Marriage

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Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

How should Christians respond as marriage becomes deinstitutionalized in our culture? Both "through our lives and through our words," David Gushee has reminded us, "we can call our neighbors to a better way."

How should Christians respond as marriage becomes deinstitutionalized in our culture—when, as Vigen Guroian notes, the "reasons for living out the norms of constancy, mutuality, fidelity, and indissolvability are no longer apparent and the actual behavior of families and the individuals within them contradict such symbols and norms"?

Both "through our *lives* and through our *words*," David Gushee has reminded us, "we can call our neighbors to a better way." In this issue our contributors articulate a Christian view of marriage and divorce. They also challenge us to live in faithful congregations, where we may stand together against destructive cultural trends and properly support husbands and wives in their commitments to each other and God.

David Gushee and Don Browning begin by tackling the problems of what we should say about marriage and how we should say it. "Our quest for true and unforced love, ironically, has led only to weaker and weaker marriages," Gushee notes in *Who Needs A Covenant?* (p. 11). This is why marriage needs a covenantal structure, for a covenant "takes faithless people and coerces them to keep faith." Rather than enslave us, however, a permanent and exclusive marriage covenant "allows us to give ourselves away, and only as we give ourselves away can we maximize our progress toward human intimacy as God intended it."

Yet "covenant" and other words of confessional faith often are misunderstood in public debates about the definition and likely future of marriage, Don Browning writes in *Christian Marriage and Public Policy* (p. 19). Therefore, he urges Christians to discover and use a "twofold language"—a philosophical language enriched with scriptural narratives and metaphors—in the pub-

lic square. This approach steers a middle course between those Christians who make "strictly confessional arguments" about marriage, and those who drop theological language entirely and appeal "to the disciplines of psychology, sociology, medicine, and other so-called secular forms of reason."

In addition to articulating a richer Christian understanding of marriage, we must live in faithfulness until our most intimate of human relationships are shaped by the cross. In *For Better or For Worse* (p. 29), Margaret Kim Peterson tells of marrying Hyung Goo Kim though he had tested positive with HIV five years earlier. "Christian marriage is not the same as the modern American fantasy of romance, and Hyung Goo and I were, by virtue of our circumstances, in a particularly good position to notice that," she writes. Together they discovered that the Christian moral life is more than and different from "the effort to protect and insulate oneself from difficulty and sorrow, or from the difficulties and sorrows of others."

John Thompson probes what it means for marriage to be a vocation for some, not all, Christians in *Marriage in the Fellowship of the Faithful* (p. 36). If marriage is truly a call to ministry, he suggests, it "is realized within and for the whole church." Furthermore, husband and wife "share a friendship through which they develop the virtues they need to become Christ's faithful disciples and build up the church body."

Heidi Hornik traces the theme of marriage as a vocation in Michele Tosini's *Marriage at Cana*. Michele celebrates the wedding as a "new beginning for a couple brought together in a covenant with God," she explains in *Water into Wine* (p. 40), and so relates marriage to the formative experiences of baptism and communion. In *A Wedding Story* (p. 44), Hornik examines Perugino's *Marriage of the Virgin* (cover), which depicts a popular apocryphal story about how God called Joseph, though he was an older man, to wed the young Mary. And in *The Promise of Marriage* (p. 46), she explores the rich symbolism of Jan van Eyck's masterpiece, *The Arnolfini Wedding*. The artist depicts "the couple in a secular setting, but with a spiritual presence," she writes. "Temporal pleasures…[and] Christian hope…unite subtly in every marriage as well, for matrimony is both a legal agreement and a spiritual covenant."

"God, form us into a community that is faithful in our covenants with you and each other," we pray in the worship service written by Sharon Felton (p. 56). "Enable us to trust others and make us trustworthy." Felton incorporates Terry York and David Bolin's new hymn, *Two Are Called to Live as One* (p. 53), which reminds us that marriage is a "covenant with spouse and God, entwining ev'ry love."

Of course, "Families are not always what they are cracked up to be," Bo Prosser admits in *The Changing Shape of Family* (p. 64). "Sometimes they are hurtful, dysfunctional, unhealthy systems." Indeed, to judge by popular culture, marriage and family are failed and outdated relationships—"'Ozzie and Harriet' have been replaced with 'Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne.'" Yet, for

those of us who "struggle with our families of origin," he repeats the good news that "inclusion into the family of God brings freedom, healing, redemption."

Our marriages can be so amazing, or so lousy, because we become vulnerable in love before a spouse. Scripture records both the healing and the distorting threads of intimate knowledge that weave through marriage, writes Ginny Bridges Ireland in *I Know Who She Is* (p. 68). Like Adam and Eve, and with Isaac and Rebekah, "we face the choice of using the power of intimate knowledge for good or evil: to stay when it would be easier to leave, to lose one's life for the sake of another, to serve as life-affirming opposites to draw one another toward the salvation of wholeness."

What should we say when a husband and wife are locked in a joyless battle rather than united in a grace-filled partnership as God intended? Is divorce ever permissible? The teachings of Scripture on divorce and remarriage have appeared, to some modern interpreters, hopelessly obscure or clearly contradictory. Yet, "when we understand the New Testament through the eyes of a first-century Jewish reader, we find Jesus and Paul were in perfect agreement," David Instone-Brewer suggests in *What God Has Joined Together* (p. 73). "Both forbid divorce unless it is based on biblical grounds. They both affirm the biblical grounds which they were asked about—Jesus, the ground of adultery, and Paul, the grounds of neglect."

"For nearly two thousand years, most Christians found support in Scripture for the belief that God ordained men to be leaders of women in the church and in the home," notes Lydia Hoyle in *Equality in Christian Marriage* (p. 82). She reviews two anthologies—*Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship? The Equal-Regard Marriage and Its Critics* edited by David Blankenhorn, Don Browning, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen—that reexamine Scripture and point toward a more egalitarian model.

"Marriage is a created good, and the resources needed to help strengthen it are not limited to the Christian faith alone," Cameron Lee urges in *Where Do We Go from Here?* (p. 88), yet the current debates about marriage "tend to be polarizing, foreclosing possibilities for constructive dialogue." He commends Don Browning's call to practical-moral thinking in *Marriage and Modernization* and John Witte's careful history of Christian marriage theology and law in *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*. For discipleship study groups, he recommends David Gushee's *Getting Marriage Right: Realistic Counsel for Saving and Strengthening Relationships* as a valuable guide for understanding marriage as a "context for the vigorous practice of kingdom living." These three books, Lee concludes, can help us learn the "virtues of humility and peacemaking [that] will not only make us better marriage partners, but better ecumenical dialogue partners."

Who Needs A Covenant?

BY DAVID P. GUSHEE

Our quest for true and unforced love, ironically, has led only to weaker and weaker marriages. A covenant coerces faithless people to keep faith. The problem is not that a binding marital covenant is a tyranny, but that nonbinding marital contracts undercut the nature of marriage itself.

Marriage is a structure of creation, divinely given, intended to meet some of our most significant needs as human beings. Because success in marriage requires the development of a range of important skills and virtues that help us to fulfill the creation purposes of marriage, most treatments of marriage emphasize the development of skills like communication, conflict resolution, and financial management.

There is another dimension to marriage, however, that is best addressed by using the biblical term "covenant." Recent days have seen a resurgence of the term "covenant marriage," both in Christian and secular circles. But this does not mean we understand the very rich meaning of the term. It certainly does not mean we are structuring our marriages as covenantal relationships.

Covenant is the structural principle of marriage. Just as God designed marriage to meet the needs of human beings for companionship, sex, and love, so also God gave marriage a covenantal structure. This covenantal structure is just as integral to the *nature* of marriage as the fulfillment of creation-based needs is to the *purpose* of marriage. There can be no successful marriage that is not both creation-fulfilling and covenantal, whether the couple realizes this or not.

The concepts of creation and covenant are deeply intertwined in biblical thought. Covenants are God's way of organizing, sustaining, and reclaiming relationships established in creation but damaged by sin. Our needs for companionship, sex, shared labor, and family partnership constitute the created ends or goods of marriage.

Covenant, on the other hand, emerges after sin enters the world. Covenant exists, not as an end in itself, but as a means to creational ends. As ethicist

Margaret Farley has put it, "for the sake of our love…we almost always commit ourselves to certain frameworks for living out our love. The frameworks, then, take their whole meaning…from the love they are meant to serve."[1] Marriage has a covenantal character in order to safeguard the bond itself, which is prior to covenant but needs safeguarding due to our fallibility and faithlessness.

COVENANT AS A SCRIPTURAL CONCEPT

The concept of covenant is dramatically introduced in the Bible as God's way of structuring his effort to redeem a primeval world already spinning out of control.

The first covenant in Scripture is the one God makes with Noah. Sickened at the wreck his creatures have made of the world, God determines "to destroy both them and the earth" (Genesis 6:13b, NIV).[2] The floodwaters come and then recede. God makes a covenant with—and through—Noah. God will continue to relate to us—to every living creature—despite our rebellion and the misery we create for each other and for our Creator. God will continue to pursue his original intentions in creation, but will now do so by means of a covenant with the entire created order.

If we look closely at Genesis 9 we see eight key ingredients of most covenants in Scripture and of the Old Testament concept of covenant. First, *a covenant is initiated by someone, often the stronger party* (Genesis 9:8). In this case, God establishes the covenant unilaterally; later divine-human covenant agreements often have a bilateral structure, though God always remains the "senior partner" (see Genesis 15:18).

A covenant establishes or ratifies a relationship between two or more parties. In short, *a covenant creates or restores community*. All parties to the covenant are explicitly named in the agreement, a public document to which all participants can be held accountable. *It spells out mutual responsibilities on the part of all parties*, in this case both God and humanity. People are called in the covenant with Noah to resume the creation mandate. God in turn promises to provide food, to demand accountability for life taking, and to refrain from destroying the world again in a flood (Genesis 9:1-11). Covenant responsibilities commonly attest to both the *goals* of the covenant and the particular *rules* that apply to the covenant makers.[3]

It involves the freely given verbal declaration of sacred promises or sworn oaths that publicly symbolize and even "perform" (speak into existence) the solemn commitments being made. In Genesis 9, these promises are made by God alone; in some biblical covenants the promises are explicitly made both by God and people.[4] *Furthermore, a covenant is marked by a sign or symbolic action to communicate its significance*—in this case, a rainbow (Genesis 9:13). Other covenants have other signs attached to them, such as circumcision (Genesis 17:10), Sabbath (Exodus 31:16), and so on.

It is declared to be lasting, enduring, or even "everlasting" (Genesis 9:16, cf. Genesis 17:7, 1 Chronicles 16:17, Isaiah 24:5, and Psalm 89:28)—God promises

to "remember" the covenant always and to keep his end of the agreement faithfully. Covenant promises are binding; they restrict our future freedom of action on the basis of our present decision. *God is viewed both as the witness and guarantor of covenants*, so any breaking of covenant promises is a sin not only against a covenant partner but also against God. *Therefore, God will enforce dire consequences for breaking the covenant and offer great rewards for keeping it* (Genesis 9:5). In this case the consequences include simply an "accounting"; often covenants include a graphic list of blessings and woes (cf. Joshua 24) or simply vivid threats of judgment and destruction.[5]

God could have responded to sin by annihilating his creatures. But God pulls back from this, and instead works to redeem us. The approach God uses to structure redemptive relationships is covenant making. Given the turn of humankind to evil, the only way to move us to right action is to organize redemption through covenants. Because we are untrustworthy and fickle, we need to make sacred agreements binding ourselves to promises of behaving in a certain way. We need to know what those promises are, the terms under which we are making them, and the consequences of their betrayal. We need symbols and rituals to remind us of all of this. We need the structure of covenants, so it is covenants we are given.

It is important to understand the similarities and differences between covenants and contracts, especially related to marriage. Both covenants and contracts are initiated by someone, establish or ratify a relationship, spell out mutual responsibilities, carry public status, and are a kind of promise that binds both parties to do certain things and refrain from doing other things.

However, while contracts emphasize the precise obligations each party is taking on, covenants place more focus on the *relationships* that are being established or ratified.[6] Contracts specify an exchange of money or services and terminate when the transaction is complete, while covenants establish a relationship that transcends any particular exchange of goods. Contracts always contain "escape" clauses to enable people to back away from what they judge to have been unwise commitments or failed agreements, while covenants promise open-ended and permanent fidelity to the promises being undertaken and the relationship being established. Finally, contracts are purely and simply human transactions, while covenants invoke the presence of God as guarantor and trustee—even when the covenant is undertaken at the human-to-human level.

While contracts emphasize our obligations, covenants place more focus on the relationships that are being established. Covenants invoke the presence of God as guarantor and trustee—even when they are undertaken at the human-to-human level.

MARRIAGE AS A COVENANT

There is considerable debate among biblical scholars as to whether the Old Testament actually defines marriage as a covenant.[7] The most important single text identifying human marriage as a covenant relationship is found in Malachi 2:10-16, especially verses 13-16 (NIV):

> Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

Malachi declares that Judah's men have been unfaithful to God by intermarrying with pagan women (2:11) and divorcing their own (Jewish) wives (2:14). It is possible that the offenses were related—some Jewish men may have been divorcing their Jewish wives *in order to* marry pagan women.[8] The threat posed by intermarriage with pagans is a central theme especially in the post-exilic books. Why God would be distressed at such practices is little debated. But why God should have a problem with "regular" divorce is much more controversial, given the provisions made for divorce elsewhere in the Old Testament (such as Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Gordon Hugenberger argues that God is offended by Jewish men's divorce of their Jewish wives because the relationship between husband and wife within the covenant people Israel is in fact a covenant relationship. He shows that marriage *was* understood in Israel as a covenant relationship, including ratification by an accompanying oath and/or act ("oath-sign") in which God was invoked as a witness (cf. Malachi 2:14). In the case of marriage, besides solemn words that oath-sign was understood to be the sexual union of the couple. Malachi's allusion to Genesis and the "one flesh" relationship of marriage (Malachi 2:15; cf. Genesis 2:24) connects here as well.

Malachi appears to have been unusually sensitive to the personal significance of the marriage covenant. He points to the solidarity of male and female in creation (Malachi 2:15), alludes to the bond that develops between a man and woman over most of a lifetime spent together ("the wife of your youth," "your partner"—Malachi 2:14; compare Proverbs 2:17), and seems to suggest the additional responsibility that develops upon the birth of children (Malachi 2:15—"godly offspring"), in these ways summarizing the many binding moral obligations that marriage and family ties create. This vision of marriage means that

men do a great injustice when they exploit their power over women to end their marriage covenants unjustifiably. Indeed, the section ends with a link drawn between divorce and violence, as if unjustifiable divorce is a kind of violence against its innocent victims.

Consider the number of ways that marriage is a covenant relationship like other covenant bonds in Scripture. *Marriage is a covenant because it is a freely entered agreement between two people.* It is initiated by someone, but it represents the culmination of a journey that fully involves both people. Contemporary marriage covenant agreements differ from biblical ones in that marriage in ancient Israel was not initiated (solely) by the individuals but was an agreement between families as well. But at its heart marriage is an agreement between two people to join their lives together.

Marriage is a covenant because it publicly ratifies a relationship between a man and a woman and subjects it to objective standards and social responsibilities. Marriage does not establish the personal relationship between a man and woman but it does ratify it, make it public, and establish its social legitimacy.

Marriage is a covenant because it spells out the mutual responsibilities and moral commitments that both parties are taking on in this new form of community. Earlier I claimed that biblical covenant stipulations commonly attested both to the *goals* of the covenant and the particular *rules* that apply to the covenant makers. The central goals God intends for us to seek in marriage are companionship, sexual expression, procreation, and family partnership. The central rules embedded in marriage's sacred promises are sexual exclusivity and permanence. Both goals and rules are situated in a broader context of mutual commitment reaffirmed by faithful conduct over time.[9]

Marriage is a covenant because it is sealed by various oath-signs that publicly symbolize and even "perform" the solemn commitments being made. The exchanged vows and rings, the promises publicly made, and consummation through sexual intercourse are the central acts that bring the marital relationship into existence.

Marriage is a covenant because it is a lifetime commitment. Marriage is treated in the Old Testament as a binding commitment that can be broken only for cause. This message is reinforced and strengthened in the New Testament. If the promise is not a lifetime promise, it is not a covenant and it is not marriage.

Scripture treats marriage as a binding commitment that can be broken only for cause. If the promise is not a lifetime promise, it is not a covenant and it is not marriage.

Marriage is a covenant because God is the witness and guarantor of its promises. This concept makes the most sense where the couple explicitly embraces God's role as witness and guarantor. But it can also be argued that God is the witness to every couple's marriage vows and, ultimately, the One who empowers any

couple that manages to keep those vows for a lifetime.

Marriage is a covenant because there are dire consequences for breaking its terms and great rewards for keeping it. This is not only the case in the divine-human relationship, but at the human level as well. The blessings and curses of marital success and failure are visible all around us. They are built into marriage and do not require an intervening act of divine judgment.

COVENANT AND MARRIAGE TODAY

To speak of covenant at a wedding today is to acknowledge unattractive truths. It is to say that you can dress up this man and woman in the nicest clothes but underneath it all they are faithless sinners.

To speak of covenant is to be terribly unromantic about marital love. This man and woman may be desperately in love—today. But certainly tomorrow their bonds will be tested. To speak of covenant is to acknowledge that their love will be tried by fire, and to bind this couple to the promises they make today regardless of the inclinations of their hearts on some future tomorrow. As Mike Mason has put it, "In a very real way it is the vow which keeps the man rather than vice versa."[10]

Covenant functions as the structural principle of marriage because it takes faithless people and coerces them to keep faith. Covenant says: I will be sexually faithful even when my needs for sex are frustrated in my marriage. I will be emotionally and sexually faithful even when my companionship needs are frustrated. I will be faithful in my parental responsibilities even when I am tired of both you and the children. I will be faithful in my communication and forgiveness even when I never want to speak to you again. I will be faithful in sharing the work responsibilities of family life even when I can barely put one foot in front of the other. I will be faithful in sharing a home and a bed with you even when I want to flee.

Yet covenant is not all vinegar and sandpaper. The striking thing about marriage as a covenant is that it is, like every other divinely given structure, for our good.

Outside of the sturdy protective sheath provided by covenant, there is no safe context for the pursuit of the creational needs that are met in marriage. We want and need companionship, sexual intimacy, love, and family partnership. These are the benefits that marriage was designed to provide for us. But they cannot be reliably sought—let alone achieved—outside of a context of covenantal fidelity and permanence.

If I am involved in a trustworthy covenantal marital bond with another, I can relax enough to both give and receive love. I can try and fail and try again to develop communication and sexual skills. Our mutual confidence in the permanence and exclusivity of our bond allows us to give ourselves away, and only as we give ourselves away can we maximize our progress toward human intimacy as God intended it.

One of the most corrosive effects of our culture of divorce is a vicious cycle

involving the deterioration of covenant sturdiness. Having been burned once by marriage, but still pursuing those God-given creational needs, a couple tries again in a remarriage. However, they are often less able to create a binding, lasting, and exclusive covenant the second time around, in part because they were so shattered by the failure of their first marriage.

They hesitate to give their hearts away because they are not sure that the investment is worth the risk—not sure, that is, that the covenant will hold. But precisely because they are unsure, they are less successful in achieving the goods of marriage. Thus the marriage never reaches a high level of satisfaction. Then one or both is inevitably tempted to betray or to end the tottering marriage covenant. Having done so before, it is easier to do it a second time. If the second marriage does end in divorce, and the individuals then pursue third marriages, the cycle is all the more likely to continue.

Under conditions of sin, covenant promise making is just as "natural" or "wired-in" an aspect of marriage as the fulfillment of creational needs. Theologically, it goes like this: because we are creatures with certain needs, we *seek* in marriage certain goods; because we are fallen creatures, we *need* covenants to bind us and keep us in our marriages.

The collapse of older moral certainties included a questioning of the concept of marital covenant. It became seen as archaic to make lifetime promises to anyone, about anything. Marriage began to be viewed by many as a purely voluntary relationship to be entered or exited freely, "as long as we both shall love."

The paradox is that such freedom is itself a kind of slavery. It allows the tyranny of the transient dissatisfaction to efface all commitments. The quest for true and unforced love has led only to weaker and weaker marriages, and finally to the near-collapse of the institution of marriage. The problem is not that a binding marital covenant is a tyranny, but that nonbinding marital contracts undercut the very nature of marriage itself.[11]

If I am involved in a trustworthy covenantal marital bond with another, I can relax enough to both give and receive love. And only as we give ourselves away can we maximize our progress toward human intimacy as God intended it.

NOTES

1 Margaret A. Farley, *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 124.

3 This point is made by Max L. Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family, and Economic Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 145.

4 Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 11-12.

5 Cf. Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitments*, 140-147.

6 Joseph L. Allen, "Covenant," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, edited by James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 136.

7 The next section is heavily dependent on Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*.

8 Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage After Modernity: Christian Marriage in Postmodern Times* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 74.

9 Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 216.

10 Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1985), 116.

11 This article is adapted from David P. Gushee, *Getting Marriage Right: Realistic Counsel for Saving and Strengthening Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004). Used by permission of Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group.

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Christian Marriage and Public Policy

BY DON BROWNING

How should Christians contribute to debates about society's responsibilities for marriage in welfare reform, family law, reproductive technology, insurance law, and fair employment practices and to the nagging question of who should or should not be permitted to marry?

What are the resources of the Christian tradition for contributing to the contemporary public debate over the definition and likely future of marriage? I ask not only what Christians should believe within the confessing church. I ask what truth Christianity possesses about public policy on marriage in a democratic and pluralistic society. My question is relevant to society's legal and governmental responsibilities for marriage in welfare reform, family law, reproductive technology, insurance law, and fair employment practices and to the nagging question of who should or should not be permitted to marry.

The question implicitly asks whether marriage should be a concern of law and public policy at all. Many political and religious leaders are now saying that marriage should be delegalized, that it should not be a matter of state regulation. They argue that marriage should be a matter of personal choice and perhaps religious blessing but not legal accountability and enforcement. In face of such demands, the question of the resources of Christian theology for public policy on marriage is all the more salient.

I hold that Christian ethics does have a place in forming public policy on marriage, but only if it can retrieve and articulate its arguments with a twofold language. It should be both a language of faith and a philosophical language that contains naturalistic, contextual, and justice-oriented arguments. I believe

this double language can be found in the marriage classics of the Christian tradition. In this tradition, the philosophical and naturalistic languages are qualified and enriched by narratives and metaphors about the meaning and destiny of life. But the philosophical and naturalistic languages can gain a degree of "distance" (a concept borrowed from the philosopher Paul Ricoeur) from their narrative context and function to provide rational arguments about marriage in public-policy discourse.[1]

Classic Christian marriage texts link sexual desire, love, the birth of children, the raising of children, and the mutual assistance and enrichment of economic life into an integrated and mutually reinforcing whole known as the institution of marriage. We should resist modernity's tendency to split these apart.

Discovering and using this double language challenges those Christians who want to influence public discourse on the basis of strictly confessional language and arguments. Law today rightly demands that legal arguments pass a "rational standard" test that confessional language has difficulties passing.[2] My view also contradicts both liberal and conservative Christians who try to influence law and public policy by dropping theological language and advancing their arguments entirely with appeals to the disciplines of psychology, sociology, medicine, and other so-called secular forms of reason.[3] This strategy unwittingly agrees with secularists who believe that religious language has no place in the public square.

In rejecting each of these strategies, I claim that the Christian tradition on marriage has theological classics that combine both confessional avowal and forms of practical rationality into a single multidimensional gestalt. I hold that the religious metaphors and narratives add meaning, weight, and balance to the level of practical rationality, but they should not be judged to disqualify the practical-rational dimension from participating in public deliberation.

MODERNITY AND TRADITION

Debates on marriage today are deeply influenced by what Max Weber and Jürgen Habermas have called "modernization"—the spread of technical rationality into the social spheres of economics, law, sexuality, family, and marriage.[4] In the United States, this takes the form of our no longer reasoning together about the common good, but merely expecting the marketplace to satisfy short-term individual wants and needs. The spread of technical rationality energizes a host of separations in the marital field—sex from marriage, marriage from childbirth, parenting from marriage, child rearing from marriage, and the workplace from family life. Some of these separations we value, but others we rightly are beginning to question.

Let me illustrate. The most profound disjunction created by market-style modernization is the separation of marriage and family from economic activity. This began in the nineteenth century when men were drawn away from economic dependency on the family farm and craft into dependency on the wage economy. In the second half of the twentieth century, women and mothers also were drawn into the wage economy, making them less dependent on the economic supports of marriage.[5] Birth control helped separate sex from marriage and, ironically, contributed to the explosion of nonmarital births throughout the world. Assisted reproductive technology became available for purchase both within and outside marriage, thus accelerating the separation of childbirth from marriage.[6] Finally, a string of Supreme Court decisions in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s—e.g., Griswold v. Connecticut (1965), Eisenstadt v. Baird (1971), and Roe v. Wade (1973)—gave legal support to birth control, reproductive technology, and abortion both within and outside of marriage. These landmark rulings made private preference the reigning moral value governing the entire field of sex and reproduction. Private preference was now given, as historian Nancy Cott points out, the protection of public laws.[7]

An analysis of the classic Christian marriage texts reveals that their goal was just the reverse of the modern trend. It was their intent to integrate sexual desire, love, the birth of children, the raising of children, and the mutual assistance and enrichment of economic life into an integrated and mutually reinforcing whole known as the institution of marriage. The collision of tradition and modernity on marriage raises this question: How far should we go at the level of the official intentions of law in dividing into its component parts the marital integration of sexual desire, affection, childbirth, child rearing, and mutual assistance? As a Christian practical theologian, I hold we should resist modernity's tendency to split apart the marital field.

THE TWOFOLD LANGUAGE IN CHRISTIANITY

Religious traditions are complex. They often weave together the legal, poetic, moral, political, and narrative traditions from different cultures into complex new syntheses. This is true even of early Christianity. Recent research in both cultural anthropology and biblical studies demonstrates that early Christian teachings on the family and marriage combine narratives on the life and death of Jesus with legal and cultural insights about the role of fathers, mothers, and children gleaned from Jewish, Greek, and Roman legal and philosophical traditions.[8] For instance, new scholarship tells us that the household codes on the obligations of spouses, parents and children, and masters and slaves in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter have their origin in a peripatetic philosophical tradition that goes back to Aristotle's *Politics* even though they are considerably redefined in their Christian contexts.

Legal historian John Witte documents that Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin appreciated the natural goods of marriage such as marital affection, procreation, kin altruism, conjugal sexual exchange, mutual assistance, and the

development of a common stock of the goods of life.[9] Furthermore, in his important *From Sacrament to Contract*, he shows that the Christian classics saw marriage as blending religious ideas of sacrament and covenant with views of marriage as a natural, contractual, and a socially useful institution.[10]

This combining of biblical-narrative perspectives and naturalistic-philosophical perspectives on marriage is evident in the earliest New Testament documents but comes into vivid maturity in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. He—along with Gratian, Peter Lombard, and the canon lawyers—was one of the chief synthesizers of Christian theology, Greek philosophy, and Roman law on marriage. The collective efforts of these scholars developed the genetic code of normative Western marriage theory.

Aquinas was particularly concerned with the natural good of kin altruism and stated its role in family formation and marriage with remarkable clarity. He developed his view with a double language that was simultaneously religious and biophilosophical. The biophilosophical language was informed by Aristotle, who had recently been rediscovered by Christian, Islamic, and Jewish scholars in the Muslim-controlled libraries of Spain and Sicily.[11] The specifically religious language came from Genesis and New Testament commentary on Genesis. Although his biology and philosophy of family formation—i.e., his natural law thinking—was informed by his theology, it functions with considerable distance from its religious grounding. His biophilosophical insights also constituted the core ideas supporting one of the most powerful theories available on the relation of family to the state—the subsidiarity theory of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Roman Catholic social teachings.

Of course, Aquinas believed that marriage was revealed in Scripture, specifically the Genesis account of creation. In the "Supplement" to the *Summa Theologica*, he quotes Matthew 29:4, "Have ye not read that He Who made man from the beginning 'made them male and female,'" a verse which itself refers back to Genesis 1:27. Then referring to Genesis 2:21, he claims that before sin entered the world and from the foundations of creation God "fashioned a helpmate for man out of his rib."[12] This implies what the book of Genesis makes explicit, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper as his partner" (Genesis 2:18).

However, Aquinas' full argument about marriage and family, as we will see, does not stay at the level of scriptural interpretation alone. Aquinas thought that his view of marriage and family was also a product of reason. He called marriage in its primordial form an "office of nature." At this level it could be illuminated by natural law, especially the natural law that identifies those natural inclinations that are further guided by "the free will" and "acts of virtue."[13]

Aquinas defined matrimony as the joining of the male to the primordial mother-infant family. He saw this happening for four natural reasons. First, the long period of human infant dependency makes it very difficult for mothers to raise infants by themselves. Hence, they turn for help to their male consorts.

Second, the likely fathers are much more inclined to attach to their infants if they have a high degree of certainty that the infant is actually theirs and hence continuous with their own biological existence (motivating factors that evolutionary biologists call "paternal certainty" and "paternal recognition"). Third, males attach to their infants and consorts because of the mutual assistance and affection that they receive from the infant's mother. Finally, Aquinas realized that sexual exchange between mother and father, even though he talked about it as paying "the marital debt," helped to integrate the male to the mother-infant dyad.[14]

When Aquinas said that the human male "naturally desires to be assured of his offspring and this assurance would be altogether nullified in the case of promiscuous copulation,"[15] he was echoing Aristotle's belief that parental investment is more intense and durable between natural parents and their offspring. Aristotle had considerable insight into what evolutionary psychologists today call "kin altruism," which is our tendency to invest ourselves more in those with whom we are biologically related. He was developing a prescientific theory of kin altruism when he wrote, "in common with other animals and with plants, mankind have a natural desire to leave behind them an image of themselves."[16]

Aquinas integrated these naturalistic insights about the motivational foundations of parenthood into his wider theological theories of marital fidelity, love, permanence, and mutual assistance. He argued, for instance, that marriage should last a very long time because of the dependence and vulnerability of human infants and children in contrast to the rapid growth of others mammals. Aquinas had a flexible naturalistic argument for marriage; he was fully aware that humans have conflicting natural tendencies with no single fixed aim. But when human sexuality is guided by the needs of child rearing, then the inclinations toward kin altruism, reinforced by culture and religion, can and should have a commanding role in ordering our unstable natural tendencies.[17]

Aquinas' view does not stay at the level of scriptural interpretation alone, but is also a product of reason. Marriage, as an "office of nature," can be illuminated by those natural inclinations that are further guided by "the free will" and "acts of virtue."

Aquinas' use of nature is consistent with the images of natural law developing in the thought of contemporary philosophers and theologians.[18] Mary Midgley says it well when she writes that in spite of our plural and flexible human desires and needs, "The central factors in us must be accepted, and the right line of human conduct must lie somewhere within the range they allow."[19] For Aristotle, Aquinas, and most contemporary evolutionary thought, kin altru-

ism is a central tendency that biology, moral traditions, and law have honored as being one of these "central factors" to be lived within as nearly as possible.

LUTHER'S USE OF DOUBLE LANGUAGE

If space permitted, I could illustrate a similar twofold language in Judaism and Islam. Almost everywhere, ideas of marriage are developed by combining folk biopsychologies of male and female tendencies and children's needs with religious narrative, divine commands, and judgments about natural justice. I will give a few examples from the writings of Martin Luther.

It is commonly believed that the Protestant Reformation rejected natural law arguments and the double language of Catholicism. But this is not entirely correct. Luther clearly gave more weight to Scripture than did most of medieval Roman Catholicism. But as Brian Gerrish has demonstrated, natural law arguments still had a major role in the practical rationality of the Earthly Kingdom of government and civil order in contrast to the Heavenly Kingdom of grace and salvation.[20] Marriage, we must recall, was de-sacramentalized by Luther and viewed as a natural social institution to be administered by the civil authorities of the state.[21] Because of that, Luther simultaneously could speak about marriage with the languages of the Heavenly Kingdom (the language of faith) and the Earthly Kingdom (the language of philosophy, nature, and practical reason). Even in Luther, there was a double language of marriage.

Luther famously rejected the Roman Catholic view that marriage is a sacrament, which had been based in part on reading the Greek word *mysterion* in Ephesians 5:32 as meaning the Latin *sacramentum*.[22] It is commonly acknowledged by scholars today that Luther was right; *mysterion* meant in Ephesians 5:32 that marriage is a great mystery, not a great sacrament. It referred to the great mystery that Christian marriage had an analogy with Christ's sacrificial love for the church.

In spite of their differences, however, on the question of the sacramental nature of Christian marriage, Luther and Aquinas agreed on many points in their theological interpretation of marriage. Both aspired to integrate a wide range of human goods into the institution of marriage, and both worked hard to bring men into the institution of marriage. In his essay "The Estate of Marriage," Luther did this by viewing marriage as an order of creation, an "ordinance" given by God which made both men and women sexual and procreative creatures in their very nature.[23] Luther claimed that it was a distortion of scriptures to say that celibacy was a higher state than marriage.[24]

Luther was striving to integrate sexual desire, affection, procreation, child rearing, and mutual assistance into the institution of marriage. One can see this most profoundly in his celebration of fatherhood, directly addressed to those men in his day who disdained marriage. Luther's famous passage about the care of children by the male parent is worth quoting in full for what it reveals about the integrational purposes of marriage.

> O God, because I am certain that thou hast created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers, or be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving thy creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised. Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labor, will distress or dissuade me. For I am certain that it is thus pleasing in thy sight.[25]

Notice the range of goods that Luther integrates in this view of marriage. Although Luther says little about it in this passage, we know that sex with his wife has occurred. Furthermore, he is certain that the baby is his, that it came from his "body" and that he has this special attachment to this babe. This gives him the task of caring for the infant and assisting its mother. Together, mother and father are, in effect, one flesh in this offspring—a one-flesh union of both nature and divine intention. Luther uses the double language of nature and God's will ever so subtly.

Sometimes Luther supplemented his marriage discourse based on the language of Scripture with a secondary language based on appeals to health and economics.[26] Although it was always a subordinate emphasis in his thought, Luther could write about marriage in a kind of cost-benefit language analogous to modern economic rational-choice theory. He admitted to searching out the "benefits and advantages of the estate of marriage." At the economic level, he observed that married people "retain a sound body, a good conscience, property, and honor and family." Nonmarital sex, out-of-wedlock births, and single parenthood can lead to poverty, and once wealth and property are "lost, it is well-nigh impossible to regain them—scarcely one in a hundred succeeds." Marriage, Luther claimed, not only rebounds to the wealth of individual couples but "to the benefit of whole cities and countries…." In addition to its spiritual meaning, marriage, for Luther, was a matter of good public policy and for that reason was to be administered, regulated, and encouraged by the state.[27]

Although marriage is mainly an estate of the earthly realm for which economic, health, and common good reasons can be advanced, the horizon of God's intention for marriage in creation hovers in the background.

In my view, we should not overly dichotomize Luther's two languages of the Earthly and Heavenly Kingdoms. Their relation is more like that of figure and ground in gestalt psychology. The topic of marriage illustrates this well.

Although marriage is mainly an estate of the earthly realm for which practical economic, health, and common good reasons could be advanced in its support, the horizon of God's intention for marriage in creation hovered in the background in Luther's Germany. Of course, Luther taught that Christians were to enrich their civil marriages with their theological views. Although states influenced by the Protestant Reformation have followed Luther, and also Calvin, in making marriage first of all a civil institution governed by practical reason and natural law, there is little doubt that the background of Luther's theology of marriage also influenced reason's workings in law and government in the Earthly Kingdom.[28]

MARRIAGE AS INTEGRATING THE GOODS OF LIFE

A consistent theme in Christian classics is that marriage integrates the goods and mutual reinforcements of affection, sexual exchange, children, child rearing, and mutual assistance. Synthesizing the investments of kin altruism with the reinforcements of marital affection, sexual exchange, and mutual helpfulness in the economy of the household is another crucial element. I suggest that natural parental investment should be seen as a central finite value of marital integration. It is not the core of salvation, but it is a powerful finite and relative good; it is especially important for integrating male investment into the long-term care of offspring and spouse. Both church and society should resist the contemporary trends of modernization that function to split apart the integrating task of marriage. We should also work to halt the related tendency of law and culture to privatize marriage and make it a pure relation unencumbered with children and indistinguishable from a wide range of sexual friendships.

The legal support of marriage as an integrating institution means supporting children's rights to enjoy, as nearly as possible, the benefits of kin altruism and kin investment. Society should shape law to enhance the likelihood that they will be raised by the parents who have given them life and thereby benefit from what both ancient wisdom and the contemporary social sciences are telling us—that children, on average, do much better when raised by their own two married biological parents.[29] Of course, this does not undercut the dignity, indeed the human and Christian imperative, to adopt the needy and homeless child.[30]

NOTES

1 Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 60-62.

2 The rational standard test was invoked by the majority opinion in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, the Massachusetts Judicial Supreme Court case that set the stage for the legalization of same-sex marriage in that state.

3 See, for example, Glenn Stanton, *Why Marriage Matters* (Colorado Springs, CO: Pinon, 1997); and Glenn Stanton and Bill Maier, *Marriage on Trial* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

4 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 181-182; Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action* I (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1981), 143-144.

5 Gary Becker, *Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 54-57.

6 Brent Waters, *Reproductive Technology: Toward a Theology of Procreative Stewardship* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001).

7 Nancy Cott, *Public Vows* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 226.

8 The new research on how the honor-shame codes of the Greco-Roman world influenced early Christianity is nicely summarized by Carolyn Osiek and David Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 93, 95, and 97.

9 John Witte, Jr., "The Goods and Goals of Marriage," *Marriage, Health, and the Professions*, ed. by John Wall, Don Browning, William Doherty, and Stephen Post (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 51-52.

10 John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 2.

11 Richard Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Dark Ages* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Inc., 2003).

12 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1947), Supplement to the Third Part, Q 42, A 2, sed contra and ad 4.

13 Ibid., Supplement, Q 41, A 1.

14 Ibid., Supplement, Q 41, A 1. Aquinas uses the phrase "marital debt" in Supplement, Q 58, A 1. Aquinas' four conditions almost perfectly parallel those discussed in the literature of evolutionary psychology as having led humans, in contrast to most other mammals, to form families and long-term attachments between fathers and mothers for the care of their infants and children. See Don Browning, et al., F*rom Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997, 2000), 111-113; and Don Browning, *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do about It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 109-111. For an excellent summary of the evolutionary-psychological naturalistic explanation for the emergence of marriage and long-term families at the human level, see Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, "The Evolutionary Psychology of Marriage and Divorce," *The Ties that Bind*, edited by Linda Waite (New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000), 91-110.

15 Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1924), Book 3b, chapter 124.

16 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, chapter 2 (1252a29-31), in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York, NY: Random House, 1941), 1128. Aristotle developed his views on the importance of kin altruism in his critique of Plato's thought experiment in the *Republic*. Plato had argued that the divisiveness caused by nepotism and tribalism could be suppressed if men had offspring with women who were held in common. Their offspring would then be raised by state nurses so that parents and children would not know one another or develop divisive attachments. Aristotle, however, believed that Plato's experiment would undermine parental attachment to their children, making parental love thin and "watery." Furthermore, he believed it would unleash violence because the inhibiting factor of consanguinity, or being of the same blood, would be removed. Aristotle's rejoinder is in *Politics*, Book II, chapter 4.

17 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q 10, A 12. Aquinas deployed these insights to enrich Augustine's theological argument in "The Good of Marriage."

18 See, for example, Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*, revised edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995); Jean Porter, *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999); Stephen J.

Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994); Larry Arnhart, *Darwinian Natural Right: The Biological Ethics of Human Nature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998); and Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

19 Midgley, *Beast and Man*, 81.

20 Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Reason* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962), 8-9.

21 Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 49.

22 Philip Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), xxvi-xxvii.

23 Martin Luther, "The Estate of Marriage," *Luther's Works*, volume 45 (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 18.

24 Luther, "The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows," *Luther's Works*, volume 44 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 263.

25 Luther, "The Estate of Marriage," 18.

26 Luther's secondary language can sound almost like the present-day health language of Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher in *Case for Marriage* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000) or the economic language of Nobel Prize-winning economist Gary Becker in *Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

27 Quotations from Luther, "The Estate of Marriage," 44 and 46.

28 On how this double language works in the theological and legal writings of John Calvin, see John Witte, Jr., and Robert Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family Life in Calvin's Geneva* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005).

29 The best summary of the data on this point is in Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing up with a Single Parent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). A recent study of nearly a million children in Sweden shows that children raised in single-parent homes were more than twice as likely as those raised in two-parent homes to suffer from psychiatric disorders, attempt suicide, and develop alcohol addition. See G. R. Weitoft, A. Hjern, B. Haglund, and M. Rosén, "Mortality, severe morbidity, and injury in children living with single parents in Sweden," *The Lancet*, volume 361, issue 9354 (January 25, 2003), 289-295.

30 See Don Browning, "Adoption and the Moral Significance of Kin Altruism," *The Morality of Adoption*, edited by Timothy Jackson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005).

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For Better or For Worse

BY MARGARET KIM PETERSON

When I married Hyung Goo Kim, I had concluded that his HIV infection was not the most important thing about him. Our minds were concentrated wonderfully. We were always waiting for the end to come, as indeed it did, and this intensified the happiness we found in and with each other, the intimate bond we forged as we moved deeper into marriage and into illness.

The contemporary American marriage fantasy goes something like this: after years of waiting and hoping and suffering through too many bad boyfriends or girlfriends, you finally meet The One, the perfect match, the person with whom you finally can anticipate a future of pure bliss. Together you plan a wedding that expresses your uniqueness as individuals and as a couple in every one of its multitudinous details and that, like your anticipated marriage, you expect to be perfect in every respect. And then you ride off into the sunset together, having left behind the loneliness and uncertainties of singleness and ready to receive all the benefits that inevitably come to those who marry.

I wish this were a caricature, but it's not. This is, in fact, not just a contemporary American fantasy; it is a contemporary Christian fantasy, one that is held by at least ninety percent of the scores of young people who enroll in the senior-level college course in Christian Marriage that I teach. And those young people have often been encouraged in this fantasy by their elders, who are eager to portray marriage as a means by which Christian people gain access to the good things of life—sex, children, emotional intimacy, adult status—and who are very reluctant therefore to consider whether marriage might occasionally or routinely have a dark side as well as a sunny side.

I notice this particularly because once upon a time I made a decision to marry that was unlike the fantasy scenario described above. Fifteen years ago I was being courted by a young man who, a few weeks after we had started dating, had informed me that five years earlier he had tested positive for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. I married him anyway, and was widowed four years later. And in the times before, during, and after that brief marriage, I had ample opportunity to think about what constitutes a wise decision to marry and what it means to marry "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part."

NOT A CLOUDLESS FUTURE

My boyfriend-and-then-husband was a Korean-born molecular biologist named Hyung Goo Kim. I had been slightly acquainted with him in the years before we began dating and had privately thought his name was rather funny. A few years later, I was Mrs. Hyung Goo Kim, and it served me right (I thought, penitently) for laughing at his name. His HIV status was, of course, no laughing matter. I could not possibly have been more shocked and dismayed when Hyung Goo told me of his diagnosis. I had, in fact, been wondering whether perhaps Hyung Goo might be that perfect person for me, the one who would answer all my longings and with whom I could step into a blissful and cloudless future.

I never entertained that fantasy again. And I missed it. I missed it intensely, and increasingly so, as it became apparent that I was essentially alone in my dismay and bewilderment over what I was supposed to make of this relationship, my feelings for Hyung Goo, and the obviously problematic nature of his situation. Because of the highly stigmatized nature of Hyung Goo's health condition, I didn't disclose it to everyone I knew, but from those I did tell, the response was swift and unanimous: end the relationship, and end it now. Some of the responses were kind and some were not so kind, but the substance was the same: sensible Christian people do not even think of marrying people who have serious things wrong with them.

A particularly harsh reaction came from a male friend who, when I told him of Hyung Goo's HIV status, responded with the story of his own first marriage. His wife had developed chronic kidney failure, a burden with which my friend found it impossible to live, so he divorced her. "If I had known that this would happen, I would never have married her, and I will not stand by and watch you throw your life away on this man," he said to me, heatedly. Even at the time, this seemed a tad self-justifying, but it was still profoundly upsetting. It was also illuminating. This wasn't just about AIDS; this was about tragedy. It was about death and hardship and loss and the supposed responsibility of sensible people to steer as clear of all of them as possible.

I think this was the point at which I began to wonder: is that really what Christian marriage and the Christian life are all about? Is it really all a grand

exercise in risk reduction? But what about all the seemingly self-abnegating behavior that Jesus seems to recommend—turning the other cheek, laying down one's life for one's friends, visiting the sick and expecting in them to encounter Christ himself? Is this all just so much metaphor, with no real implications for actual decision making in the course of a Christian's everyday life? Or is there more—or perhaps something quite different—to the Christian moral life than the effort to protect and insulate oneself from difficulty and sorrow, or from the difficulties and sorrows of others?

Martin Luther draws a contrast between what he calls a theology of glory and a theology of the cross. A theology of glory finds God in sunsets and cathedrals and anywhere else that seems magnificent and triumphant. A theology of the cross finds God in a cradle at Bethlehem, in a garden at Gethsemane, on a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem. A theology of the cross, in other words, finds God not as we might imagine or desire him to be, but as he actually is, taking upon himself the frailties and sorrows of humanity, and transforming them by the mysterious power of his death and resurrection.

Too many modern Christian judgments about marriage are, in essence, theologies of glory. We may say that we believe in marriage "for better or for worse," but in actual practice we patronize online dating services that promise bliss, pure bliss, if only we will follow their advice about finding romance with the perfect partner who, we are assured, is out there somewhere. We sanctify our unions in weddings that are designed to be showcases for all the perfection money can buy, we read marriage-enhancement books written by people who claim never to have had a problem that couldn't be solved in ten minutes or less, and when we meet people whose problems are too serious to conceal—illness, bankruptcy, or (gasp!) divorce—we hold our metaphorical skirts aside and murmur, "Boy, am I glad it's not me."

Are Christian marriage and the Christian life just a grand exercise in risk reduction? Or is there more—or perhaps something quite different—to the Christian moral life than the effort to protect and insulate oneself from difficulty and sorrow, or from the difficulties and sorrows of others?

The reality, of course, is that no marriage is perfect. This does not mean that everyone is an equally good marriage partner for anyone else or that some people's circumstances are not more challenging than others. It does mean that none of us should be surprised when our marriages include both better and worse, richer and poorer, sickness and health. And it means that it is foolish to base any decision about marriage on the fantasy that every-

thing will be perfect forever. You are not perfect, your partner is not perfect, your life will not be perfect, and Christian marriage is a promise to be companions together in all that life brings, with the expectations that what life brings is bound to be mixed and that God promises to be redemptively, transformatively present in all of it.

When I did eventually decide to marry Hyung Goo, I did so in large part because I had come to the conclusion that his HIV infection was not the most important thing about him. It was significant, to be sure, but so were other things about him: his character, his personality, the joy I found in and with him. And Hyung Goo, for his part, decided he had more to offer me than his infirmities. Yes, he was going to die, but so was I, and for reasons that even now seem simultaneously crystal clear and mysterious, he was uniquely right for me, and I for him. We were sorry we could not expect to be married for many years, but we didn't think that was sufficient reason not to marry at all.

It sounds so simple and straightforward. And, in a sense, it was. Samuel Johnson said, "When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." Hyung Goo's and my minds were concentrated wonderfully, from the beginning of our marriage to the end of it. We were always waiting for the end to come, as indeed it did, and the anticipation of that end intensified every aspect of our life together: the happiness we found in and with each other, the intimate bond we forged as we moved deeper into marriage and into illness, the grief we felt over all our experienced and anticipated losses.

At the time, the apocalyptic intensity of both joy and grief was overwhelming. In retrospect, it is one of the things that I miss most. There was a kind of innocence to those years, an innocence that came with the singleness of purpose that our life embodied. Our marriage was about seeing each other through to the end, period. At the time, this seemed normal, even normative. Not long after Hyung Goo died, an acquaintance said to me, "You must have had a very unusual marriage." I was mystified. As far as I was concerned, Hyung Goo's and my marriage was the perfect standard by which all other marriages should be judged. Hadn't our marriage been the very apotheosis of intimacy and self-giving? Why shouldn't all other marriages be just like it?

THE SHAPE OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The truth, of course, is that not all people are the same, and not all circumstances are the same either. For starters, most marriages are about many things, not just one thing. I speak from experience here, from somewhere in the middle of a second marriage that is already twice as long as the marriage I shared with Hyung Goo. My husband and I have careers, a mortgage, a child—all things that Hyung Goo and I did not have. We worry about saving for retirement, about how we will care for our aging parents,

about how we will pay for college, for orthodontia, for the plumber we've had to have out to the house yet again. Hyung Goo and I never worried about any of these things. We were concerned for one another to the near-total exclusion of anything else.

I thus hesitate to hold up Hyung Goo's and my marriage as a paradigm for the marriages of other people, as if it were somehow a template for all that it means to be married well, to be married Christianly, to be married "for better or for worse, until death do us part." And yet, I think there were aspects of that marriage that were not unique to us, that were part of the common heritage of the many people who have entered into and been shaped by the institution that we call Christian marriage. Christian marriage is not the same as the modern American fantasy of romance, and Hyung Goo and I were, by virtue of our circumstances, in a particularly good position to notice that. Here, then, are five distinctions that I would draw between the fantasy of romance, on the one hand, and Christian marriage on the other.

In the first place, the fantasy of romance is all about finding the perfect partner, after which the rest of the story takes care of itself. The grain of truth here is that it matters whom you choose. The big falsehood is that the rest of the story will take care of itself. In the fantasy of romance, the wedding comes at the end. In Christian marriage, the wedding is the beginning—the beginning of a journey together that will take you through uncharted territory, some of which we hope will be beautiful, some of which may be challenging in the extreme, and much of which is likely to be both. For such a journey, you don't want a partner who is "perfect" (whatever that might mean). You want a partner whom you can rely upon as a fellow pilgrim, someone whom you would trust with your very life—because when you get married, that is exactly what you are doing.

Christian marriage is not the same as the modern American fantasy of romance, and Hyung Goo and I were, by virtue of our circumstances, in a particularly good position to notice that.

The fantasy of romance requires that you choose as your partner someone with whom you have "fallen in love." Christian marriage requires that you choose someone whom you can promise to love. I have nothing against "falling in love," and indeed have done so twice myself. But being "in love" is not a sufficient ground for marrying anyone, if by "in love" we mean simply that we feel ineffable palpitations when we think of the beloved. Ineffable palpitations make all manner of things more pleasant, but if they are going to help get you through the hard patches of life, they

had better be founded upon a solid grounding of mutual trust and respect. It is far more important that you choose someone—and that you be someone—whose character is fertile ground for love, than that you be "in love" with the person you marry before you marry him or her.

The fantasy of romance is all about you. Christian marriage, if it is to endure and thrive as it is meant to do, had better be about more than you. We live in an increasingly mobile society, one in which it is expected that we and everyone we know will move from job to job and place to place in the course of a lifetime. Part of the reason people long for marriage in such a society is that they hope to find one person who will move with them. And part of the reason Christian marriages falter and dissolve at the rates that they do is that it is simply unreasonable to expect lone marriages to support themselves any more than we would expect lone blades of grass to hold themselves upright in a hurricane. Many of us are unaccustomed either to the demands or the rewards of the cultivation of true community, but this is a fundamental Christian virtue, and one that is essential in the practice of faithful Christian marriage.

Our marriage was a journey into uncharted and unimaginably deep waters, a crucible in which we were individually and together being refined by fires of suffering and sorrow. And, at the same time, it was profoundly healing and transformative and, yes, joyful.

The fantasy of romance focuses on grand gestures (the dramatic proposal, the dream honeymoon) and big-picture aspirations (the house with the white picket fence, the 2.5 children and the dog). Christian marriage recognizes that little things matter at least as much as big ones, and maybe more so. Part of the reason many people fail to develop the kind of bond that can get them through hard times is that they forego opportunity after opportunity to rejoice together in small blessings and to deal intentionally and constructively with small challenges. We are always looking over one another's shoulders at whatever it is we want and haven't got yet, rather than giving thanks together for daily bread, sharing the pleasures or the disappointments of the day, and thus putting down roots ever more deeply into the soil of a truly common life.

And finally, the fantasy of romance is about living happily ever after—a curiously timeless, bloodless, future-without-end. Christian marriage is about cherishing one another today, because today is what you have. Who knows what tomorrow may bring? What is certain is that one day there will be no more tomorrows. There is a profoundly realistic note in the Christian promise to love and to cherish "until death do us part." By "realistic," I do

not mean "defeatist" or "depressing." I mean that marriage, for Christians, constitutes an opportunity to look death in the eye and choose to love anyway, because that is what God in Christ has already done on our behalf.

ALL THINGS TRANSFORMED BY THE CROSS

The fantasy of romance has a far more powerful grip on the popular imagination—including, alas, the popular Christian imagination—than does a properly Christian theology of marriage. I am still astonished and grateful that Hyung Goo and I were able to glimpse enough of the contrast between the two to realize that we could make a defensible decision to marry one another. No, neither of us was perfect: he added to my problems, and I could not fix his. We couldn't expect to be utterly independent and never in need of anything from anyone. We couldn't pin our hopes for happiness on children we hoped one day to have, career milestones we hoped one day to reach, or financial stability we hoped one day to achieve. We couldn't expect to live "happily ever after."

What we could do was to face life's limitations and gifts together, for as many days as we were given. We could be husband and wife together, accompanying one another on the Christian pilgrimage, depending together on God, on one another, on the many people who cared for us and about us. And we did. Was it hard? Yes, it was. It was a journey into uncharted and unimaginably deep waters, a crucible in which we were individually and together being refined by fires of suffering and sorrow. And, at the same time, it was profoundly healing and transformative and, yes, joyful.

How could this have been? In answer I can only point to the gospel of Christ crucified. According to that gospel, God brings life out of death, redemption out of suffering, victory out of defeat. To be a Christian means, among other things, to live as if this story, the Christian story, is the true story of the world. And to be married Christianly is to expect this most intimate of human relationships to be shaped by that story. Sometimes this looks dramatic; at other times, it looks humdrum and everyday. In most lives, in most marriages, it is both. Most of us, when we marry, marry both for better and for worse, and our happy endings come as we encounter together the God who transforms all things by the cross.

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Marriage in the Fellowship of the Faithful

BY JOHN THOMPSON

Marriage is a calling to ministry for some Christians that is realized within and for the whole church. The love between husband and wife transcends the ideal of romantic love, for they share a friendship through which they develop the virtues they need to become Christ's faithful disciples and build up the church body.

Christians do well to join the contemporary public debate on the future of marriage. Yet too often when we discuss who should be allowed to marry, the boundaries of sexual ethics, and when it is permissible to divorce, we are unclear about what constitutes a Christian marriage. "Marriage is something which happens in and to the whole church," the contemporary Orthodox theologian Vigen Guroian writes, "for it is an institution with a purpose that transcends the personal goals or purposes of those who enter into it."[1] A Christian marriage, then, involves more than two individuals; it belongs to the larger church body.

How can we reclaim this richer sense of marriage within and for the fellowship of the gathered faithful, the Church? We must begin by drawing a clear distinction between secular marriage and Christian marriage, and understand that the tools to reclaim marriage as Christian come only through the worship of the church body. Furthermore, we must understand the love between husband and wife in a Christian marriage as transcending the ideal of romantic love, for they share a friendship through which they develop virtues that help them become Christ's faithful disciples and build up the church body. As we reflect on these distinctive aspects of Christian marriage, we will see how premarital counseling, the marriage service, and the marriage relationship might properly be called "Christian."

MARRIAGE AS VOCATION

Why does anyone today get married? What is it about marriage that leads us to give up our individual lives and unite ourselves with another person? Our society, of course, provides certain financial incentives for marriage through breaks on taxes, insurance, and inheritance, but the main reason we enter into marriage is to mollify the fear of loneliness. Through marriage we secure a family that keeps us from living and dying alone. Many churches today merely echo this secular and pragmatic function of marriage with their extreme focus on family and family values.

Christian marriage, however, does not serve this purpose of providing a supportive family. As Christians, we do not need to marry to overcome loneliness, since our true family is the Church. The good news of the gospel is that in Christ strangers can become family. Marriage might even hinder our life together in the church family, for it can distract from the primary goal of becoming a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. This is the Apostle Paul's point to the Corinthians:

> I wish for you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how he might please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how he might please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or the girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, in order that she might be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how she might please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your unhindered devotion to the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:32-35, *my translation*)

Thus, the Church should teach that singleness is the first, default, and standard way of life for every Christian.

Marriage is certainly not wrong for Christians, and existing marriages should be nurtured. Yet Christians have no imperative to become married as soon as they can, or to prefer marriage over singleness as a more whole or wholesome situation. Jesus and Paul expressly relativize the priority of marriage within a Jewish culture that made marriage the norm.[2] Indeed Jewish religious teachers considered it to be the normal state of human life; frequent was the saying, "He who has no wife lives without joy, blessing, or good."[3]

Though this new teaching on the superiority of singleness is not widespread or repetitious in the New Testament, it is univocal. Furthermore, early church tradition continues this emphasis. Methodius of Olympias sees marriage as a good because it is a source of new Christians (*Symposium* 2.1), yet he proclaims celibacy as a "higher form of life" (1.2). Similar sentiments are found in the *Divine Institutes* of the African theologian Lactantius when he proclaims sexual abstinence as "the peak and summit of all virtues," al-

though he points out that it is no requirement (6.23.29). Later Christian writings such as John Chrysostom's *Homily 20 on Ephesians* and Augustine's *De Bono Conjugali* echo the preference for singleness.[4] Thus, both Scripture and the early church tradition proclaim that marriage is not necessary for a contented and complete Christian life.

Given this priority of singleness, Christians should see marriage as a calling to ministry. And if marriage is a vocation, the theologian Karl Barth writes, then it is not an arbitrary choice by two individuals but a divine command. In the Messianic age marriage is a specific vocation, not a natural structure or "order of creation" to which everyone is called. Christian marriage is precisely a calling of the two partners in Christ; hence the ultimate norm for their relation is Christological—a relation of mutual love and service to the other. A strength of Barth's account of marriage as vocation is its unsentimental character; mutual forgiveness and patience are more important in a marriage than romantic love.[5]

Since Christian marriage is a vocation from God, the worship and thanksgiving of the Church through baptism and communion are a real source of grace and the true ground of marriage.

Once marriage is seen as a specific call to ministry, it becomes clear that significant numbers of Christians are not called to it. Paul uses the term *charisma* (or gift) to describe singleness, marriage, and chastity (1 Corinthians 7:7). Members who believe that they cannot fulfill the obligations of Christian marriage must resist any pressure they feel to marry. Moreover, they should not view their ostensible unfitness for marriage as a character deficiency. As Paul states, "Each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind" (1 Corinthians 7:7).

MARRIAGE AS WORSHIP

Since marriage is a vocation from God, we should look to the Church to provide the tools necessary to fulfill properly our marriage vows, and we should fully expect that marriage will include participating in the common life of the faithful. The worship and thanksgiving of the Church are a real source of grace and the true ground of marriage.

The church practices of baptism and communion provide the proper lenses for us to view Christian marriage. Baptism lets us see that we are grounded in a community more determinative than marriage. The grace offered to us in our baptism allows us to see our spouses as family even before the marriage ceremony. Thus, we are brothers and sisters, friends in Christ, before we are husband and wife. In the celebration of communion

we are reminded that our lives and our marriages are based on grace, that they are gifts.

When we were baptized, the minister used words like "new birth," "new creation," or "newness of life" to proclaim to us and the church body that a new beginning had occurred. Baptism is a death to death and is also the beginning of life; we die to our old sinful life and are raised to new life (Romans 6:3-8; cf. Colossians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:1-5). Our baptism, then, was not an individual and private action, but a communal and public action performed for and from the church body. Baptism welcomed us into the body of Christ, where we are no longer strangers. It follows that within marriage or without, we are not alone. And if we do marry, our marriage is a relationship within a community of friends, and it enriches and is enriched by that community.

Likewise, the act of communion also draws us into this remarkable friendship. We share our lives literally as companions (Latin for "with bread"). At the table of God we are called to offer forgiveness and be patient toward one another, because patience and forgiveness were first shown to us.

If we isolate Christian marriage from the gathering of the faithful and these practices of baptism and communion, it will be misunderstood. When we look at marriage through the lenses of these practices, we can see that we do not make or break our loves by our own will and strength. We see that our marriages are great gifts from God that enrich and are enriched by the community of friendship in the Church. Without these lenses, of course, this view of marriage is almost unthinkable in our age of self-reliance.

MARRIAGE AS FRIENDSHIP

The language of "friendship" can appear out of place as a description of marriage today. From one perspective, it might appear just too obvious or simple to say our spouse is our "friend," because after all we eat, drink, sleep, talk, and spend a lot time with him or her. From another perspective, and one that appeals especially to Christians, it might look inadequate to say our spouse is our friend. Shouldn't we cultivate self-giving love (or what the ancients called *agape*) rather than friendly affection (or *philia*) toward our spouses? Both of these objections challenge us to dig deeper into the meaning of friendship. This concept has a rich history and there is no better place to begin our digging than into the ideas of the Greek philosopher Aristotle.

A good life, one that is filled with virtue, cannot be realized by an isolated individual, Aristotle famously claims in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. It can only be lived in the right sort of community. Friendship, therefore, becomes a crucial ingredient in any good life because friendship creates the community necessary for the pursuit of virtue.

Every friendship is built up around the friends' similarity of interests,

agreement on likes and dislikes, and especially agreement on what is important. Thus, for Aristotle, friendship is always the "sharing of a common project."[6] He recognizes three very different kinds of friendship—those where the common project revolves around pleasure, usefulness and advantage, or goodness and virtue.

The deepest and most permanent friendships are of the third type, where the friends are bound together by their shared love of the good. Each friend is drawn to the other for who he or she is, because each one loves the good and the friend to some degree embodies that good. In short, they love one another because they are people of goodness and virtue.[7]

Ideally every marriage should grow into a friendship of this third sort, where husband and wife are drawn together in love for one another because they share a conception of the good. In Christian marriage, the common good of loving God and neighbor enables couples to develop virtues, like forgiveness and patience, they need to be faithful disciples and build up the church body. In the friendship of marriage, Christian spouses can become skilled in the art of forgiveness because they realize that they share in the undeserved, extravagant mercy of a grace-full God. Reconciled to God and to one another through the cross of Christ, they must never allow hurt and brokenness to prevail between them. Furthermore, they should patiently share their lives with each other. This is more than just passing their time together; they should be present to one another in what we might call "virtuous time," wherein they model and learn the virtues necessary to sustain marriage and be more faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Character, of course, develops gradually through a process of discernment that requires talking and listening, understanding and sympathizing, leading and following. In a word, it requires that we exhibit some of the patience that God shows humanity by giving us time, hearing our prayers, enduring our sins.

The friendship that characterizes Christian marriage is not an insular partnership, but it is open to the wider friendship and support of members who seek one another's good through the church body. An interesting way of expressing this continuity of friendship within a marriage and extending through the Church can be found in the Roman Catholic doctrine of "domestic churches." This doctrine

> directs our attention to the ecclesial character of Christian families and, conversely, the familial character of the Church. Alternative expressions are "church in miniature," "church of the home," "house church," or "little church." [The domestic church] is a recognition of Jesus' promise to be present whenever two or three are gathered in his name. The idea of domestic church presupposes that religious activity is not confined to a sanctuary or a particular day of the week; rather, it incorporates the Pauline principle "Whatever you eat or drink—whatever you do—you should do all for the glory of God."[9]

Since the tradition sees domestic churches as units within the larger church body and their good as continuous with the common good of the Church, marriage becomes a vocation within the Church, and the friendship between spouses, though it is appropriately distinctive, becomes continuous with the friendship among all believers.

How can a marriage build up the church body? We all know husband and wife teams that minister together in their congregation—they work in the nursery, cook broccoli casseroles for church suppers, or sing in the choir. In these and many more very practical ways their marriages support the church body. Yet in a much more crucial way, these marriages can build up the Church by being a grace-giving sign. By faithfully living out the vocation of marriage, husbands and wives bear witness to the reality and hope that we can share in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Their steadfast union in marriage, St. Augustine writes, becomes a living sign of the "unity of all of us subject to God which is to be in one heavenly city."[10] It shows us what is possible for human community here and now because we share new life in Christ.

In a steadfast marriage, husbands and wives can live out the gospel before one another and for the world. "The family is placed at the service of the building up of the kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the church," Pope John Paul II proclaims. Its grace-filled purpose is "to communicate Christ's love to their brethren thus becoming a saving community. In this way, while the Christian family is a fruit and sign of the supernatural fecundity of the church, it stands also as a symbol, witness and participant in the church's motherhood."[11]

REFORMING THE CHURCH'S PRACTICE

Marriage can be a grace-giving sign. By faithfully living out the vocation of marriage, husbands and wives bear witness to the reality and hope that we can share in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

I have suggested that if Christian marriage is a vocation to which some are called (rather than a personal romantic choice) that can be understood only in the context of baptism and communion (rather than defined by or limited to the personal goals of the spouses), two things follow. Husband and wife must acknowledge one another as friends, and their marriage must be lived out *for* the church body.

When we view Christian marriage from this distinctive perspective as belonging to the Church, we will see that premarital counseling should be a continuation of proper catechization. The process begins when a congregation recognizes the calling of a man and woman that leads to a nuptial bond

between them and it commends their faithfulness. Thus, the proper way of engagement is not to announce the forthcoming wedding in a newspaper, but to stand before the church body and seek its ordination of the marriage. After this blessing, the couple's premarriage counseling would look less like psychological profiling and more like Christian formation. While conversations with the pastor or marriage counselor will be helpful to the engaged couple, their true counseling will occur as they interact with the larger church body worshiping together. If a couple is not faithful enough to gather with the church body for worship, the church must not bless the couple's marriage.

Because worship provides the tools we need to understand marriage, the marriage ceremony should never be divorced from the worship service. How often do ceremonies performed in churches consist of some home videos, a bit of romantic music played by the church pianist or crooned by a singer, a short reading from 1 Corinthians (you know the verses!), and the couple's vows? This may be marriage within the church building, but it is not Christian marriage. This turning of the marriage ceremony into a romantic fantasy renders the church's witness of Christian marriage unintelligible. Why not integrate the marriage vows into the worship service? Before their vows the couple could celebrate communion with the congregation. They would proclaim that the Church views marriage in a different way than secular culture by abstaining from the wasteful extravagance that accompanies most marriage ceremonies.

Finally, the Church should make claims on the married couple after the marriage service, calling them to exercise their vocation of marriage for the building up of the church body. Marriage should not be granted to those who are unwilling to commit their time and service to the church body beyond merely attending weekly services. For just as our marriages are for the Church and do not belong to us, so too as Christians we belong not to ourselves, but to God and to one another.

NOTES

1 Vigen Guroian, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 106.

2 This is a point at which the New Testament clearly moves beyond the Old Testament. Compare Mark 12:25 (and parallel Matthew 22:30), Matthew 19:10-12, and 1 Corinthians 7 to Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:18-24. See the rabbinic commentaries *Genesis Rabbah* 17:2, *b. Yebamoth* 63a, and *Midrash Psalms 59*.

3 Quoted in C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology* (London: Macmillan, 1938), 1430, 1432, and 1437.

4 Although the priority of singleness over marriage dominates early church thought, there is a minority voice that places marriage in an equal and superior position. For example, Clement of Rome in his *Miscellanies* appealed to the married saints of the Old Testament and to the married apostles of the New Testament to argue that there is no incompatibility between the practice of a self-controlled marriage and a life of service

in the Church. Also, the Roman monk Jovian taught that married Christians and their celibate brothers and sisters did not essentially differ in sanctity (cited in Jerome, *Against Jovian*, 1.3). For more about this, see David G. Hunter, ed., *Marriage in the Early Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

5 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/IV (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 183.

6 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 146.

7 Paul Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 52-58.

9 Florence Caffrey Bourg, *Where Two Or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2004), 8.

10 Augustine, *De Bono Conjugali*, in Roy J. Deferrari, ed., *Saint Augustine: Treatise on Marriage and Other Subjects*, The Fathers of the Church New Translation, 27 (New York, NY: Fathers of the Church), 21. Elsewhere Augustine writes, "It is certain, then, that from the first men were created, as we see and know them to be now, of two sexes, male and female, and that they are called one…on account of the matrimonial union" [*City of God*, XIV, 23 (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1993), 470].

11 Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, December 15, 1981), 46.

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MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN depicts a popular apocryphal story that explains how God chose Joseph, though he was an older man, to wed the young Mary.

Perugino (c. 1450-1523). *MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN, 1500-1504. Oil on wood, 234 x 185 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen, France. Photo: © Erich Lessing / Art Resource. Used by Permission.*

A Wedding Story

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

Pietro Vannucci, better known as Perugino, was the leading painter of the school at Perugia, Italy. He brought fame to that city through his own works and those of his most famous pupil, Raphael (1483-1520). By 1472 Perugino was working in Florence where he joined the artist's Company of St. Luke. He quickly learned perspective and a drawing style favored by the Florentines.

Pope Sixtus IV della Rovere called the artist to Rome in about 1480 to supervise the painting of the entire cycle of wall frescoes in the newly built private chapel of the Pope, the Sistine Chapel. Perugino painted the primary scene, *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter*, which depicts the events of Matthew 16:18-19, the basis of apostolic succession.

Marriage of the Virgin, painted twenty years later, portrays an extra-biblical story found in the apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James* (c. 150) and *The Golden Legend* written by the Dominican and Archbishop of Genoa, Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1229-1298). Perugino expertly applies the Renaissance characteristics of harmony, balance, proportion, and scientific perspective to the painting. The story's main scene, Joseph placing the ring on Mary's finger as the High Priest joins their hands, is in the front and center of the picture plane. Behind the wedding group, the piazza has a precise grid pattern using scientific one-point linear perspective as codified by architect Leone Battista Alberti in *On Painting* (1435). In the center of the background the Temple, looking very much like a centrally planned Renaissance building, looms over the correctly proportioned boy sitting on its steps. For a sense of recession, several groups of people in the middle ground are reduced proportionally in size.

Apocryphal stories were popular in this era because they provided readers with missing details about the lives of the biblical saints. According to the story of the Virgin's wedding, Mary was fourteen when the high priest ordered all the male descendants of David of marriageable age to bring a rod and gather at the Temple. The man whose rod blossomed into flower would become Mary's husband. Though Joseph was no longer a young man, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove made his rod bloom. Then the wedding was celebrated according to Jewish custom. In Perugino's painting, the unsuccessful younger suitors whose "rods did not flower" are standing beside Joseph and in groups on the piazza.

A spiritual presence pervades the secular setting. Temporal pleasures combine with Christian hope. These two worlds unite subtly in every marriage as well, for matrimony is both a legal agreement and a spiritual covenant.

Jan van Eyck (1390-1441). *The Arnolfini Wedding, 1434. Oil on panel, 82 x 60 cm. The National Gallery, London. Photo: © Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

The Promise of Marriage

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

Long believed to be a marriage portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami in the privacy of the bridal chamber, this treasure of the National Gallery, London, instead probably depicts their betrothal or engagement in the main room of the bride's house.† The artist signed the panel not in the conventional location on the frame but above the painted mirror in a formal script "Johannes de eyck fuit hic 1434" (Jan van Eyck was here 1434). Jan, like the two male figures reflected in the mirror (the one in the turban has been suggested to be Jan himself), is also a witness to this sacred and legal event of a promised marriage. Engagements in the fifteenth century were legal and financial contracts between two families that demanded careful preparation.

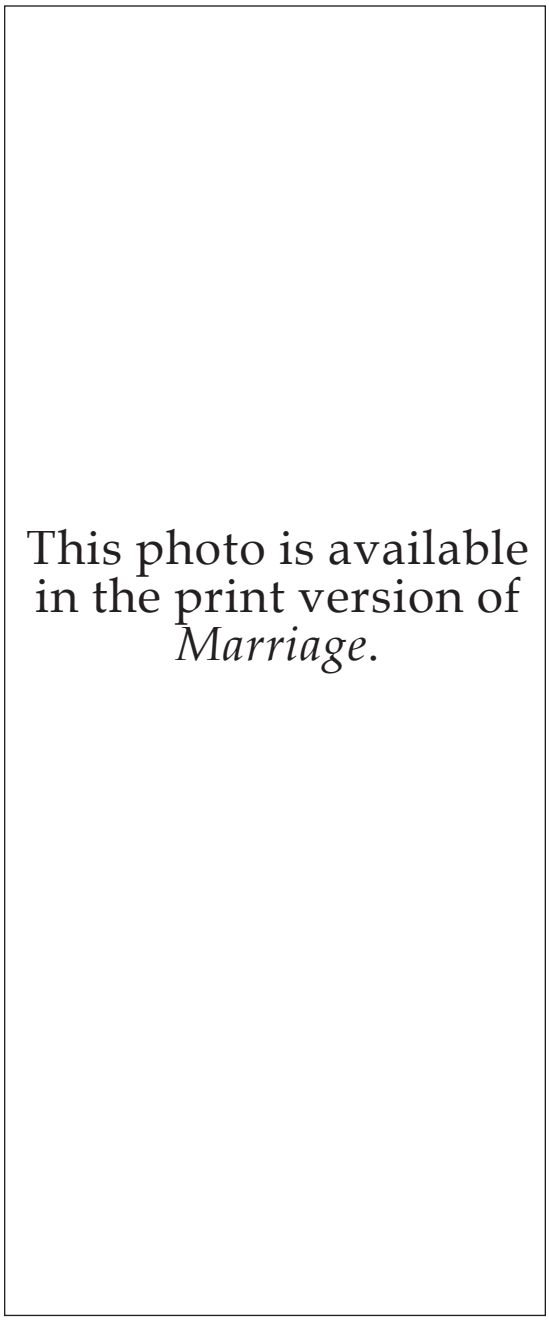
Arnolfini was an Italian merchant who lived in Bruges, Belgium. In this image he raises his right hand as if to take an oath while his left hand holds the right hand of his wife. According to Northern European tradition, wedding ceremonies took place in front of a church and the couple would join their right hands. So, rather than depicting their wedding, this double portrait probably commemorates the marriage that is planned.

The painting is rich in symbolism. The dog that stands in the front of the composition may be a loyal pet or an emblem of fidelity. (In Latin, *fides* is the root for the words "dog," "fidelity," and "betrothal.") Perhaps the couple have removed their shoes to show they are standing on holy ground, even as Moses removed his shoes before the burning bush and in the presence of God on Mount Sinai. Surrounding the mirror are tiny round images from the Passion and Resurrection narratives. On the seven-branched chandelier, a single lit candle (in the middle of the day) may symbolize the ever-present light of God. The woman lifts her gown as was the fashion of the day, but this gesture also may suggest her desire for children.

Jan van Eyck depicts the couple in a secular setting, but with a spiritual presence. Temporal pleasures represented in the lush furnishings combine with Christian hope expressed in the Passion and Resurrection stories. These two worlds unite subtly in every marriage as well, for matrimony is both a legal agreement and a spiritual covenant.

NOTE

† Recent scholarship has also questioned the identification of the couple as Arnolfini and Cenami because they were married much later than 1434.



Michele Tosini (1503-1577). *Marriage at Cana, 1561. Fresco. Strozzi Chapel, Villa Caserotta, Paolini, Italy. Photo: © Heidi J. Hornik. Used by permission.*

Water into Wine

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

A searching question is inscribed beside the Marriage of Cana: "Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time?" We become the faithful servant who observes the miracle and ponders its significance in Christ's self-revelation.

The *Marriage at Cana* is a central image among the elaborately constructed paintings that fill the Strozzi chapel in Paolini, Italy. We know much about the artist, who was a younger contemporary of Michelangelo, from archival research.[1] Michele lived in Florence, where his father was a messenger for the *Signoria*, the central administrative body for the city. With his wife Felice and their four children, Michele was a member of the Dominican parish of Santa Maria Novella. Both of his sons became painters: the older Baccio would take over his father's workshop in the late 1570s, while the younger son, following in the Dominican manner of Fra Angelico and Fra Bartolomeo, became a painter after entering the order as Fra Santi Tosini in nearby Fiesole. Michele's two daughters also joined the Dominican order in convents near Florence. Michele received a number of commissions from his familial connections with the Dominicans, but he also inherited from his teacher, Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, a prestigious clientele that included the Strozzi family who commissioned the fresco cycle in their private villa chapel.

Michele was trained in the same Ghirlandaio workshop where Michelangelo, twenty-eight years his senior, had studied. The Ghirlandaio workshop was best known for training artists in drawing (*disegno*) and painting techniques, including the fresco method (painting on wet plaster) used in *Marriage at Cana*. Domenico (Michelangelo's teacher) and his son, Ridolfo

(Michele's teacher), were excellent businessmen. They had developed a strong patronage base before Michele di Ridolfo, as Tosini was known by his contemporaries, inherited the workshop and became *capo*, or master.

The Strozzi chapel fresco cycle is a visual interpretation of redemptive epiphany. The chapel, adjacent to the present kitchen of the villa now occupied by the Ganucci Cancellieri family, was completed during the Strozzi ownership in 1561. The largest frescoes depict the *Adoration of the Kings* and the *Marriage of Cana*. These two scenes face each other and are two of the three events associated with the favorite Florentine feast day of the Epiphany. A third event, the *Baptism of Christ*, is juxtaposed with a Lamentation scene in the original altar panel. Together, the frescoes and altar panel define the program of the chapel as the full cycle of redemption from the infancy narratives through Christ's sacrifice and death.

The Strozzi Chapel paintings represent Michele's participation in the important theological discussions of his day. His scenes are entirely biblical, yet they incorporate the symbolism of the liturgy iconographically.

The iconographic key to the program of the chapel is found in the background of the feast of the Epiphany, or God's manifestation in Jesus Christ, that the Church celebrates on January 6. The earliest celebrations of the feast of the Epiphany probably date back to the third century in Egypt where it replaced a festival of Isis, the main point of which was the virgin birth of Aion, on January 6. The changing of water into wine, a Dionysian miracle, was celebrated in conjunction with the Isis festival. The Christians reinterpreted this miracle as a reference to baptism, and they may have associated it with the miracle at Cana, which they then celebrated at Epiphany.[2]

By the sixteenth century, the Church was observing three celebrations on January 6—the feasts of the Adoration of the Magi, the Marriage at Cana, and the Baptism of Christ. This holy day, with its emphasis on Christ's baptism, was especially important in Florence because John the Baptist was the patron saint of the city.

On the day of Epiphany the Church is married to Christ.[3] During the morning prayer hour (or Lauds) therefore, the response to the *Benedictus* (the prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus' birth from Luke 1:68-79) is: "Today the Church is joined to her celestial spouse, because in Jordan Christ doth wash her sins; the Magi hasten with gifts to the royal marriage feast, and the guests exult in the water turned to wine." The inscription written above this fresco, "today he changed water into wine at the wedding," is a direct reference to the Lauds.

Marriage at Cana portrays Jesus' first miracle or "sign" in the Gospel of

John, the turning of water into wine at the wedding feast. Jesus, his mother, and the wedding party sit at a long banquet table. From their places of honor in the center, the bride and groom look directly toward the viewer; probably they are contemporary portraits, but their identity remains unknown. Two women sit to the left of the bride and four men squeeze in uncomfortably to the right of the groom.[4]

The fresco depicts the events narrated in John 2:3-8. Mary is informing Jesus that the wedding party has run out of wine (2:3). Six stone water jars are in front of the table (2:6). Jesus is raising his hand in authority to instruct one of the servant boys to fill them with water. The boy on the right is pouring water into the first of the elegant vases after receiving direction (2:7). The second servant, obeying Jesus' command to "draw some out, and take it to the chief steward" (2:8), is pouring wine into the goblet. The image invites us to witness a miracle and not merely observe a sumptuous feast.

Michele fills out the image with other figures. The guests at the table probably are contemporary portraits, similar to those frequently repeated by Michele and imitators of his workshop in the 1560s and 1570s. In the corners are other men—six on the left and thirteen on the right—who vary in age, stature, and facial expression. A musician is playing a flute in the right background. The table in front of the guests is laden generously with birds (perhaps they are sparrows, the Florentine delicacy) and plates of fruits and vegetables.

Inscribed on the wall to the right of the fresco are the first sentences of the biblical account:

> On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."
>
> *John 2:1-4*

Below this passage, a searching question from the parable of the faithful servant is appended: "Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time?" (Matthew 24:45). It is appropriate to link this parable with the moment depicted in the fresco: the servants obeying the instructions of Christ, which is also a moment of transubstantiation and redemption. The viewer of *Marriage at Cana* becomes the faithful servant who observes the miracle, but may not fully grasp its significance in Christ's self-revelation.

The Strozzi chapel paintings represent Michele's participation in the important theological discussions of his day. The great reformer, Martin Luther (1483-1546), had proposed *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone) to em-

phasize the singular importance of the Bible in guiding Christian discipleship. Michele's fresco scenes are entirely biblical, yet they incorporate the symbolism of the liturgy iconographically.

Christ's changing the water into wine at the wedding at Cana is a transubstantiation that points us toward the Eucharist, or Communion. Of course, the proper understanding of the sacraments was an issue raised by Luther. In *Marriage at Cana*, Michele visually ties the Eucharist to the sacrament or union of marriage, which is another new beginning for a couple brought together in a covenant with God.

Michele's integration of biblical text and liturgical imagery came at a critical time in the history of Christianity, which failed to realize all the potential ramifications for such a combination.

NOTES

1 This biographical sketch is based on Tosini's testament found in the Archivio di Stato, Florence. See Heidi J. Hornik, "The Testament of Michele Tosini," *Paragone* 46:543-545 (1995): 156-167.

2 See Heidi J. Hornik, "The Strozzi Chapel by Michele Tosini: A Visual Interpretation of Redemptive Epiphany," *Artibus et Historiae* 23:46 (2002): 97-118.

3 Rab Hatfield, *Botticelli's Uffizi 'Adoration': A Study in Pictorial Content* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 55.

4 The style of Mannerism—a movement away from the one-point linear perspective, perfect balance, proportion, and symmetry of the High Renaissance to the flamboyance of the Baroque period—allowed artists to create spatial incongruities. In this painting the four men do not appear to have enough space for more than one of them to sit down!

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Two Are Called to Live as One

BY TERRY W. YORK

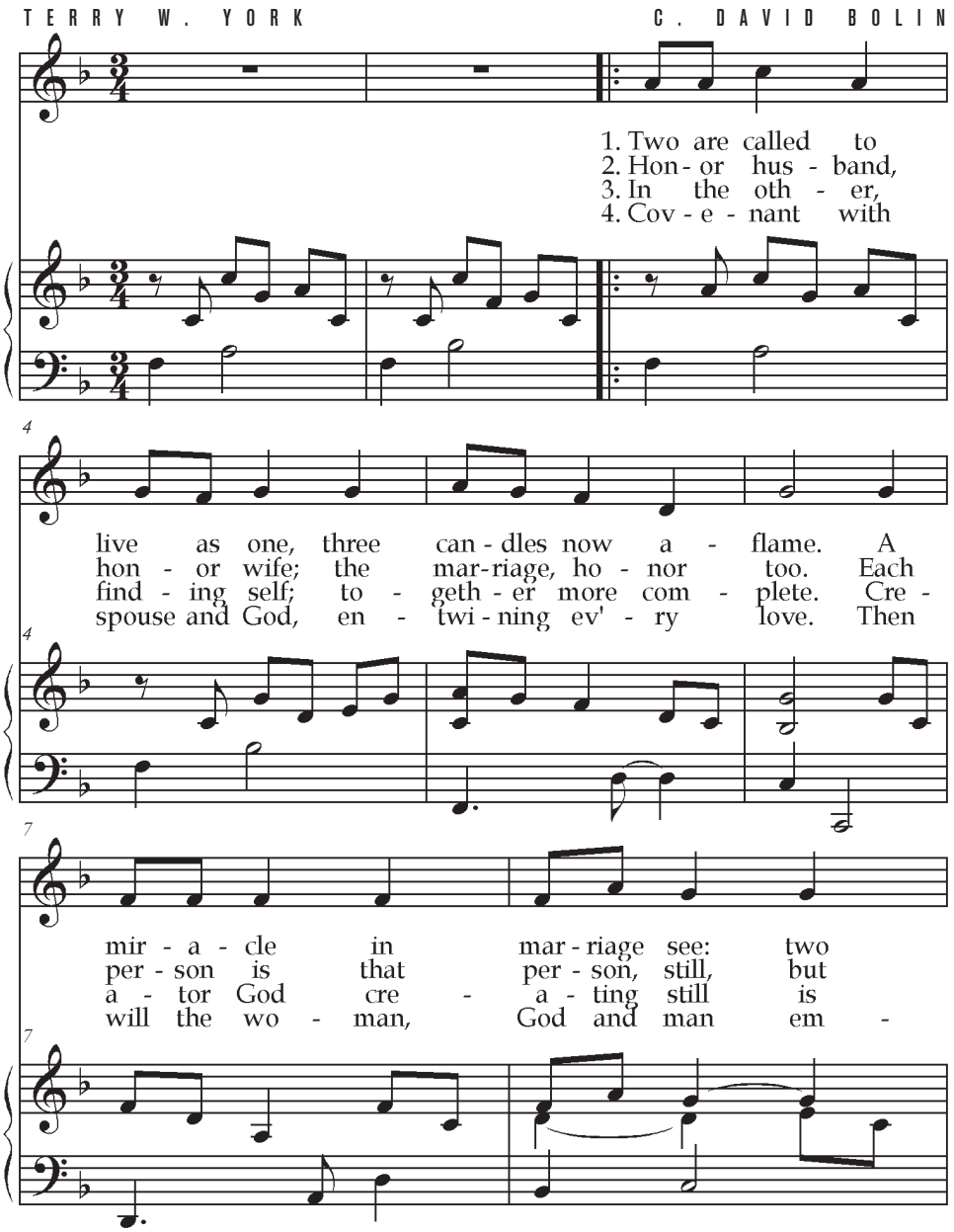
Two are called to live as one,
three candles now aflame.
A miracle in marriage see:
two persons make a trinity.

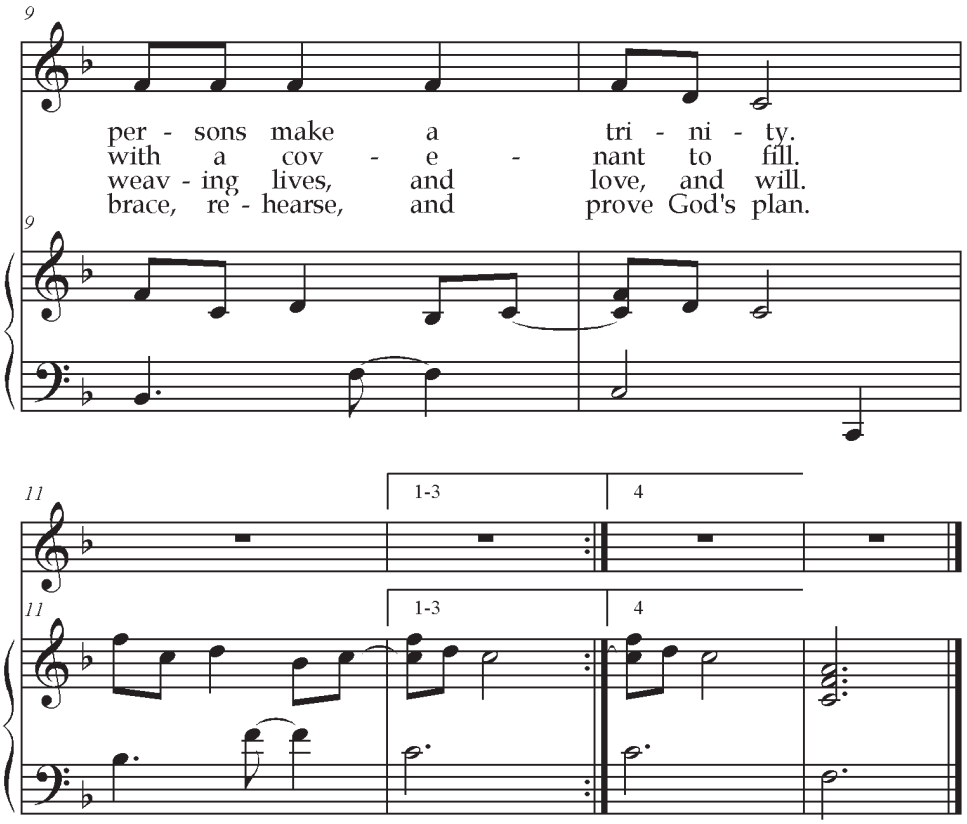
Honor husband, honor wife;
the marriage, honor too.
Each person is that person, still,
but with a covenant to fill.

In the other, finding self;
together more complete.
Creator God creating still
is weaving lives, and love, and will.

Covenant with spouse and God,
entwining ev'ry love.
Then will the woman, God, and man
embrace, rehearse, and prove God's plan.

Two Are Called to Live as One





Tune: PLYMOUTH PARK
7.6.8.8.

Worship Service

BY SHARON KIRKPATRICK FELTON

Prelude: "Oh Love That Will Not Let Me Go"

Call to Worship

All who desire to know the God of love and covenant,
come together to worship.
Come with open hearts, minds, and souls
committed to loving one another freely and completely.
Come together as individuals and couples into a new community,
ready to be changed
and to change the world through love.

Unison Invocation

God of covenant, God of unfailing love,
we seek your presence in worship.
Teach us to be people of commitment and compassion,
who give ourselves sacrificially to each other in covenant love.
Show us that true freedom comes in giving ourselves
and our power away.
Help us to find that freedom
and experience your love in one another. Amen.

Hymn

"Oh Love That Will Not Let Me Go" (verses 1-3)

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

O light that follows all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be.

George Matheson (1882)
Tune: ST. MARGARET (Peace)

Old Testament Reading: Hosea 2:18-20

I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will take you for my wife for ever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.

Prayer for Community

God, form us into a community that is faithful
in our covenants with you and each other.
Enable us to trust others
and make us trustworthy.

Share with us your heart, your mind, and your spirit
so that we will be faithful, supportive, and encouraging of our spouses.
Fill our hearts with love rather than fear,
and our spirits with tenacity rather than apathy.

Share with us your heart, your mind, and your spirit
so that we will be faithful, supportive, and encouraging
of other couples in their marriages.
Help us to work for their good,
and keep us from being stumbling blocks to their commitments.

Empower us to create families
that model your love in this world. Amen.

Hymn

"Two are Called to Live as One"

Two are called to live as one,
three candles now aflame.
A miracle in marriage see:
two persons make a trinity.

Honor husband, honor wife;
the marriage, honor too.
Each person is that person, still,
but with a covenant to fill.

In the other, finding self;
together more complete.
Creator God creating still
is weaving lives, and love, and will.

Covenant with spouse and God,
entwining ev'ry love.
Then will the woman, God, and man
embrace, rehearse, and prove God's plan.

Terry W. York, ASCAP (2005)
Tune: PLYMOUTH PARK (pp. 53-55 in this volume)

New Testament Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, 13

A young, recently married couple reads responsively:

Love is bliss!
Love is exciting and easy.
Love is losing myself in you.
Love is wanting to be together twenty-four hours a day.
Love is wonderful!
Yes, love is divine!

A middle-aged couple reads responsively:

Love is hard work!
Love is not always liking each other.
Love is sometimes a struggle.
Love is figuring out who I am and who you are as well.
Love is loneliness and suffocation.
Love is exhausting.

A long-married couple reads responsively:

Love is patient; love is kind;
love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice in wrongdoing,
but rejoices in the truth.
It bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.

All three couples in unison:

Love never ends.
And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;
and the greatest of these is love.

Hymn

"O Love Divine and Golden"

O Love divine and golden,
mysterious depth and height,
to you the world beholden,
looks up for life and light.
O Love divine and gentle,
the blesser and the blest,
beneath your care parental
the world lies down in rest.

O Love divine and tender,
that through our homes can move,
veiled in the softened splendor
O holy household love.
A throne without your blessing
were labor without rest,
yet cottages possessing
your blessedness are blest.

God bless these hands united;
God bless these hearts made one!
Unsevered and unblighted
may they through life go on,

here in earth's home preparing
for the bright home above,
and there forever sharing
its joy where "God is Love."

John S. B. Monsell (1857), alt.
Suggested Tunes: AURELIA or ST. THEODULPH

Responsive Reading

Leader: Love is
People: hope that promises new tomorrows
and heals yesterday's wounds.
Love is
compassion that dispels fear
and nurtures the soul.
Love is
commitment that stands the test of time
and overcomes mistrust and neglect.
Love is
Two souls breathing independent breaths in unison.
True love
All: draws us to God and one another in covenant for all time.

Sermon

Hymn of Commitment

"Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us"

Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use thy folds prepare.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Thou hast bought us, thine we are.

We are thine, thou dost befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.

Thou hast promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
thou hast mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse, and power to free.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! We will early turn to thee.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! We will early turn to thee.

Early let us seek thy favor, early let us do thy will;
blessèd Lord and only Savior, with thy love our bosoms fill.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.

Attr. Dorothy A. Thrupp (1836)
Tune: BRADBURY

Benediction

Love is hard, yet love is full of grace and mercy.
Leave this place and love passionately, love completely,
and love in a manner that draws all people to the Kingdom of God.
Allow your heart and mind to be transformed by your worship.
Go from this place committed to love and serve God
and, through God's power, to love and serve humanity.
Make a difference, change this world,
and enable others to know Christ through you. Amen.

SHARON KIRKPATRICK FELTON
is a freelance writer in Hamilton, Texas.

The Changing Shape of Family

BY BO PROSSER

Families are not always what they are cracked up to be. Sometimes they are hurtful, dysfunctional, unhealthy systems. But "family" does not have to be an outdated or negative word. While many of us struggle with our families of origin, inclusion into the family of God brings freedom, healing, and redemption.

The use of the word "family" has fallen out of fashion in some circles. Yet family is not a "dirty" word. The use of "family" is still valuable in our world. Like it or not, the meaning of family may have changed, but the importance of belonging to a family has not!

The nuclear family has certainly changed. For most of us, "Ozzie and Harriet" have been replaced with "Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne." Father may know best but many families do not have a father in the house. An intern of mine has three sets of "parents" and four different sets of siblings. He has to reintroduce himself to some of them at holiday gatherings. In 2003, the number of filed divorces in the United States was half the number of marriage certificates granted that year! And many of us find ourselves surviving family life only through the help of a therapist and antidepressants. Family is not all it could be. Yet, we need community and the intimacy of knowing and being known. This intimacy is offered to those who would be a part of Jesus' family.

The demands on family structures today are taking their toll. Parents, children, and extended family may be deficient in intimacy and sensitivity. Fantasy is replacing reality in what it means to love and be loved. In some cases fantasy has collided with dangerous opportunity, and the family unit

has exploded. Families come crying to our churches, "Can your Jesus help us cope?" And we must answer with a resounding "Yes!"

Jesus gives us the clues to what it means to be family. In his genealogy, we see Jesus being taken into family even in light of the inexplicable incarnation. At several points in Jesus' ministry, we see him being family to the apostles, the many disciples, and even to perfect strangers. Jesus modeled for us how to do the will of the Father. And in this passage, he gives us the deeper understanding, "Those who do the will of the Father are my family!"

> While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."
>
> *Matthew 12:46-50*

These are scary days. We spend more time at work or school than we do at home. Many of us spend more time in the car than we do at the family table. The average American today watches more than forty hours of television a week—much more than time spent at the family table. The average American lives more than two hundred miles away from significant extended family members. We end up sharing our hopes, dreams, and deepest secrets with those other than our spouses or significant others. We are all vulnerable. In our vulnerability we find ourselves desperate for intimacy, touch, and the affirmation that we matter. Acting out our fantasies is dangerous.

The family dynamic has changed. We tend to turn to complete strangers via the internet rather than turn to the one on the other side of the bed. One safe way to reclaim the intimacy we so desire is through God's family. We become part of the divine family as we respond to the will of the Father. Jesus adopts us into his family. We need the intimacy of God's family as we journey.

I have always felt like I had family. When my dad divorced my mother, I felt that he also divorced me. He wanted out of our family. When our broken family was trying to make sense of it all, several key families from my home church adopted me. They let me be a part of their families. They loved me unconditionally, fed me unselfishly, and tolerated me lovingly. How thankful I am for Bill and Ruby and Bundy and Anna, for Marion and Linda and their girls! These folks modeled family in the most healthy, intimate, and spiritual ways! They modeled what it meant to do the will of the Father, what it meant to be in the family of Jesus.

Churches I have served have also modeled family for me. Even when I did not always do my best, these congregations still loved me with affirmation and grace. These churches have been extended family for us when we were far from home; they have been the family Jesus represented. In days when some would define family too narrowly and others would abandon the term altogether, we need churches who will model living in the will of the Father. We need churches who will risk being family with one another and with their communities.

Too many of us are driven by wanting more stuff, by hoping that our next acquisition will be the one to fulfill us. Jesus calls us to be perfect, completed—to be completed in God's love, not our love of stuff.

Jesus models for us what it means to "do the will of the Father." There are certain things that are required of relationships. Toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells how to be family.

Smile at unfair demands. The idea of an "eye for an eye" was instituted in early Jewish life to keep persons in right relationship. The ancient Jewish mindset was one of fierce emotion. The Jewish male did not take insults calmly. "An eye for an eye" was meant to make those who would do harm think about the consequences beforehand.

But Jesus rejects this view entirely. He says that we are to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, forgive and forget! Very few of us today suffer physical blows from others, but we are hurt by unkind comments, insults, and emotional jabs. Jesus tells us that "doing the will of the Father" means to relate redemptively to persons who make unfair demands on us. Merit is not the issue; service in the Kingdom is! Understanding this concept gives us a freedom to move from oppression to action, from negative living to positive living. This kind of living allows us to be family with one another.

Spend time together. The family table, indeed the family altar, is quickly becoming replaced by the minivan! We spend lots of time traveling in the car. Last week I was riding in the car with my wife. We were holding hands: no radio, no conversation, just riding and touching. This was a holy moment, one to be cherished and shared. But this cannot be the only time we spend intimately.

Families need to set aside time for playing, praying, and sharing. They must find time to share ministry and to worship together. The intentionality that is required for spending time together is the same intentionality required for doing the will of the Father. Jesus calls us to be family with one another and the world. In previous days we were given the myth of "quality" time: just spend five minutes a day with each family member. This al-

lowed us to rationalize our time spent away from family. The call to be family is the call to be intentional about sharing the love of Jesus with one another and the world.

Serve one another in God's love. God's love does not discriminate; neither should our own! We are called to be gracious to those who are not in our group, to those whom we do not know very well and may not like very well. Jesus has always been in the business of tearing down walls not building them.

Again, Jesus gives us the model: serve those who hurt us. We continue working together and striving to reach out beyond ourselves. What a difference we could make in the world if we reached out in service and in love to those different from us. What a difference we could make in the world if we did the will of the Father, if we were family! As Christians we are in a unique situation to be peacemakers in our world, our churches, and our communities.

Seek perfection. Jesus says to each of us, "You must be perfect" (Matthew 5:48). God knows that we will never attain perfection but we are still to desire it. Too many of us are driven by wanting more stuff! Too many of us are driven by hoping that our next acquisition will be the one to fulfill us. Jesus calls us to be perfect, completed—to be completed in God's love, not our love of stuff.

Today's families need a release from the push for more. There is freedom in seeking completion in God's love. There is freedom in seeking fulfillment in doing the will of the Father. There is fulfillment in being within the family of God.

True, family is not always what it is cracked up to be. Families are sometimes hurtful, dysfunctional, unhealthy systems. But, "family" does not have to be an outdated or negative word. While many of us struggle with our families of origin, inclusion into the family of God brings freedom, healing, and redemption. Although there are many who struggle to escape from their immediate families, inclusion into the family of God is fulfilling, happy. Let us embrace our divine family. Let us encourage one another in the love of our Jesus. Let us be found faithful doing the will of the Father. Let us be family!

BO PROSSER
is Coordinator for Congregational Life at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Atlanta, Georgia.

Other Voices

We need not look for scapegoats…. Some Christians have taken on the abortion issue; others have focused on divorce, the gay rights movement, illegitimacy, you name it. While Christians must continue to make their moral witness clear and live according to biblical standards, it is important not to confuse symptoms with causes. The deinstitutionalization of marriage is a cultural phenomenon rooted in some forces that cannot be reversed, some that should not be reversed, and others that can and should be reversed.... We can do several things, however. We can clarify a Christian understanding of marriage and divorce and live accordingly. We can strengthen faith communities so that they no longer capitulate to destructive cultural trends. And we can bear witness to the culture. Through our lives and through our words, we can call our neighbors to a better way.

DAVID P. GUSHEE, *Getting Marriage Right* (2004)

For the sake of our own identity, as well as our witness to our society, we need a full and serious recovery of the depth and breadth of our moral and theological resources in Scripture and tradition. This includes a notion of Christian marriage as a distinctive theological vocation based in discipleship, a call to embody in our faithfulness and forgiveness toward one another, in our patient nurturing and bearing with one another, the endless forbearance shown us by God in Christ. Only such a full-blown call to fidelity and permanence in marriage can offer something beyond the practical calculation of generic social functionality, the claim that *in general* it is better for children and for society if married partners remain together.

SONDRA WHEELER, "Christians and Family," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* (2005)

Many Christians lack a clear sense of why they are married and raising families as church members. Indeed, in so far as contemporary Christians even try to explain a social purpose for marriage they tend to do so primarily in sociological or secular political terms. They have lost sight of the significance of Christian marriage and family as a form of human community in service to the Church and the Kingdom of God.

VIGEN GUROIAN, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics* (1987)

Firmly established by the Lord, the unity of marriage will radiate from the equal personal dignity of wife and husband, a dignity acknowledged by

mutual and total love. The constant fulfillment of the duties of this Christian vocation demands notable virtue. For this reason, strengthened by grace for holiness of life, the couple will painstakingly cultivate and pray for steadiness of love, largeheartedness, and the spirit of sacrifice.

***Gaudium et Spes* (1965)**

Religiously committed people who, by reason of their worldview, wish to make a case for the normativity of the two-parent family would be well advised to spend less time claiming the high moral ground for their position, and more time showing by example that they are committed to egalitarian gender relations between spouses, to a radical degendering of both public and private spheres of life, and to the development of institutions supportive of childrearing that promote both female achievement and male nurturance.

MARY STEWART VAN LEEUWEN, "Re-Inventing the Ties That Bind," in *Religion, Feminism, and the Family* (1996)

The death of unconstrained patriarchy, the end of the status of wives and children as chattel, and the prohibition of child labor hardly signal that family life in the twenty-first-century America is now morally safe…. American culture offers a full range of corruptions, shaped by its distinctive features of consumer capitalism and technological self-confidence. Marriage is now explicitly a life-style choice, and economic strategy, and courtship is more and more overtly conducted in a marketplace complete with advertising, both veiled and direct.

SONDRA WHEELER, "Christians and Family," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* (2005)

As an incarnate spirit, that is, a soul which expresses itself in a body and a body informed by an immortal spirit, man is called to love in his unified totality. Love includes the human body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love.

Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person, in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is in its proper form an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being "created in the image of God."

JOHN PAUL II (1920-2005), *Familiaris Consortio* (1981)

The community of the church must seek to find ways to provide deep and satisfying *koinōnia* and friendships to those divorced persons who choose not to remarry in order to devote their lives to the service of God outside the married state…. In other words, within the church we need to shatter the power of the myth that only married people are normal and that only marriage offers the conditions necessary for human fulfillment.

RICHARD B. HAYS, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (1996)

I Know Who She Is

BY GINNY BRIDGES IRELAND

How do we cultivate faithful intimacy and caring? We bear the untidy mark of Adam and Eve's drive to possess intimate knowledge wrapped in self-interest that ultimately leads to our death. We shun God's design for wholeness, which is found in the simplicity of knowing and being known by God and reflected in knowing and being known by one another.

A lifelong fire in Robertson McQuilkin's bones blazed into reality as he was inaugurated as president of Columbia Bible College, now Columbia International University. Before long he led the school to become one of the greatest missionary training schools in America. But Alzheimer's disease spun its wicked web, snatching the personality and vibrancy of his wife's mind and body. McQuilkin submitted his resignation in order to care for her. His friends strongly objected and implored him to reconsider his decision to take on the unseemly daily tasks required to care for her. Yet his decision remained firm. In a last ditch effort, Tony Campolo brazenly pleaded with him saying, "You are reneging on a promise to God!" McQuilkin replied, "There's a promise that is higher. And that's the promise I made when I married, the promise to be there for her in sickness and in health." "She doesn't even know who you are!" Campolo protested. "But I know who she is," he countered, tenderly.[1]

Robertson McQuilkin *knew* his wife, a knowledge born of love and not logic. That knowledge sustained him during his grief-filled, exhausting steps to her death. Shakespeare wrote, "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks but bears it out even to the edge of doom."[2] McQuilkin's love for his wife remained steadfast and was not altered by his wife's suffering. As a

result, he walked with her even to the edge of doom.

What was McQuilkin's secret? How did he manage to keep on loving and caring for his wife even though a terrible disease had erased all memory of him from her mind? His answer was simple and straightforward: "She may not know me, but I know her."

How do we attain that kind of knowledge in our marriages? How do we cultivate and keep alive that kind of faithful intimacy and caring? Unfortunately, we bear the untidy mark of Adam and Eve's drive to possess the kind of knowledge and control wrapped in self-interest that ultimately leads to our death. We crave a world created in our own image for our purposes; we shun God's design for wholeness for us, which is found in the simplicity of knowing and being known by God and reflected in knowing and being known by one another. We assume something better must exist just beyond our grasp in the next juicy apple. Too often we excel greedily in power but fail miserably in love.

A FITTING COMPANION

Scripture weaves divine as well as distorted threads of knowledge throughout the handful of marriages it showcases. Adam and Eve, for example, sadly misused their knowledge of the other, yet they fulfilled the divine design of knowing and being known by one another. Isaac and Rebekah later would do the same.

Perhaps before Eve appeared, Adam did not even know what was missing in his life, though one rabbinic commentary suggests that as he named the animals and noticed they were in pairs, he may have complained, "Everything has its partner, but I have no partner."[3] God remedied Adam's lack of a complement by creating Eve, and Adam was overcome with joy and relief when he first caught sight of her. Adam exclaimed, "This *at last* is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23a, emphasis mine).

God created the woman as the *ezer kenegdo*, the right and fitting companion (Genesis 2:18). Although this Hebrew phrase is often translated "helper" and culturally understood to mean "subordinate," Old Testament scholar Katharine Doob Sakenfeld says it "clearly implies correspondence, opposite, or counterpart. Equality or reciprocity is what is called for, a being who corresponds so that the scales are balanced…."[4] The Torah Study of Reform Jews pictures Genesis 2:18 as a man and woman facing one another, arms raised, forming an arch between them. As opposites, each one supports the other in equal strength, responsibility, and companionship.[5]

Ezer ("helper") appears twenty-one times in the Old Testament, often describing God as the only helper who is fiercely strong, powerful, and successful. *Ezer* comes to the rescue when the rest of the world walks away powerless: "I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help (*ezer*) come? My help (*ezer)* comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121: 1-2). "There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through

the heavens to your help (*ezer)*, majestic through the skies" (Deuteronomy 33:26). Eve is Adam's *ezer kenegdo*, which suggests that she is determinedly faithful to Adam no matter what. Implicit in this description is a relationship of mutual love, respect, and cooperation that flowers into profound intimacy and knowledge.

Notice in the creation story of Adam and Eve that the basic human need for equal companionship is illustrated before the need for sexual relations. Not until Genesis 4 does Adam "know" his wife through physical intimacy. The biblical term "to know" captures a closeness that deepens within, but transcends, the sexual aspect of marriage. Just as two become one flesh, two become intertwined in every aspect of life. As friends, lovers, and partners, the possibility of life-affirming intimacy emerges. It is an arena of knowing and being known, graced with love and acceptance, that encourages the other person toward wholeness. This intensity of love and knowledge in monogamous marriage, writes Naomi Harris Rosenblatt, "parallels the intensely committed relationship between one human and one God."[6]

A loving marriage of knowing and being known by another person necessitates our moving beyond being squeezed into society's mold, to a life Parker Palmer calls an "inner understanding of the other, which comes from empathy; a sense of the other's value, which comes from love; a feel for its origins and ends, which comes from faith; and a respect for its integrity and selfhood, which comes from respecting our own."[7]

MISUSED KNOWLEDGE

Such intimate marital knowledge sometimes backfires, however, falling far short of the divine ideal. Betrayal, hurt, and manipulation for selfish ends can displace love's comforting trust. "Knowledge is power," wrote Francis Bacon, and the power of intimate knowledge combined with strength and equality can be misused and abused.

Such was the case in the loving yet tumultuous marriage between Isaac and Rebekah. After their classic romantic meeting in the fields of the Negev, Isaac "took Rebekah and she became his wife; and he loved her" (Genesis 24:67b). In the context of the story in Genesis 24, his love seems to mean far more than sexual union: he delighted in who she was and in her beauty. From that initial meeting, Isaac was fiercely loyal and devoted to Rebekah. His love reflected a quiet and deep certainty. Rebekah mirrored this kind of love for Isaac as she comforted him after his mother's death. At this point in their relationship they reflected the divine plan for marriage: mutual help and support and a wonderful quality of *knowing* that sustained them through difficulty.

But as the fragrant bloom of their romance faded, they used their knowledge of one another to manipulate. Rebekah chose to break the practice of primogeniture, the cultural mode of protecting the family unit and its goals, and conspired against Isaac and Esau to fulfill her own goal of Jacob's suc-

cess (27:5 ff.). Perhaps she had learned the art of betrayal well from Isaac himself, who earlier had protected himself at her expense in Gerar. There, he attempted to pass off Rebekah as his sister to King Abimelech in order to save his own life (26:6-11). The piercing wails of Esau floating throughout the house and Isaac's tormented trembling that shook its walls were echoes of Rebekah's tears and despair, born of Isaac's betrayal of her long ago and held within her breast for years.

Scripture tells us that despite their mutual betrayal of trust and love, Isaac and Rebekah never forsook one another. Perhaps they were able to refocus their loyalties on a higher plane than their once all-consuming selfish desires. Perhaps he rued growing apart from her and taking their initial love for granted. Or perhaps she realized that revenge leaves a bitter taste. Maybe he thought with grave disappointment, "I know who she is for I am just like her." Could this depth of knowledge—a knowledge and intimacy reflecting God's initial design—have become the catalyst for hope of a deeper love, one that prompted each to forgive the other?

THE CHOICES WE FACE

In our marriages we face the choice of using the power of intimate knowledge for good or evil: to stay when it would be easier to leave, to lose one's life for the sake of another, to choose the higher calling, to live as Christ, to serve as life-affirming opposites to draw one another toward the salvation of wholeness. It is this journey of faith and choice that keeps us from hurting one another more often than we do. As each partner makes this daily, sometimes difficult, choice for good, he or she becomes more whole, creating a marriage reflecting God's intention. It is a noble calling, one in which we find our life by losing it.

We face the choice of using the power of intimate knowledge for good or evil: to stay when it would be easier to leave, to lose one's life for the sake of another, to serve as life-affirming opposites to draw one another toward the salvation of wholeness.

No marriage will be perfect this side of eternity. In *The Warrior, the Woman, and the Christ*, G. A. Studdert-Kennedy describes marriage as a "joyous conflict" of "self-conscious persons who rejoice in one another's individualities and through the clash of mind on mind and will on will work out an ever-increasing but never finally completed unity."[8] As we bring our individual selves to marriage, we learn along with Palmer that "the self is above all communal, and its communality draws on 'everything we have got.'"[9] Perhaps we resonate with Sybil's view of her family in the

film *The Family Stone*. When asked angrily by her future daughter-in-law Meredith, "What's so great about you guys?" she replies, "Uh, nothing…. It's just that we're all that we've got."[10]

And all we've got is more than enough, especially if at the end of life we can say tenderly and lovingly, "I know who she is." Or "I know who he is."

NOTES

1 Tony Campolo told this story in his sermon, "It's Time…To be Christ's Presence in Our Community," at the 2003 Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Fort Worth, TX.

2 William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 116."

3 Naomi Harris Rosenblatt, "The First Rebel," *Women of the Bible,* U.S. News and World Report, Special Collector's Issue (2006), 5-17.

4 Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "The Bible and Women: Bane or Blessing?" *Theology Today*, 32:3 (October 1975), 222-233.

5 See the "Ezer Kenegdo" word study at *www.godswordtowomen.org*.

6 Rosenblatt, 6.

7 Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 53.

8 Cuthbert A. Simpson, "Introduction and Exegesis," *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 1, (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1952), 500.

9 Palmer, 53.

10 *The Family Stone*, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2005.

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What God Has Joined Together

BY DAVID INSTONE-BREWER

Thanks to recent research in ancient Judaism, we have a better understanding of the Pharisees' question of Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" We find Jesus and Paul were in perfect agreement. They both forbid divorce unless it is based on biblical grounds.

The treasures found by Indiana Jones are boring compared to the fabulous discoveries made by two elderly widowed sisters in the 1890s, Agnes Lewis and Margaret Gibson. After unexciting marriages to Scottish lawyers, during which they passed the time by learning ancient languages, they decided to set out on adventures in the Middle East. Their knowledge of Syriac, Aramaic, and other languages helped them gain entrance to St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai where they found more valuable manuscripts than the monks knew what to do with. The butter dish at one meal turned out to be fashioned from a fifth-century Syriac Gospel!

Such discoveries spurred them to seek out other neglected manuscripts, and after following several leads they went to an old synagogue in Cairo where they found a Geniza (a rubbish room for sacred manuscripts) that had not been cleared out for a thousand years. They gained permission to take the oldest manuscripts to Cambridge University, where they arrived in several tea chests —so many, that scholars have only recently finished the work of identifying and cataloging them all. Their hoard included a copy of the Damascus Document, later also found at Qumran, where we find the sect's views on marriage, as well as a wealth of early Jewish marriage contracts which list the biblical grounds for divorce. These and other such discoveries have now enabled us to understand the question that the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" (Matthew 19:3).

Another example of heroic scholarship is Jacob Neusner, who set himself the monumental work of analyzing ancient rabbinic literature, as found in the Talmuds and Midrashim, in the light of modern textual criticism. Several decades and over a thousand books later (yes, he has personally written and edited over a thousand books), his painstaking and laboriously detailed work has given scholars the tools and confidence to identify the earliest traditions within this literature. Many traditions date back to New Testament times and these have now enabled us to understand the answer that Jesus gave to the Pharisees' question about divorce.[1]

Jewish rabbis were debating a new and very popular form of divorce called the "Any Cause" divorce, which implies that their question to Jesus should be understood as "Is it lawful to use the Any Cause divorce?"

Before these discoveries, there were two main ways to understand Jesus' teaching on divorce. The traditional church teaching, still followed by the Catholic Church, is that Jesus allowed divorce for only one cause, adultery, and that he only allowed remarriage after the death of a partner. This creates a contradiction with the Apostle Paul, who specifically allowed divorce only if it was carried out by a nonbeliever. Most Protestants have "solved" this by maintaining the traditional understanding of Jesus but adding Paul's teaching as a second route to divorce. The second main interpretation, which was favored by many scholars, was that Jesus totally disallowed divorce and that the New Testament church added these two exceptions for practical reasons.[2] The great regret, by almost all theologians, was that the church had not also added divorce for abuse and abandonment. Many modern interpreters have attempted, with varying success, to argue that biblical teaching implied that divorce was allowed for these additional grounds, while others, notably Luther, allowed divorce in such circumstances for reasons of common sense.[3]

Thanks to recent research in ancient Judaism, we now have a better understanding of Pharisaic thinking than did the second-century church whose interpretation of Jesus' teaching on divorce became the traditional doctrine. When the Pharisees asked Jesus "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" the early church thought that the question meant "Is divorce ever lawful?" We now know that Jewish rabbis at the time of Jesus were debating a new and very popular form of divorce called the "Any Cause" divorce, which implies that their question to Jesus should be understood as "Is it lawful to use the Any Cause divorce?"[4]

JESUS AND THE DIVORCE DEBATE

Hillelite Pharisees invented this new form of divorce by dividing up the scriptural phrase "a cause of indecency" (translated as "something objection-

able" in the NRSV), which is the ground for divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1. They said that this phrase included two grounds for divorce: "indecency" (i.e., adultery) and "a cause" (i.e., any cause). They emphasized their conclusion that "a cause" meant "*any* cause" by saying that you could divorce a wife even if she burned a single meal. This was, unsurprisingly, considered controversial, and early rabbinic traditions record the debate that they had with their rivals, the Shammaite Pharisees. The Shammaites agreed that "indecency" meant "adultery" but argued that "a cause of indecency" should be regarded as a single phrase and should not be divided up to produce an extra ground for divorce. They said that the whole phrase meant "nothing except adultery."[5]

In this rabbinic debate we find the origins of two phrases used by Matthew when he recorded the Pharisees' debate with Jesus. They asked him about the new Hillelite "Any Cause" divorce, and he replied with the Shammaite slogan, "nothing except adultery."[6] This does not mean that Jesus was a Shammaite, but he agreed with them (as most modern exegetes would) that you should not artificially divide up a phrase in order to create a new ground for divorce. These terms and the whole debate were very familiar to Jesus and the listening crowd, for whom this was an important and practical area of theology.

Mark does not bother to include these two terms in his account because his readers would have mentally inserted them in any case. Mark records the question in an abbreviated way, which was probably the way it was originally expressed: "Is it lawful to divorce your wife?" (Mark 10:2). This abbreviated version is like the question "Is it lawful for a sixteen-year-old to drink?" to which any modern reader would mentally append the words "alcoholic beverages." These additional words are unnecessary because without them the question is absurd—one would die without anything to drink. In the same way, Mark's readers would mentally append "for Any Cause," because it was absurd to ask if divorce itself was legal—divorce was legislated in the Law of Moses as in all other ancient law codes.

If Jesus was being asked about the new Any Cause divorce and if he answered with the well-known phrase "nothing except adultery," what did he mean? Unless Jesus was trying to deliberately mislead his listeners, he presumably meant the same thing that others in the crowd would have meant when they used this phrase in this context. When the Pharisees used this phrase in the divorce debate, they meant that the words "a cause of indecency" in Deuteronomy 24:1 mean "nothing but adultery." They did not mean that there are "no grounds for divorce except adultery," which is how we have traditionally understood these words when spoken by Jesus. They believed that Scripture also allowed divorce for neglect and infertility. Infertility was a ground for divorce because the command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:22, 28) made it the duty of every Jewish male to marry and have children. Jesus specifically ruled out this ground for divorce by stating (contrary to Hillelite and Shammaite teaching) that marriage and procreation were optional (Matthew 19:12). But Jesus was silent about the grounds for divorce based on neglect.

Neglect was the normal ground for divorce before the Any Cause divorce was invented and before the increase of adultery in "this generation" (Mark 8:38; Matthew 12:38; 16:4; cf. m. Sot. 9:9), which was probably due to the presence of Roman soldiers in the first century. Neglect was defined on the basis of Exodus 21:7-11, where a slave wife is guaranteed "food, clothing, and love" and allowed her freedom from the marriage if these are neglected. It was assumed that if the lowest of society had these rights, the rest of society certainly shared them. Therefore anyone (man or woman) who suffered neglect could demand a divorce. In contrast to divorces for adultery or for Any Cause that could only be brought by a man (since they were based on Deuteronomy 24:1 that refers only to men), divorces for neglect could be brought by a woman.[7] Men had to provide the food and wool, or money to buy these, while women had to prepare them by cooking, sewing, and weaving. The rabbis defined the minimum owed by each spouse and even the minimum amount of lovemaking that could be cited as neglect. They debated about these details, but no rabbi ever questioned the validity of divorce for neglect.[8] Evidence for the general application of this law is found in surviving marriage certificates (which often list the possible grounds for divorce) and divorce certificates.[9]

Why was Jesus silent about the most important ground for divorce—neglect? Did his silence imply that he disagreed with it, or that he agreed with it?

Why was Jesus silent about the most important ground for divorce? Did his silence imply that he disagreed with it, or that he agreed with it? Arguments from silence are notoriously difficult: Jesus was silent about the law that rebellious teenagers should be stoned (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), but he was equally silent about the laws against rape. However, his silence in this case is difficult to ignore, because Jesus chose to be vocal about so many aspects concerning divorce. He was asked a simple question about his views on the Any Cause divorce, and yet his reply (Matthew 19:4-12) concerned many other matters: he criticized polygamy (which all Jews except the Qumran sect affirmed);[10] he denied that divorce was compulsory for adultery (which all Jews affirmed);[11] he denied that procreation was a commandment (which all Jews except perhaps the Qumran sect affirmed); and he emphasized forgiveness for broken marriage vows rather than divorce.[12] Jesus was clearly keen to highlight all the aspects where he disagreed with current Jewish theology on divorce and marriage, even if they were tangential to the question he had been asked. His silence on divorce for neglect is therefore deafening. As far as we know, there was no branch of Judaism that denied the provisions of neglect in Exodus 21:10-11, and yet Jesus did not mention any disagreement with it. The natural conclusion is that Jesus agreed with the provisions of this law and its application.

PAUL AND THE DIVORCE DEBATE

Paul, unlike Jesus, did affirm the regulations based on Exodus 21:7-11 when he reminded the Corinthians that they were obligated to provide their spouses with material provisions (1 Corinthians 7:32-34) and conjugal rights (7:3-5). Paul normally based his ethical commands on Scripture[13] and when he didn't, he said so (e.g., 7:10, 25), and Exodus 21:10-11 is the only place where these regulations could originate. Presumably this law is also the foundation of his teaching that a believer who is abandoned may be regarded as divorced (7:15), because abandonment implied neglect. Paul had a different response when a believer abandoned his or her spouse—he ordered that the believer should attempt reconciliation and should avoid remarriage which would prevent reconciliation (7:11). In the Roman world, any separation with the view to breaking up a marriage was automatically considered to be a legal divorce. This divorce-by-separation was, according to Paul, not permitted for a believer, presumably because it is not based on biblical grounds for divorce. However, when a believer suffered divorce-by-separation against his or her will, Paul allowed the believer to consider this as a valid divorce. The reason for these different approaches appears to be pragmatic—Paul could command a believer to return to his or her spouse, but he could not command an unbeliever. Therefore, if the unbeliever departed (i.e., they carried out a legal divorce-by-separation), the believer could be considered to be a victim of neglect, which was a biblical ground for divorce. In the modern world where believers can also be unresponsive to the demands of church discipline, Paul presumably would extend this provision to all victims of divorce against their will.

When we understand this Jewish background, we find that Jesus and Paul are in full agreement on divorce. Both Paul and Jesus were against no-fault divorce—i.e., divorce without proper biblical grounds (in the Roman world the no-fault divorce was the divorce-by-separation and in the Jewish world it was the Any Cause divorce).[14] Both affirm the biblical grounds for divorce when they are asked specific questions about it. Jesus is asked about Deuteronomy 24 and affirmed that it refers to divorce for adultery (but not anything else like "any cause"). Paul is asked if believers can abandon their nonbelieving spouses[15] and replies with the scriptural regulations against neglect as in Exodus 21:10-11. We cannot infer from Jesus' silence that he was against divorce for neglect any more than we can infer from Paul's silence that he was against divorce for adultery.

CONCERNS ABOUT REMARRIAGE

Were Jesus and Paul equally in agreement on remarriage? On first reading, Jesus appears to regard all remarriage as adultery, as though divorce does not end a marriage, while Paul appears to allow remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:15. Some regard the freedom referred to in 1 Corinthians 7:15 as the freedom to separate or the freedom to be divorced without remarriage. However, if Paul was affirming this he would be saying nothing, because in the Roman world an

abandoned spouse is already fully and legally divorced. It is much more likely that this freedom is a reference to the words that are found in all Jewish divorce certificates and many Graeco-Roman ones: "You are now free to marry any man you wish." This wording is found in rabbinic traditions (m. Git. 9:3) and on the Masada divorce certificate of A.D. 72, as well as being quoted in 1 Corinthians 7:39 where Paul extends these same rights to widows.[16]

Jesus was stating, in effect, that anyone with an Any Cause divorce was still married, so if they remarried they were committing adultery. He was rejecting the Any Cause divorce in the most shocking way possible.

Jesus' refusal of remarriage and Paul's allowance of it are normally reconciled by saying that remarriage is allowed only after the death of a spouse (which is specifically allowed in 1 Corinthians 7:39 and Romans 7:2), even though Paul nowhere tells believers to remain unmarried until their former spouse's death. This is a problematic solution, because it demands that believers should break the Roman law that divorcees should remarry within eighteen months.[17] This effectively would put believers at the mercy of their neighbors who could bring charges and be awarded a proportion of their property upon conviction. No doubt believers would be willing to suffer this if it was regarded as important for the faith, but it would be strange for such a demanding command to be hidden in implications and silence without a specific instruction from Paul that they should disobey the Roman law. Paul's silence should therefore be regarded as agreement with the status quo of both Old Testament and Roman law—i.e., allowing remarriage.

We have to reassess Jesus' teaching on remarriage in the light of his rejection of the Any Cause divorce. If his debate with the Pharisees concerned this new ground for divorce, his conclusion that remarriage was adultery was presumably also a reply to this question. He was stating, in effect, that anyone with an Any Cause divorce was still married, so if they remarried they were committing adultery. We can now see that Jesus was rejecting the Any Cause divorce in the most shocking way possible—by stating that remarriage after an Any Cause divorce was equivalent to adultery! This is similar to his teaching that anger is equivalent to murder and lusting is equivalent to promiscuity.

The Any Cause divorce was probably the most common form of divorce by the time of Jesus, and by the second century it completely replaced all other types of divorce. The Any Cause divorce already was so widely accepted during the first century that when Joseph considered using it in order to avoid the publicity of a trial of Mary, this was considered a "righteous" act (cf. Matthew 1:19).[18] This means that when Jesus criticized those who had remarried after divorce, he implicated virtually all remarried Jews. Therefore, when Luke and Matthew wanted to abbreviate Jesus' teaching into a couple of sentences, they

were able to present the conclusion that 'any man who remarries commits adultery' and, because most divorced people remarry, 'he causes his wife to commit adultery' (Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:18). Jesus was not saying remarriage *per se* was adulterous, but that remarriage after an invalid divorce (such as an Any Cause divorce) was adulterous, because the person was still married.

Paul said the same thing. He commanded the believer who had used the Roman divorce-by-separation to remain unmarried, because their divorce was not based on any scriptural grounds and was therefore invalid. But when a divorce was based on valid grounds (such as neglect by being abandoned), Paul allowed remarriage. He continued to regard death as the normal way to end a marriage, and twice when he speaks about the end of marriage, he mentions only death (1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2), though without ruling out that marriage can also end by divorce. In both passages, moreover, it would be inappropriate to mention divorce because in 1 Corinthians 7 he was addressing widows and in Romans 7 he used marriage as an illustration of the relationship of a Jew with the Law—and the Law would not, of course, break his marriage vows and cause a divorce. Paul, therefore, does not rule out remarriage after divorce, except for believers who are using a no-fault divorce.

A practical matter which remains unclear in the New Testament is whether someone who divorces without biblical grounds can remarry. Did Jesus literally mean that this was adulterous, or was this rhetorical hyperbole like 'he may as well wear a millstone and jump in the sea' (Matthew 18:6) or 'gouge out your eye' (Matthew 5:29)? Also, when Paul forbids remarriage to someone who has used divorce-by-separation to abandon their partner and tells them to attempt reconciliation, did he forbid remarriage in order to punish them or in order to make reconciliation possible? If it is the latter, are they allowed to remarry if their former partner accepts the divorce, so that reconciliation becomes impossible? There is uncertainty in both Jesus' and Paul's teaching about whether to allow remarriage to those who have divorced their partners without biblical grounds, if their partners subsequently refuse reconciliation or remarry.

During the history of this debate, a lot of emphasis has been laid on the lifelong nature of marriage, even going so far as teaching the impossibility of ending a marriage by divorce. It is good and right that a marriage should be lifelong because, as Jesus emphasized, this was what God wanted. But it is also unfortunately true that not all marriages last a lifetime, and sometimes continuing the pretence after a marriage has died is as ugly as the walking dead. Phrases like "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24; cited in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:8) and "let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9) emphasize that marriage *should* last a lifetime, but they do not mean that marriages are guaranteed to last. When Jesus spoke about "those whom God has joined," he used the imperative to order them "do not separate," or possibly "you should not separate," but it is impossible to translate this imperative as "you cannot separate." In other words, it is not impossible to break marriage vows and thereby provide grounds for a divorce, but it is always wrong to do so. And the phrase "one

flesh" does not indicate an indissoluble bond that makes people married in God's eyes for their lifetime, because it is also used in 1 Corinthians 6:16 to describe a union with a prostitute. The phrase is used there in order to emphasize the seriousness of sexual sin, but there is no implication that someone becomes married to a prostitute in God's eyes, so that they may not subsequently marry anyone else. Both of these phrases point to the ideal that marriage should last a lifetime, while recognizing the unfortunate fact that marriages can end.

CONCLUSION

If we understand the New Testament through the eyes of a first-century Jewish reader, we find Jesus and Paul in perfect agreement, while addressing different audiences. Both forbid divorce unless it is based on biblical grounds. Both affirm the biblical grounds which they were asked about—Jesus, the ground of adultery, and Paul, the grounds of neglect. Jesus took the opportunity to criticize many aspects of the Jewish theology of marriage that he disagreed with—including infertility as a ground for divorce, allowing polygamy, and compulsory divorce for adultery. Jesus taught forgiveness rather than hasty divorce, though he agreed that a hard-hearted partner who repeatedly broke marriage vows unrepentantly could be divorced. Paul's emphasis was that marriages to unbelievers were sacred in God's eyes and that no believer should cause a divorce by neglecting their obligations or by abandoning their spouse.

NOTES

1 These earliest traditions will be easily accessible in the volumes of *Traditions of the Rabbis in the Era of the New Testament (TRENT)*. See *www.T-R-E-N-T.com* for details of the series.

2 See Gordon J. Wenham and William E. Heth, *Jesus and Divorce*, updated edition (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2002), though it is significant that Heth now supports the position presented in this article.

3 See the survey of historical approaches to the problem in David L. Smith, "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley," *Trinity Journal* 11 NS (1990), 131-142.

4 So called in Philo *Spec. Leg*. 3:30 (II 304), "Another commandment is that if a woman after parting from her husband for any cause whatever…" (*kath én an tuché prophasin*); and Josephus *Ant*. 4.253, "He who desires to be divorced from the wife who is living with him, for whatsoever ground…" (*kath hasdépotoun aitias*). The variation in Greek phrases suggests that there was no standard translation of the vague Hebrew word *davah* which was used in the rabbinic debates.

5 Their debate is recorded in three similar versions at Mishnah Git. 9:10, Sifré Deut. 269, and Jerusalem Talmud Sot. 1:2, 16b.

6 The Shammaite slogan occurs in two slightly different versions, which mirror the two versions in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. The unusual Greek for "not but" (*mé epi*) is an exact translation of the Hebrew (*ela im*) and the word for "unchastity" (*porneia*) has the same broad meaning as the vague term *ervah* in Deuteronomy 24:1.

7 She could ask a rabbinic court to extract a divorce certificate from her husband. Theoretically the man had to do so voluntarily, so the rabbis kept pushing him till he volunteered (m. Arak. 5:6).

8 Mishnah Ket. 5:5-9 contains debates about how much food, clothing, and love had to be supplied in order to avoid the charge of neglect.

9 Only two Jewish divorce certificates have survived from the first two centuries. The

Masada divorce certificate (*papyrus Murabba'at* 20) was written by a man and the Selim divorce certificate (*papyrus Se'elim* 13) was written by a male scribe on behalf of a female client—though when it was first translated, the text was emended to look as though a man had initiated it. See David Instone-Brewer, "Jewish Women Divorcing Their Husbands in Early Judaism: The Background to Papyrus Se'elim 13," *Harvard Theological Review*, 92 (1999), 349-57.

10 Jesus added the word "two" to Genesis 2:24 and used the same proof texts for monogamy as found at Qumran. For details, see my "Jesus' Old Testament Basis for Monogamy," *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North*, edited by Steve Moyise, JNTS Supplement 189 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 75-105.

11 The Pharisees asked "why did Moses command…" and Jesus replied "Moses permitted…" (Matthew 19:7 f.), though this contrast is lost in Mark 10:3 f.

12 His use of "hard-heartedness" would be recognized by his listeners as a reference to Scripture because this word was invented by the Septuagint translators and was not used in normal Greek. The only place where this word is used in the context of divorce is Jeremiah 4:4 where God explains why he divorced Israel (see Jeremiah 3:8) because of her hard-hearted refusal to repent after breaking her marriage vows so many times with the idols. Therefore, when Jesus said that Moses allowed divorce for hard-heartedness, his hearers would understand this as a criticism of the rabbinic demand for divorce after adultery, and an emphasis on forgiveness for a repentant partner, though recognizing that divorce is sometimes eventually necessary, as it was in the case of God and Israel.

13 Brian S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums, 22 (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1994).

14 Strictly speaking, the Any Cause divorce did need to cite a fault, but this could be as minor as "she is not as pretty as when I married her" (m. Git. 9:10), so this is equivalent to a "no fault" divorce.

15 This is the main topic of 1 Corinthians 7. Paul starts by criticizing a saying of theirs that promotes celibacy (7:1-9), then tells the woman who has left her husband to return (7:10-11) and warns others that God recognizes their marriages to nonbelievers (7:12-16).

16 This is probably an argument against levirate marriage, where a childless woman has to marry her brother-in-law in order to have an heir. Paul's argument appears to be: If a divorcee has the right to choose their new husband, then surely a widow should have this right. His stand against levirate marriage was in line with a general unease with this law among Jews of the time.

17 The *lex Julia de maritandis de ordinibus* of Augustus was introduced because divorce was regarded as a way to avoid the responsibilities of marriage and rearing citizens for the empire. The law also said that all widows and widowers of childbearing age should remarry within twenty-four months.

18 All other forms of divorce required proof of the fault—the adultery, the neglect, or childlessness—which had to be assessed by three judges. The fault for an Any Cause divorce could be so minor that no proof was required.

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Equality in Christian Marriage

BY LYDIA HUFFMAN HOYLE

For nearly two thousand years, most Christians found support in Scripture for the belief that God ordained men to be leaders of women in the church and in the home. Two books reviewed here raise questions regarding the validity of basing this male headship model on early Christian teachings.

For nearly two thousand years, most Christians found support in Scripture for the belief that God ordained men to be leaders of women in the church and in the home. According to this view, God established a hierarchy with himself at the top, men in the middle, and women holding up the bottom. This way of ordering life was taken for granted by medieval Catholics as well as Reformation Protestants. Although there were dissenting voices, this was the teaching of both established churches and the majority of sects. The two books reviewed here raise questions regarding the validity of basing this male headship model on early Christian teachings.

Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy, edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004, 528 pp., $25.00) responds to the historically entrenched assumption of male superiority by extensively rethinking both of the biblical texts used to support a hierarchical view and the theological and cultural issues raised by the biblical texts. This collection of twenty-nine essays has a dual focus. Some contributors explore the question of the proper role of women in ministry. Although this is an issue that continues to be a topic of much discussion at least among evangelical believers, this review will draw on the second central focus of the book—the question of

equality in marriage.

The editors and their team of contributors approach their task with a clear conviction that "both the world and the church urgently need to hear and take to heart the message of biblical equality, because it is at once true, logical, biblical and beneficial" (p. 13). Although they hope their writing will foster a dialogue, it is clear from the start that the authors are confident that the hierarchical teachings that have permeated Christian doctrine for two centuries were supported by cultural assumptions, not biblical mandates. They are hopeful that this book will encourage evangelical Christians in the traditional camp to rethink their positions and to celebrate the God-given gift of gender equality.

Groothuis and Pierce begin with a helpful historical grounding for the debate. Two chapters then review the roles of women in Christian history and how women have ministered effectively even within a hierarchical framework. A third chapter follows the history of a minority movement among evangelicals which since the 1970s has struggled to promote biblical equality in the church and in the home. Many of the authors of the remaining chapters of the book have a place in this history. This is a real strength of the book: we hear the voices of noted theologians, historians, and biblical scholars who have given a portion of their careers to exploring this topic.

As evangelicals addressing an evangelical audience, the authors soon turn their attention to the biblical texts. Although their opponents in the male leadership camp might argue to the contrary, these writers are clearly scholars who hold a high view of Scripture. All of the passages traditionally used to silence women and press them into secondary roles in the home and church receive careful analysis. In addition, the biblical scholars explore the scripture passages that point toward an egalitarian view. Two chapters are committed specifically to the question of gender roles in marriage. I. Howard Marshall, a noted New Testament scholar, discusses "Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage." He particularly addresses the passages in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5 that outline the conduct expected of wives and husbands (as well as of children and fathers and of slaves and masters.) According to Marshall, Paul is speaking to an audience that has clear hierarchical assumptions about marriage and is seeking to move them toward a "love-patriarchalism" (p. 195). The call for wives to submit is simply a plea for these women to do what is expected of them by society. The call to husbands to love their wives is where the text moves away from social conventions. If a husband acts in love, this will necessarily change the way he expresses his authority. Instead of making demands of his wife, he will be willing to sacrifice for her good. Although, Paul assumes that this self-sacrifice will occur within a patriarchal marital structure, his teaching does not require such a structure. In fact, Marshall argues, the "patriarchal authority of the husband is so transformed by the command to love his wife that it ceases to be exercised in the old way" (p. 202). The ultimate result is a

mutual partnership marriage. Because the concept of partnership marriage would have carried Paul too far from his cultural moorings, it would have been impossible for him to have offered this teaching.

Marshall thus focuses on the trajectory of Paul's teaching. While Paul is assuming a hierarchical relationship between husband and wife, this is not necessary for contemporary believers. Marshall believes that this recognition of progress in revelation is consistent with the nature of the Bible. Like many other scholars, Marshall points to the way slavery is addressed in the New Testament to provide light on the issue of women. Paul's writings do not deny the legitimacy of the practice of slavery but by placing slaves and masters equally under Christ, the writings lay the groundwork for a move away from slavery. A similar progression is seen in the marital relationship. The call of the Gospel to sacrificial love and the ongoing work of the Spirit in the Church enable contemporary Christians to move beyond the patriarchal structures of the first century.

Peter H. Davids, a missionary and scholar, offers a somewhat similar conclusion in his article on 1 Peter 3:1-7. This passage, like those in Colossians and Ephesians, is something of a "household code" that outlines the duties of those who dwell together. In the case of 1 Peter, however, the instructions are given specifically to Christian women whose husbands are not Christian. The author of the epistle encourages the women to demonstrate their faith by their reverent and chaste behavior. Then, in a strange twist, he holds up the example of Sarah who "obeyed Abraham and called him Lord" (3:6). It is odd, Davids says, that the Genesis texts that speak of Sarah never mention that she calls Abraham "Lord." (In Genesis 18:12 she refers to Abraham as her master, or lord, but Davids notes the "statement is an unbelieving response to God and indicates no particular submission to Abraham.") In several instances, Sarah seems something less than obedient as well. Thus, it appears that 1 Peter is building on contemporary noncanonical Jewish writings about Sarah and calling women to model "culturally appropriate behavior" (p. 234). Today, the behaviors viewed as problematic in 1 Peter (braiding hair, wearing gold) are no longer signs of sexual promiscuity. Similarly, modern societies do not give all authority to husbands. Therefore, Davids concludes, to fulfill the intention of the writer of 1 Peter, contemporary Christians should be faithful to their spouses and participate as equals in their marriages whether their husbands are Christians or not.

Building on the argument established by Marshall and Davids regarding the biblical support for equality in marriage, Judith and Jack Balswick expand on what it means to have a "partnership of equals" (p. 448). They believe that the language couples use to describe their relationship (e.g. "male leadership" or "equal regard") may not actually describe the realities of the marriage. Ultimately, according to the Balswicks, equality (or the lack thereof) is demonstrated by the distribution of power in a relationship. Utilizing sociological theory, the Balswicks argue that Christian couples

should not seek to gain personal power over the other but rather work to empower each other. The locus of authority should rest in the relationship the two share. Although the Balswicks' chapter jumps rapidly from topic to topic (it has the feel of a condensed book), the authors offer not only practical advice but social scientific support for many of their ideas. Ultimately, the Balswicks argue, a marriage that claims equality of partners should demonstrate that claim as a witness to the love of God.

While *Discovering Biblical Equality* is clearly written as a response to those who believe that the Bible upholds a hierarchical marital arrangement, *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship? The Equal-Regard Marriage and Its Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004, 141 pp., $15.00) actually allots roughly half of its pages to those who oppose the idea of an "equal-regard" marriage. This book, edited by David Blankenhorn, Don Browning, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, is something of a written debate that brings to the table a diverse array of Christians. In it we hear the voices of thoughtful Protestants and Roman Catholics, conservatives and liberals. All address the issue of gender relationships in the family not only from differing theological and ecclesiological perspectives but also from the vantage point of a number of disciplines and occupations. The result is a book well suited for stimulating discussion. It could easily form the core of a small-group or class study of the issue. Everyone could find support within the book for their own point of view as well as reasons to rethink the conclusions they have previously reached.

David Blankenhorn introduces the topic by briefly discussing marriage as a social institution. According to Blankenhorn, marriage, from its inception five thousand years ago, reflected "the domestic institutionalization" of patriarchy. Even though it has carried this baggage, Blankenhorn argues, marriage has benefited men, women, children, and society as a whole. For it to continue to do so, Christians must address important theological questions regarding how they can best understand gender relations in the family and practical questions regarding how to best connect fathers to their families. This book is an attempt to do just that.

Like a debate that brings to the table a diverse array of Christians, Does Christianity Teach Male Headship? will stimulate discussion. Everyone can find support for their own point of view as well as reasons to rethink the conclusions they have previously reached.

In the first chapter, Don Browning follows a line of reasoning similar to that of Howard Marshall. He compares the household codes found in Ephesians with those of Aristotle and notes the radical biblical calls to mutual

submission and love of wife that stand in contrast to the more patriarchal teachings of Aristotle and other philosophical writers of the period. Like Marshall, he sees a trajectory away from patriarchy in the biblical texts. Browning, however, like other authors in this collection, is not content to address Christian marriage in theory only. He is moved by the fact that so many children in America have little or no relationship with their fathers. This withdrawal of fathers complicates the issue for Browning. Ultimately, he believes the answer lies in calling husbands to moments of self-sacrifice with the goal of maintaining marriages of "equal regard" (p. 11).

Other proponents of the equal-regard marriage add their voices to the chorus. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen finds in creation a God-designed "mutual interdependence." The fall tragically transformed this relationship into one of domination, Van Leeuwen writes, but Jesus brought to humanity a "redeemed vision" of right relationship between men and women. According to Carolyn Osiek, early Christians assumed but did not teach male headship. Like Marshall, she sees the household codes in the New Testament taking a "bold step forward" in their portrayal of Christian families (p. 27). Other essays by John Witte, Jr., and Lisa Sowle Cahill look at the way male headship in marriage has been maintained in Protestant traditions and denied by Pope John Paul II. A final essay by Bonnie Miller-McLemore, a feminist pastoral theologian, repeats some of the earlier arguments forwarded by others in respect to the biblical texts and offers answers from the discipline of feminist theology to questions about headship.

Five critics of the equal-regard marriage outline their response to the arguments of the advocates. Several seem to be responding to a previous book by Browning and others entitled *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997, 2000). John W. Miller and Maggie Gallagher are most concerned that the major problem of male ambivalence toward fatherhood will not be solved by an "androgynous" ethic of equal regard (p. 72). W. Robert Godfrey quotes extensive passages of Scripture and argues that the teaching of the Bible regarding men and women is internally consistent and plain in affirming male leadership. Allan C. Carlson finds the supporters of "equal-regard marriage" guilty of embracing a limited canon of Scripture and devaluing the self-giving nature of Christian love. Daniel Mark Cere, a Catholic scholar, argues that the question of male headship in marriage is not one that can be answered by either Scripture or tradition. Therefore, Christians should press forward toward the mutual subjection encouraged by Pope John Paul II, acknowledging that the issue is ultimately an ethical rather than a theological concern.

The book closes with a final defense by Browning. In it he responds to all the critics and, thus, the equal-regard voice gets the last word.

Discovering Biblical Equality and *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship?* are two radically different books. Although both approach the question of

equality in marriage, the first book carefully builds an argument across twenty-nine chapters that is directed toward those who hold more traditional views. Although written by scholars, the language is generally clear and accessible to most readers. The second book is more concerned with the broad practice of marriage in our culture. The essays are brief but overlapping and sometimes difficult to follow. Readers seeking personal clarity on the issue at hand should turn to the first book. Readers anxious to study the topic from a variety of disciplinary perspectives should examine the second.

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Where Do We Go from Here?

BY CAMERON LEE

Do the changes in the institution of marriage bode well for the future? That remains in dispute. By encouraging us to put our current situation in its sociohistorical context, the three recent contributions to the marriage conversation reviewed here help us build a constructive Christian ethic of marriage.

Much has changed in the twenty-seven years since my wife and I made our vows to God and to each other. In the voluminous literature on the contemporary family, indeed this is the only constant: the acknowledgement that things have changed. Do these changes bode well for the future of marriage? That remains in dispute. Our values regarding the institutions of marriage and family often become deeply engrained sources of contention, and Christians are not exceptions to this trend. But mere debate tends to be polarizing, foreclosing possibilities for constructive dialogue. How Christians engage in moral reflection about marriage is therefore a pressing issue for our age.

Each of the three recent contributions to the marriage conversation reviewed here, in its own way, helps build a constructive Christian ethic of marriage. Each encourages thoughtful Christians to put our current situation in its sociohistorical context, enabling more self-critical reflection about our moral commitments as individuals, couples, and congregations.

In *Marriage and Modernization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003, 280 pp., $30.00), theologian and ethicist Don Browning points to the corrosive effects of the latter upon the former, a thesis that has been explored by many sociologists in recent decades. Following Max Weber, Browning defines

modernization as "the spread of technical rationality into the various domains of life" (p. 5). With modernization comes a variety of social pressures that alter the cultural landscape in which families interpret and enact their commitments: globalization, industrialization, and urbanization, to name the usual suspects. Summarizing the sociological evidence, Browning writes:

> Modernization and globalization have led to the heightened economic insecurity of many families, the domination of domestic life by the cost-benefit logic of the market, less economic dependency of the husband and wife on each other, more divorce, and more non-marital births. Almost everywhere, they have been accompanied by less marriage, less parental time with children, the increased economic liability of children to their parents, increased poverty of single mothers and their children, and a growing absence of large numbers of fathers from the lives of their children. (p. 30)

Added to this is the postmodern uncertainty that comes from the awareness of other cultures and family patterns, making one's own assumptions about marriage seem highly relative.

Such arguments in themselves, of course, are not new. The question that animates the book is how Christians should respond. Browning notes that while sociologists agree that marriage is being transformed or disrupted worldwide, they differ in their recommendations. Some believe modernization cannot be stopped, and therefore advocate the creation of social policies to buffer its effects. Others, like David Popenoe, argue for nothing less than "a new moral conversation that would lead to a cultural rebirth of marital commitment" (p. 20). But most seem to ignore the fundamental role that religious traditions can and should play in such a cultural rebirth. It is this gap that Browning's book seeks to address.

In this regard, the subtitle of the book, *How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do About It*, is somewhat misleading. The actual impact of modernization and globalization is assumed and briefly described, but is not the focus of the book. Nor does Browning intend to provide authoritative solutions and policy recommendations. Rather than tell his readers "what to do about it," He is more concerned to help shape how they think. The book functions as a demonstration project in practical theology, applied to the problem of modernization's reshaping of conjugality. He hopes to encourage a deeper level of practical moral thinking in order to stimulate the kind of cross-disciplinary dialogue needed to sustain a new "cultural work" regarding marriage. Although his particular interest is in what Christian theology might contribute to this conversation, Browning casts an ecumenical net, arguing that a global reconstruction of marriage will require the moral and imaginative resources of the world's major religious traditions.

The book is an extension of Browning's previous work in practical theology, in which he posits five interacting levels of "practical-moral thinking": (1) a

metanarrative or "visional" level (in which religious meanings may be a particularly relevant resource), (2) an "obligational" level of moral principles, (3) a level of assumptions about "basic human needs" that constitute premoral goods, (4) a level which examines the larger ecology of "social and environmental constraints," and finally (5) the practical implications that follow upon the other four levels (pp. 162, 228). For an example of this multi-level approach, see Browning's article "Christian Marriage and Public Policy" in this issue.

Browning employs this model first implicitly and then explicitly throughout the book, examining a multidisciplinary array of contributions to a practical theology and ethics of marriage. The hope is that articulating our assumptions about marriage along these five dimensions will not only enrich moral discourse but enable productive dialogue, since disagreements at a policy level may reflect deeper differences in another dimension of practical thinking. Deepening how we think about marriage "should help us specify more accurately where the real conflicts can be found and help us discover more precisely how to address them" (p. 185). Given our ambiguous relationship with modernity, Browning's volume helps point the way forward for the Church and concerned Christians to engage in more self-critical moral analysis.

A related volume that supports this practical vision is *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* by legal historian John Witte, Jr. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, 315 pp., $29.95). The book is part of a series emanating from the Religion, Culture, and Family Project at the University of Chicago Divinity School, funded by the Lilly Endowment and directed by Don Browning. It is a scholarly exercise in the history of ideas, demonstrating the interdependence of Western theological and legal traditions and how they have understood the institution of marriage. Witte's source material includes hundreds of documents and court records; endnotes and references account for nearly a third of the book's pages. He has done family scholars the enormous favor of organizing these archival sources into a highly readable and coherent narrative.

Witte devotes one chapter to each of five religious and philosophical traditions. The Roman Catholic metanarrative viewed marriage as a *sacramental* union under the jurisdiction of the Church and canon law. Three Protestant perspectives later rejected Catholic sacramentalism. Martin Luther, on the basis of his two-kingdom theory, viewed marriage primarily as a *social* estate, a relationship between husband and wife in the present that should be governed by civil authorities. Calvin, like Luther, also noted the civil importance of marriage, but argued instead for a *covenantal* perspective that broadened the range of social stakeholders in the marriage union to include the couple's parents, witnesses, the minister, the magistrate, and, of course, God—each party representing an aspect of the covenant. The Anglican *commonwealth* model extended the metanarrative scope even further. Beyond its social and covenantal aspects, marriage was divinely ordained to train individuals in the habits and beliefs that would make them good citizens and good Christians. As a microcosm of

the larger commonwealth, families would reflect in their own internal structure the hierarchies of church and state. The political upheavals of the seventeenth century, however, undercut this hierarchical understanding and led to more egalitarian formulations. John Locke's understanding of marriage as a voluntary *contract* between two individuals prefigured the perspective of Enlightenment thinkers, who based their understanding of marriage on the philosophical foundations of deism, individualism, and rationalism.

Seen in their historical contexts, the continuities and discontinuities among the perspectives become clear. Even when theologians and jurists directed fierce jeremiads against other traditions (e.g. the Reformers' attacks against the perceived errors and excesses of Catholic canon law), this was not a wholesale rejection. Certain religious values, naturalistic assumptions, and points of law carried over from one tradition to the next, albeit in an altered narrative framework (as in level one of Browning's practical theology).

The book's historical narrative is enlivened by case studies that demonstrate the interplay of religion, law, and politics. We are reminded, for example, that the Anglican reformation of marriage law was precipitated by England's break from Rome over the conjugal machinations of Henry VIII. Occurring at about the same time, in Germany, the case of Johann Apel gives a stunning (to modern Western sensibilities) portrait of the power of the church over against the state, in matters that are now considered to be personal and private.

Such cases bring our own moral assumptions about marriage into bolder relief. Each of the five perspectives within the general movement from sacramental to contractual understandings represents an attempt to integrate theological concerns with legal and practical ones that are still relevant today. How should marriages be formed and sustained? Under what conditions, if at all, should marriages be allowed to dissolve? Who decides? How we answer these and other related questions will depend on the kind of taken-for-granted ethical assumptions Witte identifies. Although he spends precious little space on the practical implications of his intellectual history, his book does the important spade work on the major marriage paradigms of Western culture as seen through the lenses of Browning's first three levels of practical moral thinking, with careful attention to sociohistorical context (Browning's level four). Thus, the book exhibits the thick moral analysis needed to undergird the kind of critical cultural conversation that Browning envisions.

How should marriages be formed and sustained? Under what conditions, if at all, should marriages be allowed to dissolve? Who decides? How we answer such questions will depend on the kind of taken-for-granted ethical assumptions Witte identifies.

As valuable as both of these books may be for intelligent participation in contemporary debates about the family, however, it is doubtful that many Christians outside the professional ministry or the academy will be willing to work their way through either of them. In contrast, *Getting Marriage Right: Realistic Counsel for Saving and Strengthening Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2004, 272 pp., $14.99) by ethicist David P. Gushee is written for a more general Christian audience. The "counsel" that the book offers, however, is not the kind found in self-help books for struggling couples. Indeed, as Gushee himself insists: "*There is no technical solution to marriage*. There is no five-step secret plan that can ensure marital success" (p. 108, italics in original). His concern, rather, is to revitalize the church's understanding of marriage and divorce so that it may embody a kingdom-oriented, countercultural alternative to the deinstitutionalization of marriage itself.

The book originates in Gushee's experience as a professor counseling his students, who one after another told him their stories of growing up in broken families. Not surprisingly, the well-being of children becomes a central moral touchstone for his reconsideration of Christian reflections on marriage and divorce. "Our divorce culture…remains sentimental about children even while we sacrifice their basic needs—and the basic requirements of justice—on the altar of our self-interest," writes Gushee, "and if it is a justice issue, biblical people have no choice but to respond on behalf of injustice's victims" (p. 80). Such injustices are poignantly illustrated through excerpts from interviews with children of divorce.

Gushee's central metaphor for what Browning referred to as a "cultural work" is the rebuilding of the marriage "cathedral":

> Both cathedrals and social institutions take a long time to build and are not easily brought down. Marriage moved toward being deinstitutionalized under the impact of a series of exceptionally important cultural developments. Like a building damaged from all sides, marriage weakened dramatically under the cumulative impact of these cultural blows in ways that no one anticipated. (p. 25)

The first two chapters offer a brief historical overview of these developments, which include the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the rise of divorce and cohabitation, and the uncoupling of sex from procreation. This summary establishes the problematic weakening of the cathedral's internal structure, against which Gushee proposes a constructive theological and ethical program.

The marriage cathedral will need to be rebuilt, he argues, on the basis of four "pillars." First is the recognition of the purposes for which God created the institution of marriage. Gushee identifies four such creation purposes in the Genesis account: companionship, sexual union, the procreation and nurture of children, and support of the larger social order. These purposes apply to all married persons, Christian or not, and are supported by the contemporary emphasis on the teaching of relationship skills. The second pillar is an under-

standing of marriage as a covenant, which provides the narrative backdrop for sustained commitment and faithfulness within the family, even in the face of marital suffering. Third is a focus on how marriage might become "the context for the vigorous practice of kingdom living" (p. 177). The fourth pillar is closely related to the third: an ecclesiology in which the church's mission in the world is understood to include a living witness to the first three pillars. It is here that Gushee offers some of the most valuable practical advice of the book. He outlines twelve strategies by which a local congregation might begin to incarnate such a vision, including an emphasis on character formation and sound congregational relationships, and the provision of biblical teaching and service ministries oriented toward the strengthening of marriages. A final chapter suggests some of the public policy implications of his work.

If we accept that Christians concerned about the contemporary state of marriage need to do the kind of practical-moral thinking that Browning suggests, then Gushee's book represents one example of someone who has done just that. The themes of covenant and kingdom, for example, provide the deep narrative of his approach, while his emphasis on the creational purposes of marriage identifies the premoral goods common to all who marry. Throughout the volume, and especially in Gushee's use of covenant language, one can hear the echoes of the historical traditions Witte surveys, brought once again to life for our day and age.

So where do we go from here? I confess that Gushee's book is the one that resonates most closely with my own writing and teaching, arguing for the transformation of marriage and family life from the inside out by calling the church to reimagine its countercultural role as an embodiment of God's kingdom. Merely bemoaning the current state of marriage is fruitless. Churches must take the lead in reexamining how their own cultural commitments shape moral vision, and they must take deliberate and concrete steps to cultivate the virtues and skills needed to sustain healthy marriage partnerships—particularly for the sake of the next generation.

But even more is needed, given the global scope of the problem. Browning is right to call for ecumenical dialogue. Marriage is a created good, and the resources needed to help strengthen it are not limited to the Christian faith alone. The virtues of humility and peacemaking will not only make us better marriage partners, but better ecumenical dialogue partners. In that sense, we must all become better practical theologians.

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