deep knowledge of a sexual other, and so do not share the meaning of the sexual act as a gift of the self to another. Although he is extremely tentative, and is reluctant to condemn same-sex desire and same-sex acts as a perversion, Roger Scruton captures the distinction nicely, a distinction rooted in a dimorphic understanding of gender, in which distinctions between the genders "play a constitutive role in the sexual act":<sup>23</sup> "In the heterosexual act, it might be said, I move out *from* my body *towards* the other, whose flesh is unknown to me; while in the homosexual act I remain locked within my body, narcissistically contemplating in the other an excitement that is the mirror of my own."<sup>24</sup> Thus, in the language of TOB, same-sex sexual acts are, by their very structure, perversions, because by their very nature they are turned in on the self, rather than giving the self to the other. This claim will be offensive to contemporary ears. But these ears have been attuned to think of sex and gender as something less than fully ontological, and of differences of sex and gender as no more significant than differences of eye or skin color.<sup>25</sup> Again, we see the importance here what John Paul calls the spousal meaning of the body, of a strong ontological understanding of our sexual and gender dimorphism as not simply an attribute of the person, but as constitutive of the person. We are created *male and female* in the image of God, for personal communion with one another through the gift of self.

Teaching these things will not win us any popularity contests. To the sensibilities of our contemporaries, we will appear arbitrary and intolerant. The life-stories of people we know, and the positive portrayals of gay and lesbian relationships in films and sitcoms, mean that claims about the naturalness of same-sex erotic desires and

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<sup>22</sup> Roberts, "Just Cause," 69.

<sup>23</sup> Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London; New York: Continuum 2006 [First published Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1986]), 311.

<sup>24</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 310.

<sup>25</sup> On which, see the more extensive discussion below.

relationships feel intuitively obvious. How can such an apparently common experience be anything but natural? How can opposition to it be anything but arbitrary? However, in answering the Pharisees in Matthew 19, Jesus made it clear that our experience is not the only guide in issues of sexual ethics; indeed, it is an unreliable guide. The fall has placed a veil over our understanding of gender and sexuality, blurring and confusing our vision. But, according to Jesus, we are not trapped within the boundaries of our own experience of the world, nor even the boundaries of the experience of others. By going back to Genesis 1 and 2, we can see behind the veil, to the way creation ought to be. And what we see is a distinct pattern and structure to human sexual relations: man and woman, male and female, revealed truly to themselves and one another through their bodies, and united to one another in knowledge and love in the one flesh union of marriage.

Until recently, evangelicals have been relatively united on the exegesis of particular texts prohibiting same-sex sexuality. But we have been relatively weak in articulating the structure and coherence of God's design for human sexuality. Same-sex relationships are not merely violations of an arbitrary commandment. They are declensions from reality. Whatever position we take in the complementarian-egalitarian debate on gender roles, it is important that in our teaching and preaching we take seriously the givenness of creation, and particularly the givenness of our embodied existence as male and female. Scripture's prohibitions on same-sex sexual relationships are not arbitrary. Nor are they simply cultural constructions of an ignorant, repressive age. Creation has a pattern, like the grain of a piece of wood or marble. A wise sculptor recognizes the givenness of this grain and works with it, knowing that this constraint frees her to bring what is most beautiful out of her materials. Likewise, biblical sexual ethics call on us to cut with creation's grain in our sexual lives, and warn that a life or a society that cuts against the grain will warp, and splinter, and fragment.

This is true for our understanding of same-sex acts and relationships; it is also true of our understanding of the essential genderedness of humanity. However, thus far, I have simply assumed the rightness of a dimorphic understanding of human sex and gender. But this is far from obvious in contemporary discourse on sex and sexuality, so we must now consider this further, examining the opening chapter of TOB in relation to contemporary understandings of gender identity.

### III. SEXUAL DIMORPHISM: THE SHOCK OF THE BODY

The two accounts of the creation of humanity in Genesis 1-2, and Jesus' authoritative interpretation of them from a postlapsarian perspective, teach a sexually dimorphic view of humanity: in the beginning, God made them male and female. In western societies, however, this is increasingly controversial.

As we consider these issues, it will be helpful to distinguish sex and gender, and also to distinguish the philosophical terms "concept," "conception," and "ideal." "Sex" refers to our biological sex: male or female. It is a creational given, a distinction between natural kinds,

although the effects of the fall mean that even here the categories are sometimes a little blurry: some babies are born with ambiguous sex, some with both male and female sexual characteristics. "Gender" refers to social categories such as boy or woman, masculine or feminine. It is linked to biological sex, but not identical with it: sex refers to natural kinds, gender to different patterns of life and behavior that flow from how we respond to the differences of sex. The distinctions of gender are profoundly shaped by culture,<sup>26</sup> and it is here that the distinctions between concept, conception, and ideal are important. Our *concept* of gender is of "a perceivable division between...masculine and feminine."<sup>27</sup> Our *conception* of gender relates to the varying *ideals* we associate with masculinity or femininity: in what does ideal masculine behavior consist? Given these distinctions, we may share a *concept* of gender (though, as we shall see, even this is contested) while disagreeing profoundly on our *conceptions* and *ideals* of masculinity or femininity. Similarly, cultures that share a common concept of gender may hold vastly different ideals and conceptions concerning it. They will therefore shape men and women to inhabit their gender in very different ways. Compare the masculinity associated with medieval ideals of courtly love with that shaped by those of a contemporary frat house, or the version of femininity forged by the domestic economy of a seventeenth century smallholding with that formed by the appropriation of second wave feminism on a university campus in the 1960s. Or consider the differences between male fashion in early eighteenth century England with its powdered wigs, abundant lace, and heavily embroidered clothes and that expressed in the sober suits and bowler hats of the London stock exchange in the 1930s.

So far, the picture is still relatively straightforward. However, under the influence queer theory, and of what Scruton has called "Kantian feminism," the picture becomes far more complicated. On this understanding, what I really am is a person, and my personhood is distinct from its bodily form.<sup>28</sup> There is therefore "no real distinction between the masculine and the feminine, except in so far as human freedom has been bent in certain directions, by whatever social pressures, so as to take on two contrasting forms." Because I am distinct from my body in this way, and the form of my body is not inherent to who I am—the outward expression of my soul—gender distinctions "cannot lie in the nature of things." The connection between myself and my body is severed, and so the connection between sex and gender is also severed. With this severing comes a rejection of gender and sexual binaries: if I am a free person, not chained to my outward bodily form, then I must be free to bend my sexual and gender identity in any way I desire, unconstrained by biological "nature." "There is no *fact of the matter*" even about the concept of gender, let alone our conceptions of it.

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<sup>26</sup> Jenell Williams Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex is Too Important to Define Who We Are* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 31-35; Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 254-257.

<sup>27</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 255.

<sup>28</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 258-60.

There are “only distinctions of attitude that can be redrawn at any time.”<sup>29</sup>

Rejection of sexual and gender binaries can be seen in the ever-growing acronym LGBTQIAO.<sup>30</sup> There are many legitimate sexualities, not just gay and straight. And, just as sexual desire is not binary, but a spectrum from exclusively straight to exclusively gay or lesbian, so also sex and gender identity are a spectrum: not just male or female, but also transgender, transsexual, intersex, asexual. Moreover, one’s sexual and gender identity is not rooted in ontology, in what one *is* by nature; it is constructed by cultural discourses; it is also something one is free to (re)construct for oneself. Recently, this has led to public confusion and controversy when the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education issued guidelines banning discrimination on the basis of gender identity within its public schools. These guidelines instruct schools that a student who claims to be a girl (regardless of biological sex) is to be respected and treated as a girl. This includes, among other things, use of names and pronouns, gender markers on student records, and access to bathrooms and changing rooms. So, for example, a male-to-female transgender student who is biologically male, but who self-identifies as female, must be permitted to use female bathrooms. In an indication of how flexible gender identity can be, the guidelines also assert that “The statute does not require consistent and uniform assertion of gender identity as long as there is ‘other evidence that the gender-related identity is sincerely held as part of [the] person’s core identity.’” In another recent case that illustrates how even the most progressive institutions can be wrong-footed by this gender plasticity, the all-female Smith College refused to consider a transgender applicant on the grounds of her gender because, although she listed herself as female on her college application, she listed herself as male on the FAFSA federal financial aid form.<sup>31</sup>

This constructivist view of gender is based on a denial that gender is inherent to us, a denial that we are ontologically male or female. It is famously expressed in the oft-quoted line of Simone de Beauvoir: “One is not born, but becomes a woman.”<sup>32</sup> Being female is not a biological given, rather it is something produced by “civilization as a whole.” Although I may have a male body, with male genitals and xy chromosomes I am not thereby male. There is a separation between myself and my body such that I may identify as transgender. My body is not self-interpreting; my gender is not given by my biology, but rather by discourse: when I was given my boy’s name, I moved from being an “it” to being a “he,”<sup>33</sup> and this gender identity was then “tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized

<sup>29</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 260.

<sup>30</sup> Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender / Transsexual, Questioning / Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Other.

<sup>31</sup> Jaclyn Freedman, “Smith’s Unsisterly Move,” *The American Prospect*, online at <<http://prospect.org/article/smiths-unsisterly-move>> (Last Accessed April 8, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Simon de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1952), 249.

<sup>33</sup> cf. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), 7-8.

repetition of acts.” Gender is therefore “a performative accomplishment.”<sup>34</sup> And, so, I am free to inscribe a different identity on my body through a different performance. We could summarize, paraphrasing Keats: here stands one whose gender identity is writ in water.

John Paul’s reading of Genesis 1-2 offers a radically different understanding of what it means to be male and female. For him, our *personal subjectivity*, our awareness of ourselves as male and female (expressed particularly in the creation account of Genesis 2) “corresponds to the *objective reality* of man created ‘in the image of God’” (expressed particularly in the creation account of Genesis 1; TOB 3:1).<sup>35</sup> Thus, there is an ontological reality to our masculinity and femininity, a givenness in creation. This depends on an anthropology that places a high value on the body. My body is not something other than myself. I, the “real I,” am not just a ghost in the machine. This is not to deny that I have both soul and body, but rather to insist that, although my body is not all there is to me, it does adequately express and reveal me (TOB 7:2; 8:4; 9:4).

What does the body reveal? According to Genesis 2:23, it reveals both “sexual difference” and “somatic homogeneity” (TOB 8:4), a difference and homogeneity so obvious that when the man awakes from his sleep, he says “this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh [bodily homogeneity]. She shall be called woman because she was taken from man [sexual difference].”

In the light of this, John Paul argues that being male or female is not just an attribute of the person—and therefore something that can be (re)constructed. Rather, it is *constitutive* for the person. The sexual differences between male and female are far deeper than differences of hair color, or the size or shape of one’s ears. Masculinity and femininity are “two reciprocally completing ways of ‘being a body’ and at the same time of being human...femininity in some way finds itself before masculinity, while masculinity confirms itself through femininity.” (TOB 10:1) Masculinity and femininity are mutually enriching and mutually interpreting; together, for the first time, they give a new consciousness of the meaning of one’s body. When God brings the woman to Adam, he understands himself, and the meaning of his body, precisely in relation to her. (TOB 9:4-5) In recognizing their bodily difference from one another, the man and the woman are revealed to one another through their bodies. What is revealed is their existence *for* one another as a gift. According to John Paul, what Adam is exclaiming in Genesis 2:23 is “Look, a body that expresses the ‘person!’” But, precisely because she is feminine, not masculine, her body “expresses femininity ‘for’ masculinity” even as his expresses “masculinity ‘for’ femininity.” (TOB 14:4) In our embodied gender distinctions as male and female, we exist for one another in the communion of persons in which we live ‘in a relationship of reciprocal gift.’ (14:2)

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<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY; London: Routledge, 1990), 140-41.

<sup>35</sup> Italics mine.

According to John Paul, this is not a violent power claim, an oppressive heterosexist construction. This is who we are, and so this is our true freedom. Although queer theorists like Judith Butler deny that there is such a thing as “nature,” they are wrong. It should, in any case, be noted that Butler is inconsistent here. Building on Freud she *does* articulate an ontology of sexuality in which heterosexuality is built on repressed homosexual desire.<sup>36</sup> But why should we accept this less than intuitively obvious ontology in preference to the far more intuitively plausible claim that our bodies reveal the truth about our sex and gender? As Scruton notes, “The important point is not whether a particular *conception* of gender is a human universal, but whether the *concept* of gender is such.”<sup>37</sup> Even transgender experience depends upon this reality. In any case, our true freedom is not freedom to remake ourselves however we wish, as if we had no nature, or as if our natures did not matter or could be mastered and remolded. Rather, our true freedom is to live according to our nature as created in God’s image. It is freedom to find ourselves reciprocally in the meaning of ourselves as male and female in the free gift of the self to another.

In an unfallen world—the world of Genesis 1 and 2—our subjective experience would have corresponded to this reality. In encountering the opposite sex, and so knowing ourselves truly as masculine or feminine, we would, with Adam, have felt neither repression, nor confusion, but awe, wonder, and joy in the mystery of ourselves as seen in the gaze of another. But in the fallen world we inhabit, our experience is not so easy. Our experience of our bodies, and of our gender and sexuality, is marred by both natural and moral evils. Natural evils mean that tragedies of deformed genitalia and a certain blurring of sexual dimorphism should not surprise us (though we should not overstate the frequency of this, tragic as it is). Morally, the noetic effects of sin mean that to a greater or lesser extent we fail to discern our bodies as they truly are, and gender confusion should not surprise us.

Once again, in our teaching, the importance of articulating clearly and confidently the intrinsic shape and reality of God’s creation design is vital in resisting these contemporary trends. However, pastorally the issues will be difficult to navigate, not least because we are caring for real people, in situations that are often emotionally fraught, and extremely complex. Pastors will need to be equipped for a variety of situations. What should a pastor say to the couple whose young daughter wants to be a boy, and whose school has been encouraging her to express her true gender identity as male? How should we counsel the new convert seeking baptism who lives as a married woman following a sex change operation twenty years previously? These may be extreme cases, but for some pastors they represent the reality of pastoral counseling.

Our human condition in Adam as ‘self-loathing narcissists’,<sup>38</sup> turned in on ourselves, but loathing ourselves in so far as we bear the image of

<sup>36</sup> See Peter Sanlon, *Plastic People: How Queer Theory is Changing Us* (Latimer Studies 73; London: Latimer Trust, 2010), 21–28.

<sup>37</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 268.

<sup>38</sup> David Field, “Radical Disorientation (I),” in Peterson, ed., *Holiness and Sexuality*, 51–87, at 77.



the God against whom we rebel means that a disordering of our desires, including our sexual desires, and confusion over gender and sexuality is, tragically, only to be expected. Thus, a comprehensive consideration of this topic would require examination of our fallen condition and its implications for our sexuality. Unfortunately, constraints of space prevent this in this article. However, in order to grasp the full shape of the creational pattern of marriage, some consideration of its typological consummation in the marriage of Christ and the church is necessary. Such consideration will shed further light on same-sex relationships.

#### IV. CONSUMMATION: THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

In his instructions on marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul provides a rich theological rationale for the way husbands and wives are to relate to one another. He draws together creation, redemption, Christology, and ecclesiology, and shows that in marriage as in all things, protology is ordered towards eschatology. Therefore, human marriage is ordered to our redemption in Christ. In this passage, Paul interprets Genesis 2:24 as referring to Christ and the church, not to exclude human marriage (the Genesis text has been in the background since v. 28),<sup>39</sup> but to set up a typological and symbolic relationship between human marriage and Christ's marriage to the church. The mystery of marriage, now revealed in Christ, is that from the beginning God created it as a type of which Christ's relationship to the church is the antitype. This immediately relativizes marriage: it is not the be-all and end-all of human life; nor are human marriages eternal; like the moon, which reflects the glory of the sun, they reflect the glory of Christ's relationship to the church; but at the consummation of that marriage, when the Sun rises in full strength, the moon shall be no more. Paradoxically, however, it also raises the dignity and importance of marriage: "as God's salvific plan for humanity, that mystery is in some sense the central theme of the whole of revelation, its central reality. It is what God as Creator and Father wishes above all to transmit to mankind in his Word" (TOB 93:2).

In a moment of profound insight, John Paul reads Ephesians 5:31 in the light of God's plan to elect a people in Christ to be holy and blameless before him (Eph. 1:3f; TOB 96:2-3). Creation is the beginning, but there was a beginning before the beginning: God's electing purposes in Christ. Thus, when we read the creation account of Genesis 1-2 in the light of Ephesians, "we must deduce that *the reality of the creation of man was already permeated by the perennial election of man in Christ: called to holiness through the grace of adoption as sons*" (TOB 96:4). We can go further: reading Genesis 2:24 together with Ephesians 1:3f, 10 and 5:31, it seems that creation, and within that the creation of marriage, is ordered towards the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose of electing a people in Christ to be brought into the divine

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<sup>39</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, *Ephesians* (PNTC; Leicester: Apollos, 1999), 427, 432.

family as the bride of the Son.<sup>40</sup> Even before creation and fall, the purpose of God's eternal decree was the union of Christ and his bride.<sup>41</sup>

This implies that in addressing human sexuality in general, and same-sex practices and relationships in particular, we are not dealing with peripheral issues. These are not areas of indifference where Christians can afford to disagree. Marriage testifies to the central reality of creation and its *telos*: God and his relationship to his creatures. *Nothing* is more fundamental than this, and therefore the symbolism of marriage, and the sexual behavior of humans more generally, takes on profound importance.<sup>42</sup> To distort this symbolism is to lie about Christ, his office as bridegroom of the church, and his love in laying down his life to sanctify his bride for himself. It is also to lie about the fundamental reality of human identity, which finds its fulfillment as part of the church that will be presented without blemish to Christ on the last day.

It is therefore of the deepest possible significance for the issue at hand that the relationship between Christ and the church is a *gendered* relationship:<sup>43</sup> he is the husband, she the bride; he is a New Adam, she a New Eve. And this relationship is irreversibly ordered. Husband and wife are not simply two interchangeable partners. Christ, as husband, is head of the Church. The union is a union in love of persons who are profoundly different from one another: it is the union of God and the creature. Thus, in the symbolism of marriage, the ontological difference between the man and the woman is no trivial thing. Rather, it symbolizes the ontological difference between Christ and the church. To be sure, the analogical interval means that there is a far greater dissimilarity in the analogy than there is similarity. The ontological gap between human persons and a divine Person (even one with a human nature) is far greater than that between a man and a woman. Still, the point stands. As the husband and wife union is a union of those who are both ontologically alike and equal and yet ontologically different from one another, so *a fortiori*, the union of Christ and the church is a union of One who as a man is ontologically one with us, but who as God is ontologically vastly different. Thus, to remove this ordering in human sexual relationships, whether by changing the definition of marriage or by permitting forms of sexual behavior forbidden by Scripture, is to distort our knowledge of God and to obscure his astonishing love for us in redeeming and uniting to himself those who are so utterly different from him, both as creatures and all the more as sinners.

This typology lies at the heart of the new creation theology of the entire epistle. In Genesis 2, it was not good for Adam to be alone: in his priestly and kingly tasks he needed a helper corresponding to him. So,

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<sup>40</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies: 501-832* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 18; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), §741, p. 367.

<sup>41</sup> As an aside: this seems to me to be a particularly interesting and pastorally significant argument in favour of a supralapsarian Christology.

<sup>42</sup> This may well provide a "deep" reason for the severity of the penalties in the *Torah* for sexual transgressions.

<sup>43</sup> Pace Deirdre J. Good *et al*, "A Theology of Marriage Including Same Sex Couples: A View from the Liberals," *ATR* 93/1 (2011): 51-87.

now that the Last Adam has come, it is not good for him to be alone either. As he fulfils Adam's commission to fill the earth, he does so in and through his Eve, his bride, the church (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:22-33). As members of the body of Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we share with him, under his headship, in completing Adam's task. The dominion promised to Adam, which he forfeited by prematurely eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, is now ours; indeed, being enthroned in the heavenlies, we have progressed beyond the first human pair to rule as the fitting helper of our Adam who fills and rules all things in heaven and on earth (1:20-22; 2:5-6). In union with our exalted head, and in obedience to his Word, we are called to the mature manhood that Adam failed to attain when he prematurely ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (4:11-16).<sup>44</sup> Through the Spirit breathed into us by the Last Adam, who is Life-Giving Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 15:45), and wearing the armor of God first worn by him, we are also called to stand firm in the holy warfare where the first Adam failed, and to wield, rather than deny, the Word of God by which he rules us (6:17; cf. 2:20; 4:11; contrast Gen. 3), and so resist the crafty schemes of the devil in the strength of the Last Adam's mighty power (6:10-18).

None of this undermines the importance of human marriage, procreation, and nurture of children within the not-yet of the new creation in Christ (cf. 5:22-6:4). But it does indicate the end to which these things are ordered. As in Genesis 1-2, marriage, and the good of children, are ordered towards obedient service of God and his kingdom. Our ecclesial family is of far greater import than our natural family. The fatherhood of God has ontological priority: human *patria* derives from it (3:14f). The marriage of Christ and the church has teleological ultimacy. Therefore, children are not their parents', but the Lord's, and owe their parents allegiance for the Lord's sake and in obedience to his command (6:1-3). For the members of Christian families, this higher identity and allegiance is reaffirmed and reinforced liturgically. We are those who have been cleansed by baptism (5:26), and each week we renew that baptismal identity as we confess our sins and hear Christ's word of absolution, we are built up together by the Word read and preached (5:26; cf. 4:11ff), and we are nourished by the eucharist (5:29) before being sent out for dominion.

In light of the contemporary American idolatry of the family, it would be hard to overstate the pastoral importance of this for both married and single people. Water is thicker than blood.<sup>45</sup> The water of baptism, conferring the name of the Triune God, marks out a more fundamental family identity than a husband's name received in marriage, or a father's name at birth. The primary family to which each of us belong is the family of God. And within that family, as members of the bride of Christ, we have a common task, whether single or married: to

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<sup>44</sup> On the relationship between the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, wisdom, and maturity see James B. Jordan, "Merit Versus Maturity: What Did Jesus Do for Us?" in Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, eds, *The Federal Vision* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2004): 151-203; William N. Wilder, "Illumination and Investiture: The Royal Significance of the Tree of Wisdom in Genesis 3," *WTJ* 68 (2006): 51-69.

<sup>45</sup> To borrow a phrase from Peter Leithart.

seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness. The primary distinctions within humanity as a whole are not Jones or Smith, nor are they single or married, nor "straight" or "gay," nor even male and female, but "in Christ" or "in Adam." Either we bear the image of the man of dust for death, or we bear the image of the man of heaven for life. And, if we bear Christ's image and share in his Spirit, our identity is fundamentally that of the divine family: sons of God, co-heirs with Christ, brothers and sisters of one another.

This has obvious pastoral implications for the deep pain of loneliness typically felt by celibate gay people (and, we must not forget, single people of all kinds). In an otherwise very fine book, Wesley Hill claims wrongly that in the Old Testament marriage was seen as the solution to loneliness. He also somewhat romanticizes the companionship provided by marriage:<sup>46</sup> a loveless marriage is one of the loneliest places in the world; in every fallen human marriage husband and wife sometimes feel surprisingly, agonizingly alienated from one another; and even at their healthiest, marriages on their own cannot bear the weight of our need for human love and companionship, which can only be met by a network of friends and community. However, as he writes movingly of his struggle with loneliness, and his longing for the affection of marriage, Hill is profoundly right to observe that the church is "the primary place where human love is best expressed and experienced."<sup>47</sup>

John Paul describes the eschatological state as not only a fulfillment of the spousal meaning of the body in intimate communion and giving and receiving with our divine spouse. Rather, this union with and participation in God will also lead to an intimate communion among created persons. The fullness of this awaits the consummation. But in the now and not-yet of biblical eschatology, as we await with longing our revealing as the sons of God, the redemption of our bodies, we are already members of one another, already participants in the communion of the saints, called to hold all things in common.

The loneliness of celibate people is not just a problem for them; nor is it a situation for which marriage is the remedy. Rather, it is a call for the church to be the church, to take our family relationships seriously. One of the virtues of the LGBT community is precisely a sense of mutual support, acceptance and belonging to a meaningful community. They know how to practice hospitality, and place a high value on it.<sup>48</sup> If the church is to be a welcoming, nurturing body in which celibate people find a home, we must do the same. A simple call to celibacy is not enough; it must be come, and be heard, in the context of real, concrete family relationships of self-giving love. For a man or woman in a same sex relationship, embedded in the LGBT community, conversion will be a train wreck; in turning to Christ, they may find

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<sup>46</sup> Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), chap. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 111-12.

<sup>48</sup> See Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburg, PA: Crown and Covenant, 2012), chaps 1-2.

themselves with little or nothing of their former life intact.<sup>49</sup> For a celibate who longs for intimacy with someone of the same sex, the life of discipleship may sometimes feel like a long, lingering death from debilitating disease. But God sets the lonely in families (Ps 68:8, NIV). Jesus promised that those who leave father, mother, brothers, sisters, family, home will receive not only eternal life in the age to come, but also fathers, sisters, brothers, mothers, home, family a hundredfold in this life (Mk 10:29-30). The challenging question for the church, as we proclaim Jesus' teaching on sexuality, is will we also be faithful in practice to Jesus' promise, or will we, by our actions, falsify it?

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<sup>49</sup> Butterfield, *Secret Thoughts*, chaps 1-2.



## POWER, SEX AND THE SELF: NOTES ON EPHESIANS 5:21-33

DAVID S. MORLAN\*

Despite remarkable advances in many spheres of society, the ancient institution of marriage remains an unsolved mystery with no clear way forward. With the divorce rate historically high and a large percentage of current marriages in distress, it is no wonder that the institution itself is being refigured, reimagined and, in some societies, made redundant all together.<sup>1</sup> A parallel trend observed by sociologists concerns a sharp decline in sexual fulfillment.<sup>2</sup> Currents in sociological research suggest that the real outcome of the so-called “sexual revolution” fed by Kinseyan and Freudian ideologies has been an *increase* of sexual imagination but a *decrease* in actual fulfilling sex between real-in-the-flesh humans.<sup>3</sup> An abundance of sexual outlets creates an inverse effect in sexual well-being. Standing between issues of sexual well-being and marital fracture is Ephesians 5:21-33, a long ignored vision of marriage that can claim special insight into the relationship between these twin societal issues.

Paul’s grand vision of marriage in Ephesians 5:21-31 has a checkered past in the history of the West which has led to revisions and outright dismissal by some in the modern era. Abuses of terms such as “submission” and “headship” to justify the subjection of women have rendered this passage to be a virtual conversation stopper in many public square dialogues about marriage.<sup>4</sup> However, in this article, I shall argue that this passage provides important insights that relate directly to many of the felt issues today concerning marriage and sexual fulfillment. In the context of pastoral counseling, I have found Paul’s words to be strong enough to replace broken foundations and reasonable enough to give couples a feasible starting point. In this passage the pastor-theologian sees precisely how Paul’s thoughts are theologically profound

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\* David Morlan is teaching Pastor of Fellowship Denver, in Denver, Colorado.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Cherlin, “American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century,” *FOC* (Fall: 2005): 33-55. Also see the US Department of Health and Human Services, which, over the years, has numerous initiatives to reverse this trend.

<sup>2</sup> See the American Medical Association’s study, “Sexual Dysfunction in the United States: Prevalence and Predictors” (1999): 537-544.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Robinson, “Porn-Induced Sexual Dysfunction: A Growing Problem,” *Psychology Today* (2011). Also, see the major study by University of Sydney’s Faculty of Health Sciences in 2012 which shows the sharp decline in sexual fulfillment in younger generations because the prevalence of pornography: <http://sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=9176>

<sup>4</sup> Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “Should Wives ‘submit graciously’? A feminist Approach to Interpreting Ephesians 5:21-33,” *Review & Expositor* 98.2 (Spring 2001): 263-276.

and exceedingly practical. A concise re-examination of the Apostle's unique vision is called for even though we proceed with caution knowing from history that potential pitfalls abound.

My conversation partners for this short study are Harold W. Hoehner and John Paul II. While on the surface these two scholars have very little in common (Hoehner, a long-time New Testament Professor at *Dallas Theological Seminary* and John Paul II serving as head of the Catholic Church), both of their crowning intellectual achievements overlap precisely on the topic at hand. Hoehner's commentary on Ephesians is a massive twenty-year labor of love that offers an unrivaled and relentless historical-grammatical analysis of the text.<sup>5</sup> John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* stands as the final summary of his life's work as a philosopher and a clergyman.<sup>6</sup> As he approaches Ephesians, and chapter five in particular, he does so as one who has reached the peak, not just of Paul's thinking, but indeed the "summa" of the story of Scripture itself. At this summit he finds the mysterious intersection between divine love and authentic human love pictured in the *physical* love between a husband and a wife.

The theological scope of Ephesians is difficult to overstate. Paul quickly employs cosmic language that history itself is marching toward a climatic point in time in which "heaven and earth" are to be united "in him" (Eph. 1:10). It is a healing and restoration of the physical world in which all living creatures find themselves within the range of God's redemption. This redemption brings the dead to life (Eph. 2), is displayed in the church (Eph. 3), and brings together diverse "members" into a single identifiable body (Eph. 4). However, Paul moves to answer a more pragmatic question about how ordinary unbelievers can know this cosmic activity. The second half of the letter is dedicated to this question, and the climax of the answer is found in his discussion of the relationship between husbands and wives.

Among all the important interpersonal relationships noted in Paul's letter, the relationship between husbands and wives is given the added weight of direct gospel correlatives. It is in the context of the marriage relationship that God's plan of salvation is displayed as a living-in-the-flesh drama for all to see. By a husband's loving behavior towards his wife, outsiders see the love of Christ to the church (Eph. 5:25). By the wife's response to the husband, outsiders see the response of the church to the sacrifice of Christ (Eph. 5:24). In this way the gospel is expressed on the stage of day-to-day life. Hence for Paul, marriage between man and wife is the local touch-point in which the grand cosmic themes of Ephesians are practically experienced and "witnessed" in the context of the mundane.

John Paul II sees Ephesians as having two major lines of thought: the first "is the mystery of Christ, which is realized in the church as an

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<sup>5</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006). Hereafter cited as TOB.



expression of the divine plan for man's salvation."<sup>7</sup> The second is "the Christian vocation as the model of life of baptized persons and particular communities, corresponding to the mystery of Christ or to the divine plan for the salvation of man."<sup>8</sup> John Paul II reads Ephesians 5:21-33 as standing at the intersection of these two ideas. Indeed, these verses are not simply the linchpin of Ephesians but "the crowning of the themes and truths that ebb and flow like long waves through the Word of God revealed in Sacred Scripture."<sup>9</sup>

For John Paul II the embodied person is sacramental, that is, a visible sign of an invisible reality. This sacrament was expressed ultimately when God himself became a man through the incarnation. It is in the relationship between man and woman that the notion of gift-through-incarnation can be fully expressed and experienced.<sup>10</sup> In this way the imperative of Paul to "be imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1-2) can find its full meaning: just as God showed his self-giving love by the incarnation, so too the calling of humanity is to follow that example and give of oneself *in the flesh* to each other as a gift.

For Hoehner, Ephesians represents the "quintessence" of Paul's thought expressed through a trinitarian vision of the Father,<sup>11</sup> the Son,<sup>12</sup> and the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> He divides the book into two parts: the calling of the church (1:1-3:21) and the conduct of the church (4:1-6:24). For Hoehner, Paul's vision of marriage falls within a more ethical-moral category than that of an overarching theological one. Paul's vision of marriage is more in line with how believers "are able to please the Lord by fulfilling their duties and are able to live blameless lives in close and continual contact with their family."<sup>14</sup> However, the purpose of this marital ethic had a missional edge: it "was to display to the Roman world how believers who are transformed and empowered by the Holy Spirit function within the family structure."<sup>15</sup>

With these overviews conducted, we will now make some observations about the text itself regarding power dynamics and sex in marriage.

## I. POWER DYNAMICS

There is a history of using the notion of submission and headship as a power play in marriage that positions husbands at an advantage over their wives. But in v. 21 Paul provides an overarching power dynamic to the relationship between a husband and wife: "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." This overshadows the entire section.

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<sup>7</sup>TOB, 471.

<sup>8</sup>TOB, 471.

<sup>9</sup>TOB, 467.

<sup>10</sup>TOB, 468.

<sup>11</sup>Eph. 1:4-14, 17; 2:18, 22; 3:4-5, 14-17; 4:4-6; 5:18-26.

<sup>12</sup>Eph. 1:6, 13, 17; 4:13, 4:20-21.

<sup>13</sup>Eph. 1:13, 2:18, 22; 4:30; 5:18; 6:18.

<sup>14</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 729.

<sup>15</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 727.

Verse 21 both concludes the preceding section (beginning at verse 15) and sets the stage for Paul's discussion of marriage and other household relationships.<sup>16</sup> The previous section is an exhortation to be "filled with the Spirit" so as to be under his control and influence. Hence Paul's thought process is that the Spirit empowers and energizes the ability to achieve the actions commanded in verses 21-33. It is also worth pointing out that mutual submission is mentioned strictly within the context of being under control of the Spirit. Furthermore, *υποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοι* is the sort of Spirit-filled submission that is in view in verse 22 regarding submission of wives to husbands.

Verse 21 also makes a statement regarding the role of fear in marriage. This husband and wife relationship does indeed have fear but not toward each other. Rather, it is actualized by the power of the Spirit and overseen by an ever-present fear of Christ (*φοβῶ Χριστοῦ*). In this marriage relationship it is the thoughts and opinions of Christ that superintend the desires of both the husband and the wife. Paul interjects a "not my will, but yours be done" quality to this whole passage which renders both husband and wife looking to Christ as their ultimate authority. This observation is important because discussions about marriage and sex often drift into issues of individual rights and personal satisfaction. Paul here shows that marriage is, in effect, not solely about the husband and wife, but about the will and desire of Jesus. With this piece in place, Paul then moves to the dynamics between husbands and wives.

## II. HEAD AND BODY

In v. 23 Paul introduces a notion of headship in which a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. Even though the exact connotations of this term are not fully understood, most agree that the husband ultimately expresses his headship by being a protective covering for his wife in giving up his own life to save, benefit, and protect the life of his wife. As Christ showed his headship of the church by giving up himself on the cross for her, so to the husband is the head of his wife by giving up himself to benefit his wife. Thus, headship and the act of loving one's wife are directly related. In verse 28, Paul instructs that "husbands should love their wives as their own bodies." This reinforces the connection between love and the head/body metaphor. Hoehner points out that the verb *ἀφείλουσιν* which is followed by the infinitive directs back to the main point of v. 25 which is that husbands are "free agents" to love their wives regardless of how the wife is treating the husband.<sup>17</sup>

But in what way is the husband here to love his wife? In answering this question the connection between marriage and sex may be seen in a different and helpful light. Paul says that the husband is to love his wife as his own body. Hoehner suggests that Paul means "husbands are to love their wives 'as being' their own bodies."<sup>18</sup> He notes that

<sup>16</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 729.

<sup>17</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 764.

<sup>18</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 764.

“throughout the context the head corresponds to the body and the head, Christ, loves the body, the church; so also husbands ought to love their wives who, as it were, are their own bodies.”<sup>19</sup> Yet, as Hoehner continues in his explanation he says this:

It is to make clear that the preceding phrase is not intended to focus on a person's love of his own physical body. Rather, the focus is directed on the extent of love a husband should have for his wife, that is, the same way that Christ loved the church. This love is not to be seen as a duty but as something that is consistent with his nature, as he does not think about loving himself because it is natural, so also, should the husband's love of his wife be something that is as natural as loving himself.

To this, I agree. Indeed, it seems to me that he doesn't go far enough. Paul's focus is precisely the transfer of the “person's love of this own physical body” to of the physical, bodily needs of his wife. It is not just the “extent” of love but the bodily transfer in which the husband functions, in a strange sense, as the literal head for his wife's body. Paul's idea is that the husband endeavors to function as if he is the actual head of his wife's body. Just as a husband is in tune with the needs of his body because it is attached to his head and can communicate to his body what it needs, the idea is that husbands are to be a head for their wives' bodies and therefore be in tune with the physical needs of their wives and thus address those needs in ways fitting for the wives. It is almost as if Paul wishes husbands to envision a sort of Frankenstein image in which a husband's head is attached to the body of his wife. There is a literalness in which the husband's head functions and responds to the physical body of his wife as if his head were attached to his wife's body.

If Paul has in mind a more literal head/body concept, then all the physical needs of the wife, including sexual, would be included. The husband knows how to physically love his wife in a way that perfectly fitting *for her* because he is her head. If this is the case, then this may be a filling out of Paul's teaching on sex in 1 Corinthians 7:4 that “the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” The idea would be that person's sexual organs are *for* the spouse in that their sexuality is designed to be given to each other as a gift fitting for each spouse's body.

### III. NOURISHING AND CHERISHING

The means by which one loves the other is by “nourishing” and “cherishing” the flesh of the other. These two terms are very fleshly in scope in that they are specialized terms that refer to the physical care and well-being of another. The first term, ἐκτρέφει, refers to the physical raising up of children (cf. Eph. 6:4). It is a term taken “from language of the nursery...charged with affection.”<sup>20</sup> Josephus used this term to refer to those who care diligently for gardens so that they will

<sup>19</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 765.

<sup>20</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 766.

produce fruit,<sup>21</sup> and for others who care for animals as if the animals themselves were gods.<sup>22</sup> In each case this term carries with it a physical caring for another so that the other is enabled to thrive and experience the fullest life possible.

The second term *θάλπει* literally means to “heat up” or “to be inflamed.” It was used by Paul to describe the tender warmth experienced between a breast-feeding mother and her infant (1 Thess. 2:7). Philo used this term to describe what clothes provide for human flesh: warmth and protection.<sup>23</sup> So in this case the head cares for the body for heating it up in a way suitable for the needs it has.

So what does it mean that the head (husband) is physically attentive to the body (wife)? John Paul II suggests that this act of physical love is itself the confirmation of re-orienting *one’s self* in another person. He puts it this way:

In some sense, love makes the “I” of another person one’s own “I”: the wife’s I, I would say, becomes through love the husband’s “I”. The body is the expression of this “I” and the foundation of its identity. The union of husband and wife in love expresses itself also through the body...In union through love, the body “of the other” becomes “one’s own” in the sense that one is moved by concern for the good of the body of the other as for one’s own. One might say the above-mentioned words, which characterize the “bodily” love that should unite the spouses, express the most general and, at the same time, most essential content.<sup>24</sup>

It is in this notion of loving the other as one’s self that John Paul’s particular body theology can be seen, in the “other” orientation that moves one not just to love but to actually find one’s “self” which, until the gift was given, was never truly known. That is, it is only in giving oneself to another that anyone can understand one’s own self. In this way man is not a truly autonomous creature but only emerges in authenticity within the context of giving the “I” to another. As Jewitt states, “Man, as created in the divine image, is Man-in-fellowship...the primary form of this fellowship is that of male and female.”<sup>25</sup>

## CONCLUSION

When Paul quoted Genesis 2:24, “two become one flesh” (Eph. 5:31), he intertwined the meaning of the body with the plan of God. Two being one flesh is a biblical notion of holistic, emotional, spiritual, sexual union between a husband and wife that reaches back before the fall (Gen 2:24) and was affirmed by Jesus (Matt 19:6) as God’s continued idea for marriage. When Paul proclaims that it refers

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<sup>21</sup> Josephus, *War*, 4:467

<sup>22</sup> Josephus, *Apion*, 2:139

<sup>23</sup> *Names* 246; *Dreams* 2:52; *Deca* 77.

<sup>24</sup> TOB, 485-486.

<sup>25</sup> P. K. Jewitt, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 45-46, quoted in Judith Balswick and Jack Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 61.

mysteriously to Christ and church he infuses meaning in the human body and the incarnation of Jesus that is difficult to describe because it is just too wonderful.

Today, however, for almost everyone who experiences “one flesh,” it is hard to imagine that it points to a divinely instituted event. Sex has become a means by which individuals become self-gratified. Indeed, with the explosion of today’s sex industry, one’s partner is becoming more and more redundant. Paul’s words in Ephesians 5 remind us that the essence of sex is something that is fundamentally self-giving, not self-receiving. His head/body imagery shows that sex is a means by which husbands serve their wives for the benefit of their wives, not use them as a tool to satisfy an urge. And in doing this, the act of sex becomes something much more than satisfying. It becomes a way to discover anew who one really is.



## ON POWER AND FRAGILITY: REFLECTIONS ON JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF BODILY WOMANHOOD

OWEN STRACHAN\*

"The constitution of the woman is different, as compared with the man. We know today that it is different even in the deepest bio-physiological determinants." – John Paul II

"If girls and young women ruptured their A.C.L.'s at just twice the rate of boys and young men, it would be notable. Three times the rate would be astounding. But...female athletes rupture their A.C.L.'s at rates as high as five times that of males." – Michael Sokolove

In 2013 in Richardson, Texas, a quirky, wild-haired youth speaker named Justin Lookadoo stood up in front of a high school audience and did the unthinkable: he called young men to be "be honest, chivalrous, wild and adventurous" and for young women to "be feminine" and "let men lead" in relationships. According to a report from the *Dallas News*, Lookadoo's remarks occasioned a stern rebuke from Jaime Clark-Soles, a theology professor at Southern Methodist University: "I felt that such a person with those publicly expressed views about gender roles would not have access to my child," she said. The response to Lookadoo's remarks reached fever pitch among several students, a dozen of whom surrounded him and charged him with insensitivity toward transgender peers.<sup>1</sup>

This exchange, occurring in Dallas, Texas, suggests that in American society today there is no sphere that is more contested than the body. This is true of a wide range of issues related to our form and physique. Gender fluidity is now an accepted part of the spirit of the age. Few students who undertake a modern collegiate education will fail to hear the words "social construct" when the topic of human sexuality is raised. The message asserted by many leading cultural voices today is this: gender is fluid. Opposition to this idea is increasingly seen in nearly the same terms as overt racism.

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\*Owen Strachan is Assistant Professor of Christian Theology and Church History at Boyce College, and the Executive Director of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

<sup>1</sup>Jeffrey Weiss, "Motivational Speaker at Richardson School Criticized for Gender Stereotyping," *Dallas News*, November 13, 2013. Accessed at <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/richardson-lake-highlands/headlines/20131113-motivational-speaker-at-richardson-school-criticized-for-gender-stereotyping.ece>

Lookadoo is not the first of his ilk, however. There is a long and vast tradition of affirming sexual differences among Catholics, Protestants, and essentially every other religious group.<sup>2</sup> Few theologians have stated the case for constitutional sexual differences better than Pope John Paul II in his *Theology of the Body*. There are elements of John Paul's text that I disagree with. These include his occasional dependence on higher-critical categories and, not insignificantly, his Catholic soteriology. With that said, I affirm a central concern of John Paul's text: that the bodies of men and women are different, and womanhood as an embodied reality has a special dignity and glory that owes to God's design and serves God's unique purposes. In what follows, I interact with and reflect on John Paul's stated views. I conclude with a brief test-case of this perspective from a recent discussion in the *New York Times*.

### I. A THEOLOGY OF BODILY WOMANHOOD IN "THEOLOGY OF THE BODY"

The Pope's words on the subject of the uniqueness of the womanly body are economical in *Theology of the Body* but offer in summative form a theology of the womanly body. We will look at three sections in particular from the broader work. In "Mystery of Woman Revealed in Motherhood," John Paul notes the Bible's own economical description of the human body and its distinctiveness:

The theology of the body contained in Genesis is concise and sparing with words. At the same time, fundamental and in some sense primary and definitive contents find expression in it. All human beings find themselves in their own way in that biblical "knowledge." Woman's constitution differs from that of man; in fact, we know today that it is different even in the deepest biophysiological determinants. The difference is shown only in a limited measure on the outside, in the build and form of her body. Motherhood shows this constitution from within, as a particular power of the feminine organism, which serves with creative specificity for the conception and generation of human beings with the concurrence of the man. "Knowledge" conditions begetting.<sup>3</sup>

The woman's unique design is, according to the Pope, "different" from that of the man. John Paul qualifies himself, arguing that the feminine form and construction differs "only to a certain extent" from the man. This is a reading of the sexes consonant with evangelical complementarianism, which asserts that men and women have fundamental unity and equality of worth as image-bearers (see Genesis

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<sup>2</sup> The foundational evangelical resource articulating this position is John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Carol Stream, IL: Crossway, 1991). The Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood was founded in 1987 to promote "complementarian" theology, which recognizes and celebrates sexual differences between men and women.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 211.



1:26-27).<sup>4</sup> John Paul, then, does not set the sexes up against one another. For him, they are equal. But equality does not mean sameness. It is only the “feminine organism” that has the “particular power” of “maternity,” childbearing. This is the marker “within” the woman. A woman is thus justified in finding a constitutive element of her human identity in her possession of a womb. She need not bear children to perceive that her womb owes to the design of God; made in her own way by God, she is inherently womanly, blessed with the possibility of creating and nurturing life. This is a matter of dignity; it is not incidental to womanliness.

Womanhood is a mysterious reality and a wondrous one as John Paul views it. This is true of internal femininity and of a second way that women manifest their uniqueness: “outside” themselves. The unique “construction and form” of the womanly body expresses a profound truth: woman is not man. Though equal with him, she is in a sense a new creation, formed from the rib of Adam. Discussions of sexual difference can lead to embarrassment on one hand and prurience on the other, but John Paul offers another perspective, a theological one. The discovery of “bio-physiological” difference, the creative power of God on display, is not first carnal, but is a kind of little miracle.

It is a fearsome thing as a little child to slowly understand that boys and girls are different, and that one’s father and mother are not the same. Typically, sexual distinctions are not drilled into the minds of children. It is not necessary to do so. This knowledge is a matter of wonder, not an outcome of social engineering.<sup>5</sup> We are surprised as children to attain this knowledge; we were not expecting it, we did not create it, and it is both surprising and beautiful. This learning, we could say, is an emulation of God, an act of seeing the world as the Lord sees it, and has made it to be seen. But this wisdom is not only for contemplation. In the Pope’s elegant turn of phrase, “Knowledge conditions begetting.” This is the truth that not only makes sense of the world, but that shapes the very direction of our lives. Understanding sexual difference, in other words, is an initial miracle that leads to another: becoming like God himself, and creating life.

The discussion of womanhood in *Theology of the Body* becomes less abstract and more concrete elsewhere. In John Paul’s “Eulogy of motherhood,” he zeroes in on the feminine form: “The whole exterior constitution of woman’s body, its particular look, the qualities that stand, with the power of a perennial attraction, at the beginning of the “knowledge” about which Genesis 4:1–2 speaks, (“Adam united himself with Eve”), *are in strict union with motherhood.*” He continues by noting how “the Bible (and the liturgy following it) honors and praises throughout the centuries “the womb that bore you and the breasts from which you sucked milk (Lk 11:27). These words are a eulogy of

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Andreas Kostenberger and David Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation of the Family* (Carol Stream, IL: Crossway, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Contra the perspective of feminist scholars advocating the “social constructivist” view of gender like Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

motherhood, of femininity, of the feminine body in its typical expression of creative love." This was true of "the Mother of Jesus, Mary, the second Eve. The first woman, on the other hand, at the moment in which the maternal maturity of her body revealed itself for the first time, when she "conceived and bore," said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord" (Gen 4:1)."<sup>6</sup>

This is a frank and yet honest discussion of the womanly body. The frame and form of a woman does indeed have "the power of perennial attractiveness." The "exterior constitution" of the woman is intended, we might say, to draw Adam to Eve. Sexual attraction is no accident, in other words. It is unclear exactly when John Paul believes that this "knowledge" dawns in a man, but given that Adam was an adult, it seems right to associate sexual desire with adulthood. John Paul thus operates with two stages of sexually oriented knowledge: the first involves the discovery of sexual difference, the second involves the emergence of sexual desire. These reflections remind us that sex is the invention not of modern pornographers or fast-living celebrities, but God. God, we could say, gives us this second knowledge. It is a gift to his creation, as evidenced by Adam's cry of delight in Genesis 2:23: "This at last is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh."<sup>7</sup>

The womanly power to attract raises some questions. Does manly desire for women correspond to the feminine conformity to a pre-rational standard of beauty? Or does manly desire proceed from the hard-wiring of God's design—God made men to want women, and so men naturally find women desirous? John Paul does not explicitly answer this compelling question. His affirmation of this power, however, cannot help but prompt such lines of discussion. Whatever the case, the biblical record suggests that there is something in Eve that exceeds Adam's ability to grasp. Desire is a mighty force, one of the many aspects of life that transcends the intellectual and verges into the spiritual. Not for nothing do many fallen human beings worship the body and, beyond even this, view sex as giving meaning and purpose to life.<sup>8</sup> We need not make this tragic mistake to affirm that Eve possesses in Adam's eyes an ethereal quality. She is the direct gift of God to him. He did not cry out over the privilege of naming the animals. He shouted with relief and joy and awe when his wife, naked and unashamed, was brought to him.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 212.

<sup>7</sup> Other theologians have given voice to the role of beauty and attraction in marriage. See, for example, John Calvin, Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:15–20. Calvin believed there was a "secret kind of affection that produces mutual love," by which he meant attraction. This topic and others receive judicious treatment in John Witte, Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family Life in John Calvin's Geneva: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage*, Religion, Marriage and Family Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> On this topic, see Peter Jones, *The God of Sex: How Spirituality Defines Your Sexuality* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> The Christian tradition, despite allegations of prudishness, has similarly celebrated the goodness of sex, particularly in the last several hundred years. See, for example, the classic text on the Puritan view of the family by Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family*:

John Paul transitions his fruitful consideration of womanly beauty to procreation. It is the design of God that desire exist “in close union with motherhood” and in fact, in normal circumstances, lead to it. The womanly body is made for a “typical expression of creative love,” the procreation and bearing of children. There is of course a long-standing debate among Catholic and Protestant sexual ethicists over the exact character of the relationship between lovemaking and childbearing. I tend, not surprisingly, toward the Protestant side and see sex as a gift in itself. But this should not obscure my strong appreciation for neither John Paul’s conception of the relationship nor that of leading Protestant theologians like Martin Luther, who taught that “by nature woman has been created for the purpose of bearing children. Therefore she has breasts; she has arms for the purpose of nourishing, cherishing, and carrying her offspring. It was the intention of the Creator that women should bear children and that men should beget them.”<sup>10</sup>

This pro-procreative perspective has gone missing in sectors of our society. The womanly body on its own terms has never been more an object of fixation. It is connected in the cultural mind to an image of “glamour,” the brainchild of Helen Gurley Brown. Young single women are the most coveted reality today in society, used to sell everything from paper towels to website addresses. Though the womanly frame is obviously an object of delight for husbands—see the Song of Songs—its attractiveness is not intended for public consumption, but marital pleasure and, in some circumstances, procreation.

In all this, then, we see that the uniqueness of the womanly body leads to a function that only she can perform. The womanly body is different from the man’s. Ultimately, as the Pope points out, this unique function—childbearing—leads to the birth of a Savior. Modern culture would seek to rewrite womanhood; abortion speaks to the ultimate act of gender rebellion, for mothers made to bear life instead choose death for their children. Even women who do not commit this terrible act are influenced, with their husbands, by the cultural outlook on children such that they deride them.<sup>11</sup> No doubt women must deal with many challenges in bearing and raising children; it is precisely this sphere of their lives that is cursed (Genesis 3:16). But as John Paul rightly indicates, childbearing is an act of privilege.<sup>12</sup> It bestows a unique dignity on womanhood, for only a woman could bring the Son of God into the world.

The final section we will treat on the subject of womanhood in John Paul’s *Theology of the Body* stems from the essay entitled “The Man-Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love.” Here the Pope fleshes

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*Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

<sup>10</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-present), 5:355.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, the cover story of *Time Magazine* on August 12, 2013, entitled “The Childfree Life.”

<sup>12</sup>It is a privilege that the West is losing sight of. See Jonathan Last, *What to Expect When No One’s Expecting: America’s Coming Demographic Disaster* (New York: Encounter, 2013).

out how it is that the act of childbearing occurs, and in what state of mind the man and woman discover one another. First, the man “accepts” the woman:

If, as we have noted, at the root of their nakedness there is the interior freedom of the gift—the disinterested gift of oneself—precisely that gift enables them both, man and woman, to find one another, since the Creator willed each of them “for his (her) own sake” (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 24). Thus man, in the first beatifying meeting, finds the woman, and she finds him. In this way he accepts her interiorly. He accepts her as she is willed “for her own sake” by the Creator, as she is constituted in the mystery of the image of God through her femininity.

For her part, the woman “accepts” the man:

Reciprocally, she accepts him in the same way, as he is willed “for his own sake” by the Creator, and constituted by him by means of his masculinity. The revelation and the discovery of the nuptial meaning of the body consists in this. The Yahwist narrative, and in particular Genesis 2:25, enables us to deduce that man, as male and female, enters the world precisely with this awareness of the meaning of the body, of masculinity and femininity.<sup>13</sup>

The coming together of the man and woman necessitates that both man and woman honor and “accept” the inherent bodily design of the other. Every such act, we might say, is complementarian, proceeding from the manliness and womanliness of the couple. The man does not determine the woman’s nature; he receives it as it is given to him, “interiorly,” as the Pope says. On the other hand, the woman makes her own kind of discovery. She finds that the man possesses “masculinity.” Adam and Eve knew this instinctively, it seems. They, like the heavens, were without form, but in Yahweh’s creative act, they were given sexuality.

Gender, we see, is not incidental to humanity. It is foundational for our identity. It constitutes our reality. To be in this world is to be either a man or a woman. It is of course true that we must own our inherent sexuality; not for nothing did David tell Solomon to “be strong” and “show yourself a man” (1 Kings 2:2-3). The Deuteronomic code forbade the blurring of sexual differences, indicating that the temptation to subvert God’s design is not new, but ancient (Deuteronomy 22:5). In 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, Paul elaborates on the distinctions between the sexes, instructing both men and women to embody their God-given identity. All this builds to Paul’s account of a husband and wife joined together in marriage, imaging the Christ-church covenant of love. When a husband and wife unite, it is clear that we are dealing with ineffable realities. The numinous is upon us. Marriage, the union of one

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<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, “The Man-Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love,” accessed at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/JohnPaultb14.htm>.

man and one woman, is a profound mystery, and displays the very telos of the cosmos: God and his people as one.<sup>14</sup>

## II. CULTURAL DISCUSSION OF THE UNIQUENESS OF THE WOMANLY BODY

There are many angles from which to apply John Paul's reflections. Feminine sexuality, embodied by the womanly body, is perhaps the most coveted and abused aspect of modern American life. Young men are snared by lust through the outreach of pornographers, and are not restrained by the family, the receding moral consensus, or their educators from preying on young women whom they have been trained from birth to desire.<sup>15</sup> This generation has been reared to believe that life can and should be a "great continuous Bacchanalia," as Allan Bloom once said.<sup>16</sup> In quite another sense, sexual difference is flatly denied by the spirit of the age. This corresponds, of course, to the quixotic success of a Marxian, economics-driven worldview. We are all commodities today. If we may amend the famous feminist creed, the personal is economical. Our value is determined by our worth in the marketplace. Few societal forces have been more damaging to preserving the uniqueness of womanhood.

There are less intellectual venues for the blurring of gender lines, however. Among many we could cover, I will mention just one that recently caught my eye. Several years ago, journalist Michael Sokolove started a heated conversation on the topic of the womanly body when he published a *New York Times* magazine piece on the relatively high rates of severe injury among women athletes.<sup>17</sup> Sokolove, we should note, does not support the views on sexual difference expressed here, either by John Paul or by my far less magisterial pen. He wrote his piece and his book out of concern for young girls who were experiencing a kind of silent assault on their bodies from the game of soccer. In a non-theological way, Sokolove's arguments dovetailed rather fluidly with the basic position of *Theology of the Body*.

Sokolove's book ends up arguing that girls can retrain their bodies—particularly by stretching exercises—to overcome the threat of injury. Nonetheless, he made a brave, if straightforwardly commonsensical—case for basic sexual differences. The physical differences between the sexes mean that they respond to heavy contact uniquely, for example: "Girls and boys diverge in their physical abilities as they

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<sup>14</sup> Evangelicals do not often write extensively in these terms when discussing marriage; one work that treats this mystery at length is Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage (20th Anniversary Edition): Meditations on the Miracle* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> For a biological chronicle of the effects of pornography on the male brain, see William Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 99.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Sokolove, "The Uneven Playing Field," *New York Times* magazine, May 11, 2008. See also Sokolove, *Warrior Girls: Protecting Our Daughters Against the Injury Epidemic in Women's Sports* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

enter puberty and move through adolescence. Higher levels of testosterone allow boys to add muscle and, even without much effort on their part, get stronger. In turn, they become less flexible.” He continued the point: “Girls, as their estrogen levels increase, tend to add fat rather than muscle. They must train rigorously to get significantly stronger. The influence of estrogen makes girls’ ligaments lax, and they outperform boys in tests of overall body flexibility—a performance advantage in many sports, but also an injury risk when not accompanied by sufficient muscle to keep joints in stable, safe positions.” Some of these problems owed to a uniquely feminine running style: “Girls tend to run differently than boys—in a less-flexed, more-upright posture—which may put them at greater risk when changing directions and landing from jumps. Because of their wider hips, they are more likely to be knock-kneed—yet another suspected risk factor.”

These physical traits add up to some notable difficulties for some young women who play high-contact sports. Sokolove pointed to data from the NCAA that, in his view, poignantly showed that women are less suited to high-contact sports:

The N.C.A.A.’s Injury Surveillance System tracks injuries suffered by athletes at its member schools, calculating the frequency of certain injuries by the number of occurrences per 1,000 “athletic exposures”—practices and games. The rate for women’s soccer is 0.25 per 1,000, or 1 in 4,000, compared with 0.10 for male soccer players. The rate for women’s basketball is 0.24, more than three times the rate of 0.07 for the men. The A.C.L. injury rate for girls may be higher—perhaps much higher—than it is for college-age women because of a spike that seems to occur as girls hit puberty.”

This was, in Sokolove’s estimation, a catastrophic situation. Parents and educators simply could not ignore:

If girls and young women ruptured their A.C.L.’s at just twice the rate of boys and young men, it would be notable. Three times the rate would be astounding. But some researchers believe that in sports that both sexes play, and with similar rules—soccer, basketball, volleyball—female athletes rupture their A.C.L.’s at rates as high as five times that of males.<sup>18</sup>

Sokolove’s presentation came in for major critique, as one would expect. For example, Steven D. Stovitz, Assistant Professor of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Minnesota, and Elizabeth A. Arendt, Professor of Orthopedic Surgery at the same, responded at length to Sokolove. We will quote at length from their rebuttal of *Warrior Girls*: “One major theme is that females simply can’t do what males do. Therefore, when they try to “act like males,” meaning be competitive, powerful and aggressive, they will inevitably become injured.” In addition, “We don’t know why girls suffer ACL injuries at rates higher than boys. Theories include factors such as differences in strength, joint laxity and gait. The author presents each theory as a

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<sup>18</sup> Sokolove, “Uneven Playing Field.”

'known risk factor' implying that all girls inherently contain every risk factor which places all females at enormous risk." Finally, Sokolove's language was problematic: "overwrought language permeates Sokolove's writing and contributes to the sense of fear he creates when discussing the 'injury epidemic' he claims exists."<sup>19</sup>

This response by Stovitz and Arendt captures the general tenor of the response to Sokolove on the *New York Times* website. At base, the authors viewed Sokolove as promoting gender inequality. Many commenters on the article were far less nuanced, equating the journalist's position with bigotry. To even suggest that girls might have some inherent physical differences that led to higher rates of injury than boys in high-contact competition was to speak out of prejudice. A social and cultural code had been betrayed.

The problem with this outcry, however, is that Sokolove's arguments have scientific grounding. To give one example, Anne and Bill Moir, British scientists working from an evolutionary standpoint, have written extensively of sexual differences. Oxford-trained, associated with the production of numerous BBC specials on science, the Moirs authored a boldly iconoclastic text entitled *Why Men Don't Iron*. In the text, they discuss a study conducted at the University of Limburg at Maastricht in Holland, in which 16 men and 16 women were put through a five-month endurance training program. As the Moirs report, their average daily metabolic rate—the amount of energy they each needed to keep their body functioning—was measured. All 32 subjects increased their physical activity by 60 percent, but the effects on the sexes were quite different. The men's metabolic rate increased markedly: at the end of the 20 weeks they needed an extra 800 calories of food a day just to maintain their body weight, but no such change was detected in the women.<sup>20</sup>

What did this finding show, in the words of the husband and wife? Basically this: "Life is not fair. A man can jog away the pounds, but a woman cannot. She has to diet too." This is true, according to the Moirs, of those who compete in track-and-field. In such events, "males have a 10 percent advantage, and nature will keep it that way." Why is this so? The Moirs note that on average men are larger, and, pound for pound, their physiology is more efficient in terms of utilizing energy than a woman's physiology. Your average man, at base, "can burn energy faster than she can. Not only that, but women carry a higher proportion of body fat than men because women are more efficient at converting energy into storage." Because of this, "She might survive famine, but he will always run faster."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Steven D. Stovitz and Elizabeth A. Arendt, "Anatomy Isn't Destiny: A Response to Michael Sokolove (A Sports Medicine Perspective)," *The Tucker Center Newsletter*, Fall 2008. Accessed online at <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/tuckercenter/newsletter/2008-fall/feature.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Anne and Bill Moir, *Why Men Don't Iron: The Fascinating and Unalterable Differences Between Men and Women* (New York: Citadel Press, 1999), 56. See also Michael Gurian, *The Wonder of Boys* (New York: Tarcher, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Anne and Bill Moir, *Why Men Don't Iron*, 165–66.

Men will “run faster” in part because of their generally much higher testosterone levels. The Moirs call attention to the marked difference between men and women on this point:

Men’s competitive drive comes from testosterone, and, because in real life not everyone can be a winner, it will come as no surprise that testosterone levels vary between individuals. They also vary enormously between men and women: the adult male’s T levels (5,140-6, 460 units) are about 11 times higher than a woman’s (285-440 units). Give a man the challenge of competition and his already high T level will rise, increasing still further his competitive edge.<sup>22</sup>

If the Moirs are correct in the foregoing, these basic physiological realities suggest, as noted earlier, that men and women are “different even in the deepest bio-physiological determinants” as John Paul put it.<sup>23</sup> This is not, of course, to suggest that there are not women who are far better athletically than men, or women and men alike whose bodily experience counters the norm. That surely is not the case. It is not, additionally, to say that women are somehow physically inferior to men. The design of God for men and women is intentional, and no value difference should be seen in bodily difference. What, after all, is of greater importance than the bearing and nurturing of children, for which the woman is uniquely constituted?

The preceding discussion of the work of Sokolove and the Moirs is but a foray into a much larger cultural conversation. Whatever our theological lens, it seems that we are free to deny the physical differences between men and women in our argumentation. No harm, no foul (no pun intended). We deny them in the actual living of our days, however, to our peril. From different angles and in some unexpected ways, our personal flourishing is at stake when we question and compromise sexual difference.

### CONCLUSION: SEVEN REFLECTIONS

We have put a good deal on the table in this essay. In conclusion, I want to suggest a few points that may stimulate reflection.

*First*, we should honor the basic physical differences between men and women and, as John Paul so elegantly did, ground them in the creativity of God. *Second*, this means that sex differences, proceeding from the wisdom of God, redound to the glory of God. *Third*, we are right to see the womanly body as an object of “perennial attractiveness,” an object of delight. It is not perverse to do so. The discovery of a basic understanding of sex (gender) and a deeper understanding of what one might call “mutuality” is sacred, precious, and given us by God. *Fourth*, the glory of womanhood is not an end unto itself. Broadly speaking, it is a catalyst for both delight in marriage (see the Song of Songs) and the procreation and nurture of children.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>23</sup> George Gilder has offered a persuasive case for how biological realities shape society-sustaining patterns in texts like *Men and Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 1986).



*Fifth*, we must therefore be careful that we do not conceive of the woman's body as we do the man's. The design of the sexes matters. Women are suited to roles and tasks that men are not; the reverse also is true. However Christians apply it, the biblical portrait of the woman as "weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7) must factor into our consideration of this controverted material. *Sixth*, this does not necessarily mean that girls should not play contact sports. It does mean, however, that Christians who respect God's design for the body will, in making such decisions, make them under advisement of Scripture and wisdom gleaned from other less authoritative sources.

*Seventh*, and finally, pastors should lead this discussion on the body in their churches. Preaching, as theologian Kevin Vanhoozer has persuasively argued, is the shedding abroad of gospel wisdom.<sup>24</sup> It is the formation of reality in a world of un-reality. Perhaps this subject powerfully illustrates this central function of the pastor, indeed the pastor-theologian, for it shows that the preaching of the Word of God creates reality by, in many cases, calling the believer *back to reality*. Pastors must perform this vital task in offering the biblical account of sexuality and gender. To fail to do so is to leave many around us in a state of confusion.

We do so not because we want to offer thunderous declamations at those who disagree with us, but because we seek the vitality and well-being of our neighbor, an end that is achieved by the power of the gospel and by the application of the wisdom it fosters.

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<sup>24</sup> See Vanhoozer's 2009 Page Lectures at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and the forthcoming work by Kevin Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian* (Brazos, 2014).



## BOOK REVIEWS

Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Volume One, Vintage Books Edition, 1990; (Original Publication, 1976; English Translation, 1978), Pp. 168, \$15.00

Foucault's *History of Sexuality* asks how the notion of sexual identity became common sense and how sexual desire became associated with revealing the true self. Though considered a postmodern thinker, Foucault's method is anchored in his work as a historian of Western modernity, covering not just sexuality but a wide range of social and political topics. In light of Foucault's work, the history of sex can be seen as a procession of different historically contingent sexual regimes, which made claims on bodies, normalcy, health, morality, and the future of society.

One of the major arguments of *The History of Sexuality* is that Western society is not now nor has ever been sexually repressed. Foucault first lays out the familiar narrative of sexual repression and the need to find the truth about sexuality—through therapy, religion, medicine, and the like—as a quest to liberate desire and access the self. He argues that when looking for evidence of this repression one discovers an explosion of discourse about sex rather than its dwindling. Foucault traces the investments in “normal” sexuality of many social sciences, medical practices, political and social institutions to make the case that Western society has been ironically “speaking of [sex] *ad infinitum*,” (35).

“The essential point is that sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood, that the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful, or dangerous, precious or formidable: in short, that sex was constituted as a problem of truth” and that truth tied to the secret of who we really are (56). At the juncture of the body, relationships, family, and cultural norms, sex became the capacious vessel holding promises of understanding and pleasure as well as social futurity and liberation.

A second major implication of the work is that sexuality, i.e. the linkage between sex and identity rather than sex as discreet acts, is also a modern development. “The nineteenth-century homosexual,” writes Foucault, “became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood ... Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions ... Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto...a hermaphrodisism of the

soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species," (43).

Indeed, Foucault shows that the tie of sex to essential self was a historical effect produced and reinforced by a number of social, cultural, medical, juridical, and religious institutions. Looking at when certain vocabularies became dominant and what sort of social practices helped make them so, the homosexual/heterosexuals divide appears less and less like a natural or trans-historical way of thinking about sexuality.

Having historicized the process by which "normal" heterosexuality and "deviant" homosexuality were invented, Foucault creates the possibility of dreaming and demanding a new sexual order—one that could be more fluid and tied to desire rather than to bodily sex. It is this possibility that motivates queer activism and scholarship along with some schools of contemporary feminism.

The *History of Sexuality* is arguably the foundational text for the field of queer theory, an academic discipline examining the intersection of gender, sexuality, bodies, and politics. A key tenet of queer theory is that gender and sexuality are not fixed categories dictated by bodies, but are less stable sets of expectations and performances contingent upon what norms and knowledge dominate a particular moment.

Though his work and his legacy challenge any fixed sexual norm, Michel Foucault himself did not intend to be a liberator of sex. Rather, more Foucauldian questions would be: What makes us think that sexuality holds the key to our liberation? What forms of sexuality and desire do we imagine as liberatory or, at least, up-ending of current power relations?

In other words, though part of Foucault's legacy has been a certain kind of sexual identity politics, "sexual liberation" and "sexual identity" are part of what Foucault was questioning as historical phenomena.

The current age of gay identity politics, if anything, seems to point to renewed investments in sexual identity as a basis for entering into public and religious life. For Christians, unmooring the naturalness of "straight" and "gay" identities may feel further unsettling. Reckoning with Foucault, though, also presents believers with an opportunity to return with fresh eyes to the Bible, laying aside a discourse about sexual identity that has become comfortable for Christians as children of modernism in order to better speak about sex as the children of God. The Church can proclaim the soul and humanity's being made in the image of God as the source of identity-defining truth and grasp the Bible's language for sexual ethics.

In today's public sphere, some Christians frame themselves as defenders of "traditional marriage" and "heterosexuality" as though those are synonymous with Biblical sexual ethics. But they are not. After all, what the Bible describes as traditional and natural to this earth is brokenness—not "traditional" sexuality, nor the identity claims of heterosexuality and homosexuality. As traditional sexuality and marriage are increasingly cast as ideas on "the wrong side of history," it may also be useful to re-center conversations on the reality that the Bible's teaching on sex for all people has always been and will continue to be profoundly countercultural in any historical moment.

In teaching the whole of the Christian sexual ethic and its prohibitions on lust, premarital sex, adultery, and, yes, same sex relations, Christians are teaching, a view of sexual intimacy that is bound up with our role as divine image bearers. As such, this sexual ethic is unlikely to "feel normal" for all but the rarest of fallen humans *unless* they rely on the power of the Christ,

the accountability of community, and the Bible's assurance of God's plan for this world, including sex.

In the world after Foucault, believers might seize the possibilities for loving, humble ministry that does not treat same-sex temptation as any more identity-defining than other Biblically prohibited desires and, in the process, present a more winsomely Christ-like witness.

Laura Kenna  
Trinity Forum Academy  
George Washington University  
Washington DC

Wendell Berry. *Jayber Crow*. Berkley, CA: Counterpoint, 2000. \$14.95. ISBN: 978-1-58243-160-4. Pp. 363.

His recent comments on gay marriage notwithstanding, in his essays ("Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community"; "Poetry and Marriage") and fiction (*Hannah Coulter*, *The Memory of Old Jack*), Wendell Berry has given us rich reflections on the joys, trials and disciplines of marriages good and bad. *Jayber Crow* is an intimate portrait of a single life, which offers to enrich our pastoral ministry to those called to singleness.

The book is the fictional memoir of the eponymous barber of Port William, a small Kentucky farming town. Although the voice is distinctively Jayber's, the prose is unmistakably Berry's: gentle and lilting, probing and patient, so closely-matched to his subject it might have grown out of his native Kentucky hills.

Berry is famous as an environmentalist: a farmer hostile to technology, a chronicler of the beauty and tragedy of twentieth century agrarian life in America. But perhaps the central theme of his work is affection: affection for God's good land, affection for place and community and stability, affection for people, with all their quirks and virtues and flaws. *Jayber Crow* explores this theme in a meditation on love and hatred. From the perspective of one particular man, as his life unfolds in ways he might not have wished, it probes the question: "Why is hate so easy and love so difficult?" (328)

As the town's barber and gravedigger, transplanted into a community of farmers, Jayber remains something of an outsider throughout his life. He is a man among men with little natural contact with women, and his income and circumstances mean he cannot support a family. So he remains single into old age. But he is single by circumstance, not choice: central to the plot is his unrequited love for Mattie Chatham. Young Mattie makes a foolish marriage to an arrogant, callous husband, a union she endures for decades with dignity and love. Jayber determines that he too will honor her wedding vow; his love lasts for 40 years, but it remains his secret.

The book, with its tripartite structure, takes significant inspiration from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Before arriving in Port William, Jayber finds himself, in the middle of life, lost in the woods. He passes to his new life by a river crossing. Burley Coulter—a member of one of Port William's central families, but by instinct something of an outsider—is Jayber's Virgil, guiding him to the town and welcoming him in. Mattie is Jayber's Beatrice: loved and longed-for, but out of reach.

As the story unfolds, we experience an inferno of land despoiled, marriages shattered, a young child dying; a purgation of erotic desires disciplined and directed towards loving service; and glimpses of paradise: a dream of the child resurrected, a vision of a wonderfully earthy afterlife with dead friends restored to one another, sitting and talking on a farmhouse porch.

In *Paradiso*, Dante sets eyes on Beatrice in a beautiful wooded garden. So, too, the climax of Jayber's memoir begins with a series of encounters with Mattie in a paradisaal wood. True to its model, the story ends with a light-soaked beatific vision. But is this lyrical novel a story about heaven or about hell? For a long time it is unclear, and for many years Jayber himself is unsure. But, finally, he comes to know the truth. Near the end, he describes his woodland encounters:

Mattie always preserved a certain discretion, not in anything she said, but in the way she was, the way she carried herself and looked. She was with me, but not for me, if you can see what I mean. There was a veil between us. We both kept her vow, as I alone kept mine. I knew there was a smile of hers that I had never seen. And that was well. That was all right, (350-1).

This chaste friendship endures to the almost unbearably moving final sentence. Jayber has lost virtually everything. Port William's community has been all but destroyed by the technological and social changes of the mid-twentieth century. His friends are dead, or ageing fast. The land he loves is scarred, perhaps beyond recovery. And the woman he has loved, yet never had, lies dying. But, for all his losses, Jayber's descent into sorrow and loneliness is also an ascent to love:

I whisper over to myself the way of loss, the names of the dead. One by one, we lose our loved ones, our friends, our powers of work and pleasure, our landmarks, the days of our allotted time...Finally a man stands up alone, scoured and charred like a burnt tree, having lost everything and (at the cost only of its loss) found everything, and is ready to go, (353).

And so, "This is a book about heaven. I know it now," (351).

Jayber Crow can neither capture nor possess Mattie Chatham. But he can love her, silently, faithfully, chastely.

Strikingly, the only truly tragic characters in the book are all married. Despite, even because of, their marriages, they are trapped: by longings to escape from their circumstances and themselves, by who they want to be but can't become. And so although they are married, one of them to a wonderful woman, they are miserable and alone.

In contrast, although sadness and loss carve deep furrows through his story, Jayber is bigger than his unrequited love. There are other griefs he must endure: his orphan childhood, the death of friends, the gradual decline of the town he calls home. But there are good things too. He has a rich community and a place within it. He is loved and needed. He has friends. He gives and receives hospitality. Above all, he has a deep integrity and character: Jayber is a virtuous man, far larger and more wonderful than his marital status.

Fiction cannot make us good: vicious people sometimes possess exquisite aesthetic taste. But it can help form our moral imaginations. Marilynne Robinson has recently described her novel writing as an act of

bestowing imaginative affection on her characters. As readers, we can learn the same virtue. Great literature invites us to enter someone else's experience of life. It invites us to learn love and sympathy for people different from ourselves. Aside from the sheer pleasure of a novel like *Jayber Crow*, this gift of access to an imagined—but very real—life, is perhaps its greatest value. This is true not least for those called to pastor, and so to understand and love, people with all kinds of joys and trials, victories and heartaches. If you want to form a pastoral imagination about marriage and community, loyalty and friendship, and, yes, one man's experience of singleness, I don't think you can do better than this book.

Matthew Mason  
Church of the Resurrection  
Washington, DC

Mark and Grace Driscoll, *Real Marriage: The Truth about Sex, Friendship & Life Together*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012. Pp. xi + 249. \$22.99, Hardcover.

Timothy Keller (Kathy Keller, contributor). *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. New York: Dutton, 2011. Pp. 283. \$25.95, Cloth.

Paul David Tripp. *What did you Expect?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2010. Pp. 287. \$17.99, Paper.

It is difficult to imagine a more confusing time as it regards the ancient institution of marriage. Long-standing cultural assumptions about what marriage is, why it is important and how it benefits society have largely crumbled into a multitude of fragmented personal opinions. This cultural transition pushes pastors to reformulate a fresh expression of Christian marriage that speaks to the complexities and challenges facing disciples of Jesus today. Furthermore, the current cultural free-for-all has left those outside the church largely disappointed and many are looking for answers in surprising places. Hence there is an enormous opportunity to provide vision and hope in an area of life where pain is felt most acutely and confusion is at an all-time high. In their own ways, the Driscoll's, Keller's and Tripp provide for the church a vision for marriage that is rich with hard won insight and rings true amidst a chorus of competing voices. Indeed, several times in each book I found myself writing notes, not for this review, but for the benefit of my own ministry and marriage. However, for authors who share a similar theological framework (reformed-evangelical), the diverse ways they write about marriage is both stunning and fascinating.

While each book certainly deserves its own detailed evaluation, the focus of this review is to compare and contrast these intriguing works using broad strokes. Our jumping off point will be by taking note of the diverse ministry context in which each of these books emerged so that readers can evaluate the degree to which each book will overlap with their own ministry setting.

The Kellers write in the context of the professional and highly progressive culture of New York City. Consequently, much of the value of this book is in the highly sophisticated and downright philosophical defense

of the institution of marriage itself in light of all other available options. Keller's demonstration that covenant marriage historically brings common good to society is compared over and against the default assumption of marriage which is a toxic mix of consumerism and individualism. In place of the dominant role "commodification" plays in relationships, Keller suggests another financial concept called "love economics". The idea being that if one's love needs are sufficiently filled by the limitless fount of the gospel, then one is in the position to serve a spouse out of abundance rather than want. The overall impact of his argument is intellectually satisfying and philosophically robust. Hence, if a pastor is serving in a progressive culture, what one will find in this book is perhaps the best explanation of and case for a biblical covenant marriage over and against any consumerist and socially defragmented marriage alternatives.

In contrast to the professional sport-coat-and-slacks crowd seen at Redeemer, the Driscolls' Mars Hill resides in Seattle and serves a hip, young, urban crowd that seems slightly grittier compared to the sophisticates in Manhattan. As such, what the Driscoll's may lack in erudition they more than make up for in uncommon honesty and a style that has bone-busting force. The tone of the book is straightforward and is at times rather jarring because of the language and insight. Mark begins by sharing about his upbringing in a rough blue-collar community in which strip clubs, prostitutes, alcoholism, wife beating, and enraged fits fights were a common occurrence in both his neighborhood and immediate family. Without question this experience provides him with a unique style to communicate to many individuals who would never find a connection with Keller's polish. Perhaps the greatest value of this book is its framing of marriage within the context of friendship and in providing a terrific case study of friendship in marriage in the fascinating story of Martin Luther and his wife Katherine von Bora.

While the Keller's and Driscoll's ministry environments are very different, what they have in common is they both serve largely unchurched communities. Moreover, they are enormously successful casting a biblical vision of marriage by using their own vastly differing styles. Any pastor desiring to advance a biblical cry for marriage will benefit greatly from their insight, but especially ministers who find themselves—and their convictions about marriage—to be outnumbered and on the wrong end of current cultural trends.

In contrast to the unchurched bastions of New York City and Seattle, Tripp is the director of a para-church ministry called the Center for Pastoral Life and Care in Fort Worth, Texas. Tripp's ministry serves a much more conservative culture and in the pages of this book there is found a level of taken-for-granted assumptions about biblical authority and marriage as an institution overall than what is observed in Keller's and Driscoll's works. With that said, the pure volume of couples counseled by Tripp as a marriage specialist is greater than Driscoll and Keller, whose responsibilities expand far beyond marriage counseling. Indeed, Tripp's evenhanded and experienced posture in this book gives the impression that one is reading from the pen of an authentic sage. Tripp's approach makes his monograph on marriage very assessable and easy to apply for conservative folks who tend to fill the pews on Sunday. In Tripp the reader discovers the voice of a seasoned marriage counselor full of practical advice whereas with Keller one finds insight that may be too abstract (and whereas Driscoll may be too much altogether) for the common conservative American churchgoer.



Each of these writers come from solidly evangelical camps and each certainly use the bible as their final authority; yet how they use the bible and other sources of authority to construct their books is strikingly different and worth comparing. Keller uses two major tools in this book: an exposition of Ephesians 5 and the use of sociology. Like watching a gifted builder first clear out a ruined foundation and then replace it by pouring a new slab of concrete, Keller deconstructs the commodification common in marriage today and replaces it with a winsome exposition of covenant in marriage. He shows that the biblical vision for marriage seen in Ephesians 5 is not just “right” but that it is good for society as well. If Keller systematically lays a slab, Tripp assumes that a foundation is already there (his call to use the “Bible biblically” assumes using the Bible in the first place, pp. 16-17). As such his is a book of overall biblical wisdom without real exegesis offered. Yet I will make note of one theological conviction that emerges as a controlling idea in his book: it is the theological concept of already and not yet. That things are not as they should be (the “not yet”) is key to his fundamental thesis about having proper expectations heading into marriage. However, God has the spouse exactly where he wants them and desires them to learn/grow in their current context. Regardless of the brokenness one finds oneself in, there can be restoration found because of the theological trajectory of already/not yet.

In contrast with both Keller and Tripp, I was surprised to find the role that visions/dreams played in Driscoll’s life and hence in this book on marriage. Driscoll believes God told him that he needed to marry Grace as well as to start Mars Hill Church and the Acts 29 Network. He had a dream early in their marriage and ministry that revealed an indiscretion committed by Grace that was later confirmed by Grace to be true. This event proved to be a pivotal moment in their marriage and influenced much of this book. Later in his ministry, a man came into Mark’s office and told him—from God—that Mark needed to get healthy physically and showed him how. Mark believed that message was indeed from God and it was used to help enact real change in his life and marriage. These actionable responses from visions/messages from God provides Driscoll’s book with an edge that gives one the impression that Mark is flying close to the flame. This gives him an empowered voice in which authority is intertwined with his own Paul-like calling. This, also, at the same time, ought to make any discerning pastor a touch nervous.

It is also interesting to see how each of these writers deals with the topic of sex in marriage. The Driscoll’s spend nearly half of their book on the topic and seem to overreach on some issues such as the role of masturbation and anal sex. Yet their straightforwardness will likely be helpful to many couples dealing with specific questions regarding sex. After spending just as much time dealing with singleness, Keller spends a chapter on sex and describes it interestingly as being a repeated action of covenant renewal. Tripp doesn’t spend much time at all on the topic noting his dislike of overly gratuitous Christian sex books. His take is that sex related issues in marriage are rarely the real problem in a marriage but rather the byproduct of the more grave spiritual conditions that he addresses straight on in his book.

Finally, another feature I really enjoyed in two of these books was hearing from Grace Driscoll and Kathy Keller. In the appendix of Keller’s book, Kathy’s description about the application of male headship in her marriage was as articulate an explanation as can be found. Likewise, Grace

Driscoll's chapter on how to respect one's husband was rich with personal insight from both failures and successes. After reading both of these books I was left wishing these women were given more space to reflect on their experiences in their own marriage and ministry and offer more advice for others who want to learn from them.

In summary, each of these books deserves to be read slowly and repeatedly by any pastor who desires to strengthen marriages in the church and who aspires to articulate a compelling vision of marriage for the world.

David Morlan  
Fellowship Denver Church  
Denver, Colorado

J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*. Wilmington: ISI Books, 1952. Pp.155, \$27.95, cloth.

There is no shortage of conversations about the proper shape our sexual lives should take in this world. Yet J. Budziszewski's slim yet powerful volume *On the Meaning of Sex* is one of those rare contributions that is not only edifying and helpful but thoroughly enjoyable to read. Allow me up front to save readers the trouble of determining whether to buy the book: go forth and order, and hurry. Everything Budziszewski spreads across his 155 pages is more worthy than this review could be.

As a college professor, Budziszewski is no stranger to the devastation and confusion that our current sexual climate has wrought on young people. Yet he is not paternalistic: he writes for his generation as well, which "invented the sexual revolution" and acknowledges that they "treated our friends, our spouses, and our children dreadfully" (12). But it is a puzzle that emerges from an interaction with a student that opens Budziszewski's reflections: how might it be that a young person would be revolted by Aldous Huxley's vision of factory-made babies while simultaneously protesting that sex doesn't have to have a meaning? Budziszewski takes the revulsion seriously, suggesting that perhaps it holds a latent or tacit knowledge about the meaning of sex. Budziszewski is a philosopher by trade, and so lays bare the reasons for that revulsion with an enviable clarity. But the book never loses its pedagogical edge amidst its explorations and its arguments.

Yet Budziszewski's argument is densely packed. After exploring the initial puzzle, he turns toward providing a natural law argument for the meaning of what he helpfully dubs "sexual powers"—which not surprisingly turn out to be tied to procreation and unity. To readers unfamiliar with such teleological arguments, Budziszewski's presentation is an excellent starting place. To others more familiar with the arguments, Budziszewski's arguments will be familiar even while clearly stated.

Budziszewski then turns toward the two sexes, arguing that "sanity begins with the fact that men are potentially fathers, and women potentially mothers." Budziszewski is aware he's strolling a minefield by taking on the question of differences, but tiptoes around social constructionist arguments about gender and deploys (albeit necessarily controversial) social science studies in a helpful way to make his case. He is willing to compare fathers and mothers with kings and queens, while recognizing that such comparisons seem "naive, sentimental, and exaggerated" and "make us

squirm.” So much the worse for our responses in this case, as Budziszewski argues the reasons for such responses are wanting.

After a helpful discussion of sexual love—or what he calls the “erotic mode of charity”—Budziszewski turns to the nature of sexual beauty. Budziszewski takes on “sexiness,” carefully arguing that it is an “outward sign of the inward reality of the beauty of womanliness itself.” (Budziszewski limits himself to speaking of women in this chapter, for reasons of simplicity.) But as with everything else in the book, distinctions await: there is a “dehumanized sexiness” that is simply a “sign of readiness for sex, but not every sign of readiness for sex is dehumanized.” Sexiness has its place, not only within the bedroom but within the structure of male and female erotic relations.

Budziszewski doesn’t stop, though, with discussing beauty. He takes on sexual purity as well, which he describes as a “sweetness” that we have to practice in order to understand. His imagery and metaphors here will be similarly “backwards” to many readers, as he defends the medieval chivalric tradition. Yet again, Budziszewski is not unilateral in his approach: his discussion of modesty is a sober and level-headed treatment that grounds modesty in a mutual respect between men and women. As he puts it, “Truly modest folk...are not just clean minded; they also avoid needless provocation to those who are easily provoked,” (122). Here too his discussion of purity depends upon and deepens his previous discussions of male-female complementarity and the nature of manhood and womanhood. The woman, he argues, is the “natural guardian of purity” who “teaches it to the man, who, as her natural protector, learns to love purity, too,” (130).

It’s these later chapters that push Budziszewski’s book into territory that is foreign for many academic treatments of sexuality, yet without losing its crystalline clarity. It’s also these chapters that make the book such a practical read, despite its contemplative orientation. Pastors and youth pastors with young people struggling with questions of modesty and purity would be well served to ingest Budziszewski’s arguments slowly, to ruminate on them and learn to see them from within.

In the final chapter of the book, Budziszewski turns toward transcendence, arguing that the inevitable imperfection of sexual love points toward a more permanent, divine solution. Here Budziszewski brings God back into consideration, as he had bracketed him in the introduction in order to make as much of his argument as possible on purely philosophical grounds. Budziszewski argues that human erotic love points toward union of the Trinity. His strategy here is not particularly novel, but it is fraught with danger. “As below, so above” type arguments need to be carefully constrained by Scripture—and it is interesting that the paradigmatic image for human marriage that Paul sets down in Ephesians 5 is not the inner life of the Triune God but the specific union of the Christ and the church. Whether Budziszewski’s argument impinges upon the specific creaturely reality of human erotic love is a question worth considering closely while reading. I leave it as a question because it is so still for me.

As to criticisms of Budziszewski’s work, any additional quibbles I have are not worth mentioning. I could find other superlatives to add to those I’ve already offered, but that might be tiresome. So I will close with this: in a world that alternates between being flagrantly flippant about sex, clinical and analytic, and hysterically cautious, Budziszewski’s book is a grave and insightful antidote that is appropriately reverential without being slavishly sentimental. Budziszewski says he seeks the “beauty of wisdom” in writing

this. Judging by his prose and argumentation, he certainly caught a glimpse of it—and we are the better for it.

Matthew Lee Anderson  
Oxford University  
Oxford

Sarah Coakley, *Religion and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. xvii, 303. \$34.75, cloth.

In an address to a group of Anglican clergy and youth workers, C. S. Lewis once summarized his approach to the search for enlightenment: "The only two things really worth considering are Christianity and Hinduism. Islam is only the greatest of the Christian heresies, Buddhism only the greatest of the Hindu heresies. Real Paganism is dead. All that was best in Judaism and Platonism survives in Christianity. There isn't really, for an adult mind, this infinite variety of religions to consider," ("Christian Apologetics" in *God in the Dock*). Lewis' analysis is surprisingly straightforward to contemporary readers, almost quaint, as though finding ultimate meaning could be as simple as deciding which type of car to buy. In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Walker Percy gives a bracing diagnosis for our confusion: "You live in a deranged age—more deranged than usual, because despite great scientific and technological advances, man has not the faintest idea of who he is or what he is doing."

*Religion and the Body* is refreshing in its recognition of this derangement. Despite what for most evangelicals will be unfamiliar names and untrusted institutions, conservatives can resonate with the anthology's basic assessment of the current scene: we have some messed views and uses of the body. The book is edited by Sarah Coakley, who is currently working on a four-volume systematic theology that would be the first major systematics text from a feminist perspective. While this distinction might make some nervous, Coakley is an erudite dialogue-partner for any theologian, and she has likely upset more mainstream feminists than anyone else in her writing. In the introduction she explains the errors often made in evaluating the church's views of the body: "Current sociological and feminist accounts of the 'body', especially, tend to proceed with a jaundiced (if undifferentiated) vision of the 'Christianity' that their theorizing has replaced: its alliance with 'bourgeois capitalism' in a 'religious (if hypocritical) condemnation of sexual pleasures', its perception of the sexual body as 'gross' and 'institutional', or, more generally, its 'blanket of oppression and violence against bodiliness,'" (pg. 5). A quick warning to the would-be reader: the quotation marks and parentheses don't go away; this is definitely not a plain-spoken chat about God and stuff.

But for both the theologian and the preacher, the essays here are worth some investment. First, they offer a number of critiques against the confusions about the body in our age. Even the popular magazine induced obsession with slimming and fitness is confronted, demonstrating our implicit impatience with our bodies' own "rebellious fleshiness" that accompanies the changes of age. A second benefit is the exploration of various views, both of the major world religions (although Islam is notably absent) and a smattering of social theories: feminism, twenty-first century science, structuralism, and a quick mention of current scholarship in the philosophy of mind. A helpful clarification Coakley requires of each author is some description of what the body *isn't* in their various model or faith

tradition: What is beyond the body? How does that shape our understanding of how bodies are influenced? The third benefit comes to the reader when considering the modern day iteration of Lewis' approach toward religion. What is a distinctly Christian approach to the body? How is it truer, and better, than all alternatives? And once that is established, what can be relearned from our own heritage or other traditions?

The chapters on Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant views of the body are thorough and provide deep historical background, but they are not aimed at pastoral counseling. (For a rich yet practical meditation on our bodies and their significance, *Earthen Vessels* by Matthew Lee Anderson is excellent.) David Tripp's chapter on Protestant views of body is varied and lively but contains less sustained theological meditation than one might hope. Kalistos Ware, presenting a Greek Orthodox perspective, addresses the caricature of monasticism as anti-physical. He points out how Athanasius celebrates the blessing of health in his *Life of St. Antony* and explains the notion of asceticism in terms of the resurrection, quoting Russian Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov, "Kill the flesh so as to acquire a body," (pg. 100). Ware does recognize some inconsistencies in the church, however, particularly in practice, citing as an example the Orthodox Church's common prohibition of women receiving communion while in menstruation.

The chapter "The body in Jewish worship" by Louis Jacobs is especially interesting, given its close reading on the celebration of *Shabbat*, death and burial rites, and the priestly blessing. For many American Christians, the primary injunction related to the Sabbath is to rest from our labors, prone as we are to working all the time. This is obviously a prominent feature of Jewish teaching on the subject, but also critical are ideas grounded in Isaiah 58:13: "call the Sabbath a delight." Maimonides in his *Mishneh Torah* interprets this to require the enjoyment of good food and wine. As Jacobs writes, the Talmud states that it is forbidden *not* to feast on the Sabbath.

The Christian apologetic possibilities are most in view when considering the Eastern religions. In various ways the body is reviled or merely tolerated, although less in casual practice than in strict teaching. Mahayana Buddhism views the body as "a useless object of attachment unless it can be used for the benefit of others" (212). Suicide in service of others, such as the monk Ven. Thich Quang-Duc burning himself to death in 1963 to protest the Vietnamese government's persecution of Buddhism, is grounded in such a view. This is contrasted by the Christian understanding of the body, which acknowledges the inherent goodness of creation and forbids such an action because of its presumption in destroying what God has preserved.

In summary, *Religion and the Body* offers the Christian thinker plenty of alternatives to consider, helpful for clarification of what some of the extra-Biblical possibilities actually look like and ultimately in demonstrating how the molding of the dust by God offers a uniquely balanced view: humbling in its origins, ennobling in its fulfillment by the Word who took on flesh and dwelt among us.

Jeremy Mann  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School  
Deerfield, Illinois

Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon: An Invitation to Intimacy*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013. Pp. 183, \$25.99, cloth.

This is a good book, adapted from a sermon series that must have been a real treat.

The first chapter features the same breezy-but-thoughtful style that pervades the whole text. O'Donnell is less thorough in his review of issues than a standard commentary, but still briefly canvases options (authorship, interpretive method, history of interpretation, original setting—"Perhaps...written to be sung during the seven-day marriage festival," p. 16). He explains his approach while engaging scholarship. Among other significant judgments: Solomon is the author, but the story of the text is not about him, and in fact serves as something of a foil to his infamous marital and sexual exploits. It's possible to link the sexual union of the primary couple to Christ's love for the church, if one reads Christianly (cf. Eph 5), and O'Donnell is a major proponent of Christ-centered interpretation. But he also explains how Neo-Platonism derailed the church's ability to interpret Songs rightly for over a thousand years. And his commitment to Christ-centered interpretation is not an obstacle to mining for instruction, discipline, and encouragement (see 2 Tim 3:15-17 for both emphases in NT's interpretation of the OT). "Holiness equals happiness" and "purity,"—not forgiveness alone—"equals peace," we're told. O'Donnell also lays great stress on repeated refrains.

The exposition itself consists of nine chapters that are (on occasion) unapologetically steamy and always insistently digging into the text as well as the contemporary world. But there's no bed on stage, no clamoring to get the audience/reader's attention. O'Donnell is tasteful but preserves the tastiness of the text. He probably pushes beyond what's comfortable for the boundaries of squeamish and older generations. There is no blushing over Christological connections, no resistance to using "climax" in a tongue-in-cheek way, and no lack of commitment to teaching readers about human sexuality. Although traditional in its approach to ethics and gender roles, O'Donnell would have us conform our sexuality to the text: "When she says, 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth' (1:2) to start the Song, when she says, 'Be like a gazelle' and climb these 'mountains' in 21:7, and here [3:1-5] when she gets out of bed to bring him to bed, our application is not, 'Men, as the leader of the home, you must always make the first move,'" (p. 68).

Of course there is the repetition that one would expect to find in a sermon series, but O'Donnell varies his pitch and keeps things fresh, not least by attending to the vivid imagery of the text and connecting the word to the marriage or singleness or temptations or trials of the twenty-first century reader. There's no slavish formula here (apart from fulfilling what I call the 2 Tim 3:15-17 mandate).

To give an idea of the variety: One sermon contains a contemporization and slight embellishment of one of the beloved's poems, a compare/contrast exercise with contemporary approaches to sexuality (*Sex and the City* and *Eat Pray Love* don't fare well next to the Song), and reflections on Christ as a "greater than" object of our desire, the ultimate antidote to our immoral desires, just as sex and marriage are celebrated in the Song are written in part as "an antidote to immoral intimacies." Another sermon-chapter engages worldview and idolatry with reflections on unity, beauty, and worship. Our culture insists sex is meaningless recreation while "Sex is

[simultaneously] an idol and perhaps the most prevalent one today. It has its own house of worship...and its own priests and priestesses (porn stars, suggestive pop singers, lingerie models, etc.) and billions of worldwide parishioners who pay money and give homage...I have yet to hear a congregant say that Islam or Judaism or Hinduism or atheism has compelled him to do something, but how often I have heard, 'Love made me do it,'" (p. 81).

O'Donnell is gifted at combing through biblical research and historical and contemporary thought (not just "theology") and putting it to use thoughtfully but lightly so that the chapters do not become compendiums of research. Throughout the book, scholarship appears more often in endnotes and occasionally in the text itself in order to provide insight. Monographs, commentaries ancient and new, history and biography, and a variety of contemporary sources are mined for illustrations: we find John Piper, Roland Murphy's commentary (among many others), Mark Twain, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and the *Real Housewives of New Jersey*. Observations are fleshed out (and if you catch that pun, you'll really enjoy O'Donnell's book), literary sensitivity is achieved, and none of the chapters come within a hundred miles of being boring. If only more interpreters took this approach!

The volume is a fantastic resource for its intended audience (preachers and teachers) and useful for devotional purposes for educated laity. It would also function well as a supplemental text in a wisdom literature course. Young pastors, and in truth almost every pastor, can learn much from O'Donnell. He navigates the fine line between personal honesty and pastoral example and the precipice of tackiness with finesse and a gentle sense of humor.

Above all, even if this is not the book's primary purpose, it winds up being an excellent apology for manuscript preaching. He illustrates how one can study deeply without losing sight of application in the life of the believer or the need to point to Jesus and the gospel. And he shows how one can write it all out thoughtfully ahead of time. In my experience there are few such apologies made in the contemporary scene. In fact attempted apologies usually make the case for the prosecution. But O'Donnell has a rare gift that comes through in the text; you want to sit under his preaching yourself. Perhaps it will give more of us the courage to try our hand at thoughtful, well-researched manuscript preaching that engages our listeners in their world.

Jason B. Hood  
St. Margaret's Anglican Church  
Moshi, Tanzania

