

***Kingdom Sex:
Toward a Covenant-centered
Theology of Human Sexuality***

Paul Rhodes Eddy

**Professor of Biblical & Theological Studies
Bethel University (St. Paul, MN)
&
Teaching Pastor
Woodland Hills Church**

p-eddy@bethel.edu

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The Need for a Covenant-centered Christian Theology of Human Sexuality

In an interview with *Christianity Today* magazine, Wheaton College president Philip Ryken notes three of the biggest theological challenges facing evangelicals today, particularly in higher education settings. The first on his list: “Human sexuality and a Christian understanding of marriage and sexual behavior.”¹ Within the church today, the quest for a distinctly Kingdom approach to specific issues of sexual ethics and behavior is often undertaken without the support of an integrated, coherent, biblically-grounded *theological vision* of human sexuality. Without some sort of common ground about the basic contours of a theology of human sexuality, any given Christian community will quite likely have difficulty coming to consensus on the various, often controversial, ethical questions connected to human sexuality – and thus little hope of living corporately as a counter-cultural witness to a Kingdom way of expressing our sexuality.²

William Loader notes that, when it comes to sexual ethics, the Apostle Paul’s “primary argument is that what led to wrong sex was wrong theology.”³ This is as true today as it was in Paul’s first-century Mediterranean world. To put the matter differently, for many Christians today, the biblical teachings about sex make little sense in light of the master narratives and sexual scripts that actually guide our daily lives.⁴ This is largely because these narratives and scripts have been absorbed from contemporary, (post)modern Western culture and its wide-ranging media influence. According to statistics, most Christians are aware that these alternative scripts of our contemporary culture are in significant conflict with the New Testament (NT) narrative and the sexual vision that

emerges from within it. And yet, statistics also reveal that, for example, most young (i.e., ages 18-29), unmarried Christians report having engaged in pre-marital sex nonetheless.⁵

These sorts of findings are given a penetrating analysis by Mark Regnerus in a study of the intersection of sex and religion in the lives of American youth. In his book, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*, Regnerus notes that “religiosity almost always makes a difference.”⁶ However, Regnerus found that

just because it makes a difference does not mean that religion motivates adolescents’ sexual decision making Something more is required for religion to make a more apparent difference in the sexual lives of adolescents, and *that something is a plausibility structure* – a network of like-minded friends, family, and authorities [i.e., a community] who (a) teach and enable comprehensive religious perspectives about sexuality to compete more effectively against ubiquitous permissive sexual scripts, and (b) offer desexualized time and space and provide reinforcement of parental values⁷

As Regnerus observes, key to such a plausibility structure is the presence of a comprehensive, compelling Christian perspective on sexuality. And yet, his research also found that “few adolescents, no matter how religious, [are able to] articulate a deep, nuanced sexual ethic.”⁸

Related to this, the Barna Group has reported on the primary factors that lead young people to leave the church. One-sixth of the respondents reported that, sexually speaking, they “have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them.”⁹ What seems to be lacking in their church experience is any clear articulation of “how to live up to the church’s expectations of chastity and sexual purity” while living within a culture that constantly offers an opposing vision.¹⁰ It appears that Caroline Simon is right on track

when she notes that “[s]exual insight and sexual integrity rise and fall together.”¹¹ In line with these reflections, Stanley Hauerwas observes that what the Christian community desperately requires is

an account of life and the initiation into a community that makes intelligible why [our] interest in sex should be subordinated to other interests. What [we] demand is the lure of an adventure that captures the imagination sufficiently that for Christians “conquest” comes to mean something other than the sexual possession of another [M]arriage and singleness for Christians should represent just such an “adventurous conquest”¹²

One might hope that a simple turn to Christian ethicists would solve these problems. But with the virtual cottage industry of books on human sexuality from a professed Christian perspective, and the staggering range of conflicting views and proposals found within them, chaos reigns here as well. When viewing the field in its entirety today, it is difficult to contest Hauerwas’s assessment at this point: “Current reflection about sexual ethics by Christian ethicists is a mess.”¹³

Clearly, there is a significant need for the contemporary church to move beyond predictable clichés and single-verse proof texts on one hand (an all-too-common pattern of response among conservative Christians), and, on the other, to get past the largely uncritical Christianization of the virtually aimless sexual mores of our contemporary American culture (as typified in more theologically liberal sectors of the church today). Our current situation requires a renewed quest for a compelling articulation of a robust, counter-cultural Kingdom witness to God’s *agape*-centered, covenantal design for human sexuality – one that leads to an actual communal embodiment. It is toward this end that

the following reflections on a *theology of human sexual intimacy/union* are offered for consideration.¹⁴

A few words about the organization of this study: I have tried to keep the body of the text focused upon the central ideas that, together, constitute the proposed theology of sexual union, and thus relatively free of tangentially related concerns. But there are a number of very important related issues that require comment along the way – including the need to respond to a variety of other perspectives and concerns about our topic at hand, often at a more academic level – and so I have included a substantial section of endnotes that will serve this purpose.

A Word on Theological Method

In stating that my goal is to move toward *a communally embodied counter-cultural Kingdom witness* to God's covenantal design for human sexual intimacy/union, I am self-consciously signaling my indebtedness to the Anabaptist tradition and its intuitions as I make my way through this theological exploration.¹⁵ The bulk of this study is structured around five large-scale theological concepts/principles that build upon each other, and that, together, are informed by a theological vision grounded in a meta-narrative drawn from the Christian scriptures. At the center of this theological vision is a very specific view of God – one grounded in the revelation of the Triune God in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and developed in the NT and later

(proto)orthodox Christian tradition.¹⁶ Following Jesus' attitude toward the OT and the early church's orientation toward the NT, this theological vision is guided by the conviction that the scriptures are divinely inspired, and, properly interpreted, are authoritative for Christian faith and practice – including its vision and practice of human sexuality.¹⁷ Simply put, an appropriately Christian approach to sexual intimacy/union will be deeply informed by the Christian scriptures.¹⁸ On one hand, this means that informed exegetical analysis will, at times, have a place in this study. But scriptural engagement does not stop here for the Christian theologian. Rather, a distinctly *theological interpretation of scripture* will also play a role.¹⁹ Here, the revelation of the Triune God in Jesus Christ, and the broad meta-narrative of the bi-testamental Christian scriptures that emerges from reading them through a Christocentric lens, will serve as hermeneutical guides.²⁰ As Craig Bartholomew reminds us: “Any theological hermeneutic worth its salt must be Christocentric And precisely because a theological hermeneutic is Christocentric it will be trinitarian.”²¹ And so, as we explore the question of a biblically grounded vision of human sexuality in this study, both the explicit scriptural teachings about sexuality and the wider meta-narrative within which they rest must be attended to, with the help of a Christologically oriented, Trinitarianly sensitive hermeneutic. The words of Marva Dawn on this matter serve to point us in the right direction:

Because we are God's people, the Christian community will ask careful questions about the kind of sexual character we want to nurture. How does God's word guide us as we seek the truth about our sexuality and God's design for its expression? What has been revealed by the biblical accounts of God's people in their sexual choices, in their instructions to each other? What virtues are displayed? What commands are issued that we ignore to our peril?

Especially the narratives of both Testaments are valuable because they expose the sexual idolatries that have endured throughout human history. The

Scriptures also demonstrate the intertwining of other kinds of idolatry – greed, powermongering, covetousness – with sexual idolatry.²²

As foundational as the Christian scriptures are to the theological enterprise, we never read them in isolation. Along with many others, I have found the rubric of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of scripture, church tradition, reason, and experience (the last two components, it seems to me, naturally signaling ‘culture’ as well) to be a helpful guide for the theological process.²³ Following the historic Wesleyanism’s arrangement of the quadrilateral, I follow in the wake of those theologians within the historic orthodox Christian tradition who are convinced that the scriptures hold a unique position of authority and theological normativity.²⁴ In embracing this conviction, I self-consciously identify – theologically speaking – as an evangelical Christian.²⁵

Toward a Covenant-centered Theology of Human Sexuality: Five Foundational Principles

1. The Triune-*Agape* Nature of God: The Source and Ground of Human Relationships

Whatever complexities and mysteries are involved in the doctrine of the Trinity, this much seems clear: the Triune nature of God reveals that at the heart of ultimate Reality – the Creator God himself – we find *differentiated Persons in an eternal, radically unified (i.e., a single “being”)* *agape-love relationship* (with the fully developed orthodox dogma of the Trinity being foreshadowed by such NT seeds as Mk 1:9-11; Jn 14:25-26; Jn 17:20-23).²⁶ In the case of the Triune God, this unitive *agape-love* constitutes a single Being: God is “one” (Deut 6:4-5; I Tim 2:5; I Cor 8:4-6; James 2:19) and “God **is** *agape*”

(I John 4:8, 16).²⁷ For this reason, historic orthodox Christianity has proclaimed that God is *three persons in one Being*. This is not bad mathematics – rather it is the mathematics of an *agape*-love so radical that it literally names the very unitive essence of the Creator-God. Stanley Grenz writes:

The doctrine of the Trinity forms the foundation for the Christian conception of the essence of God As the apostolic writer indicates, the essence of God is love Love, therefore, that is, the reciprocal self-dedication of the trinitarian members, builds the unity of the one God. There is no God but the Father, Son and Spirit, bound together throughout eternity Trinitarian “love” defines God’s inner life – God as God throughout eternity apart from any references to creation In that God is love apart from the creation of the world, love characterizes God. Love is the eternal essence of the one God. But this means that trinitarian love is not merely one attribute of god among many. Rather, love is the fundamental “attribute” of God. “God is love” is the foundational ontological statement we can declare concerning the divine essence Because throughout eternity and apart from the world the one God is love, the God who is love cannot but respond to the world in accordance to his own eternal essence, which is love.²⁸

And for the early Christians, this love of God was of a qualitatively different sort than other self-oriented forms of love. As the Apostle Paul puts it:

Agape is patient; *agape* is kind; *agape* 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. *Agape* never ends. (I Cor 13:4-8)

In short, *agape*-love is *other-oriented love-in-action that, despite how one feels in the moment, consistently chooses to promote the other’s ultimate well-being, even at cost to oneself*.²⁹ From a distinctly Christian perspective, we must add that the *agape*-love to which all Kingdom people are called is definitively modeled by Messiah Jesus – most specifically by his self-sacrificial death on the cross (e.g., John 3:16; 15:13; Rom 5:8; Eph 5:1-2; I John 3:16; 4:10).³⁰

The distinctiveness of the three Persons is as important as the fact that they constitute a single Being. In other words: the *otherness* of the three Persons – an otherness that is revealed to humanity in terms of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – prevents the unitive essence from collapsing into modalism (an over-emphasis on the “oneness” of God to the point where the robust three-ness of the distinct persons is lost; i.e., the single divine Person merely appears to us as three Persons), or into an undifferentiated theism (i.e., where the unique three-ness of God is engulfed by an all-dominating oneness). And so, both the differentiated otherness of the three Persons and the *agape*-oriented unity of the single divine Being are both absolutely essential to a Christian understanding of the Triune God.³¹ If the *unity* of the one God is compromised, then the Christian understanding of the Trinity is lost and is replaced by something like Tri-theism (three gods). On the other hand, if the differentiated Father-ness of the Father is confused or blended into the Son-ness of the Son, and so on for the Spirit, then the three distinct Persons of the Triune God are lost and ultimately replaced by an undifferentiated modalism. Three clearly differentiated Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who together are one divine Being – this captures the delicately balanced revelation of the Triune God.³²

But we are not left having to deduce the *agape*-centric nature of God merely from several biblical passages and considerations of the nature of the Trinity. Rather, the other-oriented, self-sacrificial *agape*-love of the Triune God was revealed by Jesus through his life, his teachings, and – ultimately and most radically – his death. For John, this is the message of the Gospel: “We know love [*agape*] by this, that he laid down his life for us”

(I John 3:16). And again: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). In Paul’s words: “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Dietrich Bonhoeffer concisely summarizes the consistent message of the NT beautifully: “Love . . . is the revelation of God. And the revelation of God is Jesus Christ Love is always the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”³³

Something absolutely essential follows from this revelation of God in Jesus as radically other-oriented, self-sacrificial *agape*-love for any Christian theology or ethic of sexuality worthy of the name: *We can be assured that whatever the Triune God calls his people to in terms of the expression of their sexuality, the driving motivation behind it is one of agape-love. And so it is a calling in which we as his people can ultimately trust and rest, regardless of the challenges that come with it.*

Excursus: Is God Gendered? – Questions naturally arise about the fact that the Triune God has been revealed to us as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” One of the main questions is whether this suggests that God is male gendered, and thus whether males image God more fully than females.³⁴ As many Christian scholars have pointed out, the answer to this question is, quite simply: No! Donald Hook and Alvin Kimel remind us that, in the typical “linguistic presentation” of the Bible, “God may possess masculine gender, but he is not male.”³⁵ More specifically:

(1) Genesis 1:26-27 states that God created humanity in his “image and likeness,” which includes both “male and female” equally.³⁶

(2) Jesus teaches that “God is spirit” (John 4:24). The Triune God is not embodied as humans are, and thus God is not sexed, i.e., is neither male nor female in anything like a physical, biological sense.³⁷ However, some might wonder if God’s creating humanity in his “likeness” as “male and female” (Gen 1:26-27; cf. 5:1-2) suggests that God is, in fact, gendered in a way similar to humans. But as Walter Brueggemann notes concerning this text:

Sexual identity is part of the creation, but it is not part of the creator. This text provides no warrant for any notion of the masculinity or femininity or androgyny of God. Sexuality, sexual identity, and sexual function belong not to God’s person but to God’s will for creation Sexuality is ordained by God, but it does not characterize God.³⁸

(3) However, while God is not male or female in the sense that we are, he does possess attributes that are imaged in both genders. Some think of God in scripture as only possessing attributes that fit more naturally with the male gender – e.g., Lord, King, etc. But this does not capture the full story. For scripture also reveals attributes or qualities of God that are portrayed as feminine in nature. For example, God is revealed to be like a protective and comforting mother to God's people (Deut 32:18; Isa 49:15; 66:7-13; cf. Isa 42:14; Hosea 13:8;). Again, God is likened to a mother bird watching (i.e., “brooding”/“hovering”) over her chicks (Luke 13:34; Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; Isa 31:5; cf. Matt 23:37). More particularly, the Holy Spirit seems, at times, to reflect a feminine dimension that complements the “Father” and “Son.”³⁹ For example, the Spirit is portrayed as “brooding” like a mother bird (a literal translation of the Hebrew term in Gen 1:2). Finally, in ancient Jewish tradition, the Holy Spirit can be found linked with Wisdom, which in Proverbs 8-9 is personified as a woman (e.g., Wisdom 9:17).⁴⁰ Caution is required here, however, for it would be a mistake to claim that only one Person of the Triune God reflects feminine qualities.

(4) The point emphasized thus far is that one sex/gender is not more “God-like” than the other. That being said, the historic Christian church has typically followed the pattern of referring to God in masculine terms – i.e., as “God” and not “Goddess” – and of addressing the first Person of the Trinity as “Father” and not “Mother.” Reasons have been given for continuing this tradition that do not call into question the equality of the sexes. First, if humans were to speak of God in *non-gendered* terms, we would inevitably portray him as *impersonal*. This is, no doubt, a sign of the limitations of human language. But, human language is all that we humans have! We cannot resort to calling God an “it,” for in human language, “it-ness” reflects an impersonal view of God – which is the very opposite of his Triune nature.⁴¹ Second, we must remember that in the ancient Jewish world, calling someone “Father” did not merely refer to their maleness. It also connoted qualities such as authority, wisdom, protectiveness and safety, etc. These are the kind of qualities that Jesus reveals about our heavenly “Father.” Third, there is the fact that in the ancient Jewish world, the ‘father-son’ relationship (similar to the term ‘first-born’; e.g., Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5) would include the concept of *inheritance*, which is an important and ubiquitous idea connected to the concept of salvation in the NT (e.g., Matt 25:34; I Cor 6:9; Eph 1:11, 14, 18; Heb 9:15; I Pet 1:4; Rev 21:7). Fourth, it has been pointed out that in referring to God in the masculine, we are not only embracing an important “grammatical aspect of the paradigmatic biblical narrative” through which God has “disclosed himself to Israel and the church,” but also, in the process of doing so, “this masculinity turns out to be ‘kenotic,’ an aspect of the divine self-emptying by which God divests himself of all majesty, dominion, and power in order to overcome the powers (masculine and otherwise) of this world.”⁴² Additionally, some have argued that the image of “Father” is more appropriate than “Mother” in the creation

account. A maternal image could easily lead one to think in terms of pantheism (i.e., the creation being birthed out of God's own body). A paternal image, however, mitigates any pantheistic inclinations, and is more compatible with an *ex nihilo* interpretation.⁴³

Whatever we say about these arguments, it appears that the most fundamental reason for Christians to retain the "Father" language regarding God is that this is the way in which Jesus revealed God to his followers. It is out of faithfulness to this revelation of God through Jesus that historic orthodox Christianity has followed him in this language usage. In the words of Ben Witherington and Laura Ice: "The evidence we have strongly suggests that the Christian usage of the Father language derives from Jesus' own usage of it and reflects the growing emphasis on matters Christological."⁴⁴ More specifically, given the Jesus tradition contained within the Gospels, there is an obvious and inherent narrative logic as to why Jesus would refer to God as "Father" and not "Mother." Witherington and Ice explain:

It is then not just the fact that Jesus set a precedent for his followers of calling God *abba* or Father that provides an important warrant for Jesus' disciples to use such language, though that is true. There appears to be a theological rationale for Jesus' use of such language, namely that he believed God truly was the one who generated his human nature in conjunction with Mary, through a miraculous virginal conception This belief could explain why Jesus spoke repeatedly, as no one else did, of "my Father" in heaven. Furthermore, it becomes apparent Jesus could not call God Mother, precisely because he had a human mother In other words, the choice of language ultimately seems to come out of the unique relationship Jesus believed he had with the Father, a paternal relationship that by another miracle, the miracle of being born of God, believers could have an analogous form of.⁴⁵

All of this being said, it is worth remembering with Elaine Storkey that, when it comes to the question of God and gender: "If language about God does not ultimately point away from gender and to the fundamental truth of divine love, then we have overwhelmingly missed the point."⁴⁶

2. Imaging the Triune God: The Creational Design and Vocational Calling of Humanity

The very first mention of humanity in the Bible reveals an important aspect of God's intention for this very special creature:

Then God said, "Let Us make humanity [*'ādām*] in Our image [*selem*], according to Our likeness [*dēmût*] So God created humanity [*'ādām*] in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male [*zākār*] and female [*ûnēqēbāh*] He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:26-28).⁴⁷

In this passage, we are briefly told of God's primary vision – and thus calling – for humanity as a species, and it focuses on the concept of being created as God's "image" [Hebrew = *selem*] and "likeness" [*dēmût*].⁴⁸ The NT also affirms humanity as the "image"/"likeness" of God (Jam 3:9; I Cor 11:7; cf. Col 3:10). To understand this purpose and calling, a few background issues must be explored.

a. The Function of a Divine Image in the Ancient World – The Hebrew term "image" [*selem*] frequently refers to a physical statue that functions as a *divine image*. The concept of a divine image was familiar to many cultures of the ancient Near East (i.e., Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Hittite Anatolia).⁴⁹ In this context, a community commonly saw itself as bound to a certain geographical locale with a specific god (or gods) that exercised dominion and influence over their lives. A god was represented by a physical "image." The two primary referents for a divine image were (1) *a sacred statue* (i.e., an

idol) typically found in the temple of the god in question, or (2) *a human king*.⁵⁰ These two phenomena – carved statue and human king – could intersect when a king would erect a statue in a certain region to represent his rule over that territory (e.g., Dan 3:1-5).⁵¹

The theory behind the creation and use of sacred statues is instructive. The statue was crafted by the people (through a process directed, they believed, by the god itself) to enable them to visually experience in the physical realm a shadow of the attributes and characteristics of the god who existed invisibly in the spiritual realm. Though often misunderstood in our contemporary western setting, it appears that ancient cultures did not believe that these wooden or stone idols were the sum-total of the god they worshipped. Rather, they believed that the idol was merely the physical representation of the divine spirit-being that it represented, that the god's spirit in some sense inhabited and animated the idol, and that the relationship between the god and its image/idol was so intimate that to bow before and sacrifice to the idol was in fact to bow before and sacrifice to the spirit-god that it represented.⁵² In other words, ancient people were convinced that whatever they did with and for their image was in fact accepted by the related god as being done with and for him/her. Connected to this, ancient Near Eastern cultures were convinced that when an image was to be made of a god, that god was had the divine authority to determine the nature and appearance of that image and how it would be constructed.⁵³ Interestingly, a human king could be regarded as a *living statue* of the god in question.

Today, many Christians believe that God commanded his people to not recognize *any* physical representation of himself. Actually, this is not quite accurate. God's prohibitions on this matter are stated in the first two commands of the "Ten Commandments": (1) "You shall have no other gods before Me." And (2) "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:3-5). In other words, (1) God's people are not to worship any "gods" other than the true Creator God, and (2) they are not to "make" any "idols," either to represent false gods or even to represent the true God himself. One often neglected reason for this second commandment becomes clear when understood in the context of Genesis 1: God has already made his own physical image to represent himself within the creation in a tangible, visible form – and that image/likeness is *humanity* (Gen 1:26-27).⁵⁴ As Old Testament (OT) scholars Karl Löning and Erich Zenger note: "According to the meaning of the Hebrew word *selem*, which stands for 'image,' humans are to be in the world as a kind of living image or statue of God."⁵⁵ And so, human beings – *all* human beings – have been tasked with functioning as the image – the "icon" – of the Triune God. In fact, living as images who faithfully reflect the attributes and character of God within the physical realm is our primary purpose and calling as a species. Once this point is appreciated, so many otherwise odd or confusing things said of the people of God in the Bible begin to make sense (more on this below).

b. What Type of Image Can Faithfully Represent the Triune God? – And so, God does not have a problem with having a visible image of himself in the physical world. In fact,

he created one for himself! One important concern, however, is that the image of God must reflect who he truly is, and therefore must meet certain criteria. Otherwise, people could easily be misled to think of God in an inappropriate manner. Two characteristics of an authentic image of the Triune God are reflected within the scriptures, beginning in the first two chapters of Genesis in seedling form and eventually flowering in the NT:

(1) God’s image must be “living.” – Over and over again, scripture reveals that when God rebukes Israel for making idols, or even when he rebukes the pagan nations for having idols, he describes these idols as mute, silent, and blind; he ridicules them for being made of wood and stone. In other words, two problems God has with idols made by human hands are these: First, they are made to represent other gods, false gods who cannot compare to the true Creator-God. In reality, all of the false gods are nothing more than fallen angelic spirits who are trying to rob the true God of the worship due him (Deut 32:7; Lev 17:7; I Cor 8:5). Secondly, and our focus here: when humans make an idol, it is always inanimate and thus *dead*. But God is a “living God” – a theme which is ubiquitous throughout scripture (e.g., Deut 5:26; Josh 3:10; I Sam 17:26, 36; II Kings 19:4, 16; Psa 42:2, 8; 84:2; Isa 37:4, 17; Jer 10:10; cf. 23:7-8; Dan 6:20; Hos 1:10; Matt 16:16; Mark 12:27; Acts 14:15; Rom 9:26; II Cor 3:3; I Tim 3:15; Heb 3:12).⁵⁶ In Paul’s words, the people of God are those who have turned “from idols to serve a living and true God” (I Thess 1:9). God is the “living God,” but as Jesus himself states, a corollary is also true: “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mark 12:27). Not surprisingly, therefore, the only appropriate image to represent the living God is a *living image* – a *living statue* of sorts. Since God is the only One who can give life, God had to create his own image – humanity. And humanity is an appropriate image/likeness of the

true God in part because we are “living” beings, just like the God they were created to represent. This helps explain why God was so angry with the Israelites when they “made” the golden calf at Mt. Sinai. The text clearly says that they were NOT worshipping a different god! Rather, we are told that they were worshipping “Yahweh” (Exodus 32:5). This means they were not violating the first commandment, but rather the second commandment – they had made an image to represent Yahweh. But like all human-made images, it was lifeless and dead. For this reason (among others), it was an abomination to God, in that it represented the living God as a mute, blind, motionless, and ultimately dead animal-god.

(2) God’s image must reflect the essence of his relational (Triune) nature –

From a Christian theological perspective – that is, viewed from the perspective of the revelation of the Triune God through Jesus Christ – not only must God’s image be “living,” it must also reflect the relational essence that is the Triune God. The original seeds of this idea are sown in the first chapter of the Bible (Genesis 1:26-27). In reflecting on these verses, Walter Brueggemann writes:

The statement in verse 27 is not an easy one. But it is worth noting that humankind is spoken of as singular (“he created him”) and plural (“he created them”). This peculiar formula makes an important affirmation. On the one hand, humankind is a single entity. All human persons stand in solidarity before God. But on the other hand, humankind is a community, male and female. And none is the full image of God alone. Only in community of humankind is God reflected. God is, according to this bold affirmation, not mirrored as an individual but as a community.⁵⁷

These seeds go on to sprout in the books of the NT, and, eventually, to fully flower in the early Christian tradition that follows from it. Along the way, there is an increasingly clear revelation that God’s essence involves *distinct, differentiated Persons who form a*

*unified, communal whole characterized by agape-love.*⁵⁸ And so, it is not surprising to see this theme progressively emerge in the biblical narrative: God's image is reflected in a unique and powerful way in and through healthy *human community* – differentiated persons bound as one through *agape-love*.⁵⁹ This biblical theme is perhaps most clearly seen in the words of Jesus' prayer to his heavenly Father, "that they [God's people] may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee . . . that they may be one, just as we are one" (John 17:21-22). And so, in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the "image of God" is seen to be not simply the image of just any generic God concept, but rather *the image of the Triune God* – as Thomas Smail puts it: "the *imago Dei* is indeed *imago Trinitatis*."⁶⁰

(3) Excursus: On Worshipping God, Not His Image – To say that God created humanity as his image is *not* to say that we are to worship God by worshipping each other!⁶¹ Jesus is very clear that "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Even in the Genesis text, this important distinction is maintained. As Catherine Beckerleg points out, in distinction to the surrounding Near Eastern cultures (i.e., Egypt, Mesopotamia), in the Genesis creation text the image of God "is intimately related to the divine but it is not God's equal . . . , in Gen 2:5-3:24 the deity and its images were clearly distinct."⁶² Rather, the point here is that God has chosen to create a visible image/likeness to function as a reflection and representative of God in the created realm – and that image is instantiated in human persons. This human-as-image is so closely tied to God that to desecrate the image is to desecrate God himself. This principle is ubiquitous in scripture: e.g., from the Noachic prohibition against murder as an act

worthy of death due to the fact that “in his own image God made humanity” (Gen 9:6); to the reminder of I John that “Those who say they love God and yet hate their brother are liars; for those who do not love a brother whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (I John 4:20-21; cf. Matt 5:23-24). And so, while the human “image of God” itself is not to be worshipped, by operating as the image and reflection of God in creation humans are to live in such a way that they lead others to honor, worship, and glorify the God whom they image (e.g., Matt 5:14-16).

c. Humanity as the Image of the Triune God: A Synopsis – Humanity’s purpose and calling as the image of God can be summarized as follows:

(1) Every human being is created in the image of God; no human being is exempt from this design plan and calling. It is true that, because of our fallen state and the innate self-centeredness that it brings, we are prone to live as covenant-breakers (= “sinners”) rather than covenant-keepers. But, while this has damaged our ability to fully and faithfully image the Triune God of *agape*-love, our imaging capacity has not been entirely destroyed. In fact, God’s salvation plan for humanity offers us the opportunity to be restored to our full capacity as faithful imagers of God.⁶³

(2) In contemporary theology, there are three primary ways in which the imaging aspect of human beings has been understood – and as many have noted, they need not be seen as mutually exclusive.⁶⁴

(a) Substantial View – Some believe that we primarily image God in that, like God, we are personal, rational, spiritual beings.

(b) Functional View – Others believe we primarily image God when we represent God as we carry out our vocational calling of “ruling” (properly understood in terms of stewarding, protecting, and guarding) the earth and its other inhabitants.⁶⁵ This was the first job description given to humanity (Gen 1:28; 2:15). The context of this calling is important for us to understand. As supreme ruler of the universe, God always desires to share his administration with others. He desires to rule the universe through relationship and delegated authority, rather than through a unilateral exercise of his power. We see this in God’s creation of angels who form a “divine council” in the heavenly realm which assists God in ruling over the cosmos (Psalm 82; 89:5-10; I Kings 22:19; Dan 7:10; Job 1:6; 2:1). We also see this approach to shared rulership when God created the first human beings and installed them as his vice-regents over the earth and its animals.

Note: Unfortunately, this calling to “rule” (*radah*) and “subdue” (*kabash*) the earth has sometimes been used to justify self-centered human exploitation of animals and the environment. But, in fact, good exegesis of this text in no way supports an interpretation that could ever justify such things.⁶⁶ Beyond that, to truly rule as God rules (i.e., as revealed in the ways of Jesus the Messiah-King) will mean that we care for the earth and its other inhabitants in a way that reflects a heart of servant-leadership that God himself models as he cares for us. From a Kingdom of God perspective, exercising dominion and rulership is not simply about exercising “power over” others (a vision of leadership that mirrors the ways of the world and the kingdom of darkness). Rather, as exemplified by the Triune God, true Kingdom rulership is primarily expressed in “power under” acts of

“kenotic” self-sacrificial love for, and service to, those whom one rules over (e.g., Phil 2:5-8).⁶⁷ This is the model of rulership and dominion that humans are called to exercise over creation, in the process glorifying the Triune God whose servant-leadership they reflect to the creation. And so, as OT scholar Terence Fretheim notes, the Genesis mandate to “subdue” (*kabash*) the earth is best understood as a call to bring “order out of continuing disorder,” while to “have dominion” (*radah*) represents a call to “care-giving, even nurturing, not exploitation.”⁶⁸

(c) Relational View – Finally, others believe we primarily image God when, like God, we enter into self-sacrificial, *agape*-love relationships with others.⁶⁹ From the perspective of the revelation of the Triune nature of God, this third perspective captures an essential element of our calling as “imagers” of God. Whenever we enter into and live out self-sacrificial, *agape*-love relationships with God and other creatures, we reflect and image the *agape*-love nature of the Triune God. In the context of the Genesis creation texts, it is the “male and female” dyad (Gen 1), joined in a covenantal bond (Gen 2), that has typically grounded this view. As expressed by Alistair McFadyen, the image of God is “paradigmatically male and female.”⁷⁰ Among others relationships, this imaging can happen in a wide variety of covenantal relationships, each of which has covenant terms and forms of love appropriate to that relational type, and all of which are to be undergirded by self-sacrificial *agape*-love. And so, God can be faithfully “imaged” in *agape*-love relationships between parents and children, marriage partners, friends, wider communities, etc.⁷¹

(3) While each of these three perspectives on the image of God is helpful, none of them, alone, is comprehensive, and none of them fully capture the *representational* aspect at the heart of the meaning of divine image in the ancient world – i.e., the sacred divine image/statue or king that both represents and mediates the invisible divine spirit/presence in the visible world.⁷² A robust understanding of humanity as the image of God should properly foreground this important dimension of ancient divine images. Part and parcel of this aspect of imaging God within the creation is the importance of the *embodied* nature of humans. Through the centuries, embodiment has often been neglected in considerations of imaging God, and this for several reasons. On one hand, the biblical tradition is clear that the eternal creator God does not have a “body” in the sense that creatures do. In the words of Jesus: “God is spirit” (John 4:24). On the other hand, the surrounding intellectual ethos of the early church – particularly Greco-Roman philosophy – tended to view the body as, at best, a hindrance to the flourishing of truly essential feature of humanity – the immaterial, immortal spirit. With these influences at work, it has been all too easy to at various points in Christian history to leave the human body – and therefore human sexuality – out of consideration concerning our calling to image God.

However, there has also been a counter-tendency at work in Christian history that recognizes the theological importance of human embodiment.⁷³ And there are very good reasons for this. To begin, the biblical concept of the image of God is, in fact, very clearly bound up with *human embodiment*. In Genesis 1:26-27, it is in the explicit context of “male and female” embodiment that humans are said to be created in the “image of

God”. Human embodiment is part of the “very good” creation that God spoke into existence (Gen 1:26-31). And in the NT, it is in his incarnate, embodied state that Christ is identified as “the image of God” (II Cor 4:4). Again, all of this makes perfect sense in the context of the ancient concept of sacred statutes and human kings as physical representations of spirit-gods. In brief then, it appears that embodiment is an essential element involved in the human vocation of imaging God within creation.

But as Jones and Yarhouse remind us, “We are not merely physical beings; we are engendered and hence sexual physical beings.”⁷⁴ And this is true for every human being – male and female, children and adults, married and single persons.⁷⁵ Sexuality is a remarkably complex phenomenon, having to do with biological aspects and constraints (i.e., genetics, reproductive organs, sex-related hormones, etc.), as well as emotional, psychological, and relational aspects (e.g., gender identity/roles and their culturally-diverse expressions, sexual desire/attraction, etc.).⁷⁶ Sexuality is not simply physical biology, but is integrated into every aspect of our being. As Hans Urs von Balthasar emphasizes, from a theological perspective human sexuality is to be seen “in ontological terms, and as embracing the entire human person on all levels of existence. The biological cannot be separated from the psychological or spiritual.”⁷⁷

(4) It has often been observed that, once the concept of humanity as created in the “image of God” is introduced in Genesis (1:26-28; 5:1-2; 9:6), this notion is never explicitly picked up again, let alone developed, in the rest of the OT. However, the concept clearly re-emerges in the NT (e.g., Jam 3:9; I Cor 11:7; Col 3:10), and undergoes further

development, one that centers on Jesus Christ. And so, in fleshing out a wider biblical concept of the image of God, the connection made in the NT between this “image” and Jesus must be kept front and center.⁷⁸ For, as the NT makes clear, the only human being who has ever fully and perfectly fulfilled the calling to “image” God is Jesus (II Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; cf. Phil 2:6-8; Heb 1:3; I Cor 15:45). For only Jesus lived a life of unwavering trust toward God and unbroken covenant-love relationship with God and others. As the true image of God, Jesus becomes the key to human salvation – that is, human restoration as the image of God. Rikk Watts explains:

Here then we see the locus of Jesus’ deity and humanity. Because he is in some mysterious way God himself among us, he can, through the indwelling Spirit, perfectly reflect the image of God. As the Son of man, he can not only deliver and restore us but also show us what it means to be truly human. And because the God who is the God of the living, not the dead, is faithful, Jesus’ resurrection announces the ultimate destination of all those who faithfully learn from him what it means to look like the God in whose image they were made.⁷⁹

And so, as his followers, we are being conformed to the “image” of Jesus, who himself is the perfect “image” of God (Rom 8:29; II Cor 3:18; Eph 4:23-24; Col 3:9-10; I Cor 15:45-49).⁸⁰

The above considerations offer a helpful context from which to begin to explore the main topic of this paper: namely the role that human sexual intimacy is to play in our vocational calling as “imagers” of God. We come one step closer to this question as we turn to the next area of consideration – the nature of the marriage covenant.

3. The Marriage Covenant: A Unique and Powerful Expression of the Image/Likeness of the Intra-Relational God

We turn now to an exploration of a covenantal vision of marriage, one decisively shaped by Christian scriptures and theology. It is my conviction that a Christian view of human sexuality and marriage that does not offer a central place to covenant relationship will typically end up departing from the biblical vision in significant ways.⁸¹ Contrary to our contemporary Western culture, marriage and sexuality in the biblical texts are not seen primarily as aids toward the individualistic self-fulfillment/self-expression of each partner. While individual blessing is part of the story, the Bible also views marriage and sexual expression as deeply corporate and covenantal in nature. As Gary Anderson notes:

Sexuality in the Bible is not a private affair among two consenting individuals. Marriage is a defining moment for the people [of God] as a whole. *To enter into the rites of matrimonial love is to embody the destiny of the chosen people itself* . . . And so every Jewish marriage is both a retrieval of marriage that crowned creation in Eden and a testament to the nuptial joy that will characterize the end of time when God restores his chosen people.⁸²

Due to the references in the Genesis creation texts, both the Jewish and Christian traditions have recognized sexuality and marriage as important aspects of God's design for humanity. And so, it is to the opening chapters of the Bible that we now turn.

a. The Human Marriage Covenant: The Primordial Biblical Paradigm (Genesis 1 & 2)

The first two chapters of Genesis offer two complementary perspectives on the creation of humanity as male and female.⁸³ As it turns out – from Jesus' words in the Gospels (Matthew 19:3-6; Mark 10:2-9), to Paul's words in his letters (I Cor 6:16; cf. Rom 1:26-27; Eph 5:21-33; I Tim 4:1-4) – the Genesis creation accounts function in the NT as a

presupposed grounding and compass for issues related to human marriage and sexuality.⁸⁴ William Countryman rightly notes that the Genesis creation account was so fundamental to Jesus' sense of God's purposes for the human sexes that he uses this text as a basis for critiquing other passages of the Torah (e.g., the teaching on divorce in Deuteronomy). "In this way, Jesus abolished one part of scripture, the divorce law, on another part of scripture, the creation accounts."⁸⁵ And so, for Jesus, when it comes to matters related to marriage, the creational texts of Genesis 1-2 "override or 'trump' Moses' concession to the hardness of heart in Deut 24:1-4."⁸⁶ At least when it comes to marriage and sexuality, Jesus operates with the conviction that "the created order" as expressed in Genesis 1-2 "is a guide for the moral order."⁸⁷ Thus, if we are to follow Jesus' example, the divine vision and intention expressed in Genesis 1-2 must be given a central and guiding role when considering issues of human sexuality.

Within these two chapters we find several statements pointing toward the idea that the marital one flesh relationship – designed to be inaugurated in the process of the human marriage covenant – is to be one of the consummate expressions of God's living, relational likeness. In Gen 1:26-27 we read: "So God created humanity in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." Here, when God creates his own "likeness" he does so by explicitly making "male and female" together.⁸⁸ Interestingly, this same connection of God's "likeness" with the male-female dyad is repeated in Gen 5:1-2. Janet Soskice Martin's reflections on this passage are worth noting:

Genesis 1.27, with its suggestion that male and female together are in *imago dei* has yet to be fully explored God's Godself is three in one, unity in

difference. Human beings in their createdness mirror this divine procession of love in being more than one, male and female. Christian theology must embrace without contradiction that all human being in *imago dei* [sic] and that women are different from men. This means that women were not made for men any more than men were made for women. The as yet unsung glory of Genesis 1.27-27 is that the fullness of divine life and creativity is reflected by humankind which is male and female, which encompasses if not an ontological, then a primal difference. And this difference is not by default or for pragmatic reasons but by divine plan.⁸⁹

In Gen 2, the creation of the male-female dyad is considered from a different angle in greater detail. After explaining the God-human covenantal relationship to *adam* (= human being) in the Garden, God makes an interesting statement: “It is not good for the man to be alone.” This phrase “not good” should jump off the page and grab the reader’s attention, because up until this point in the Genesis narrative, *everything* God has made he has proclaimed to be either “good” or “very good.” Now, for the first time, we are confronted with something in God’s good creation that God proclaims as “not good.” Theologically (more specifically, theological- anthropologically) speaking, an important question at this point is: *why* is Adam’s aloneness “not good.” It is commonly assumed that when God says Adam being alone is “not good” that he is simply making that assessment on Adam’s behalf – i.e., “Adam is lonely and that is not good.” But, read in its wider canonical-theological (and thus even Trinitarian) context, this can hardly be the full extent of the problem.⁹⁰

The “not good” of the human being’s aloneness must ultimately be seen in light of God’s design plan for *adam*. The human being is to reflect God’s image, but something is “not good” about the image when the single human being stands alone. A single individual human, alone, cannot fully reflect the image of the living, relational God in the same way

that humans-in-relationship can. “Adam,” the individual human, needs a “helper” (Hebrew = *ezer*) – which, read in context, is best understood as a *partner*, a mirror-image of himself and yet one that is differentiated from him – in order fully to reflect the image of God in the manner desired by God for this first couple.⁹¹ As Claus Westermann notes, the real concern of Genesis 2:18-25 is not simply the creation of woman per se, nor the attraction of the sexes, but rather the creation of humankind – and this “creature is humankind only in community.”⁹² Terence Fretheim elaborates on this observation when he fleshes out the implications of reading the “not good” of the first human’s aloneness (Gen 2:18) in the context of the likely reference to the divine council in Gen 1:26:

. . . aloneness is not characteristic of God, and hence the isolated human being would not truly be created in the divine image Only the human being as social and relational to other human beings is truly correspondent to the sociality of God and what it means to be created in the image of God.⁹³

Another way to express the point is this: the tragedy of Adam’s state of aloneness is not first and foremost his subjective feelings of loneliness, but rather his objective state of *incompleteness*. In his reading of Genesis 2, Grenz comments on the

close relationship between our sexuality and incompleteness. It is as sexual beings that we are incomplete. And because we are incomplete as sexual beings we become aware of our need to be supplemented by the other, an awareness that leads us to enter into community.⁹⁴

As the narrative unfolds, God goes on to bring all the animals before Adam to see if he can find such a “partner.” Adam “names” them all, but “no partner suitable for Adam was found.” And so, to correct the (image) problem, God performs the first human surgery, taking from the “man” (Hebrew - *ish*) a “rib” from which to construct another human being – “woman” (Hebrew - *ishsha*).⁹⁵ When Adam sees Eve, his response says it all:

“Now this is bone of my bone; flesh of my flesh.” As Walter Brueggemann has demonstrated, in the ancient Jewish context, this phrase can function as a covenant formula that essentially means “we are covenantally committed to each other in every situation and circumstance.” This idiom derives from the fact that “bone” can also mean “power”/”might,” while “flesh” can mean “weakness”/”frailty.”⁹⁶ Thus this phrase is similar to our traditional wedding vows which state that we will love each other “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health” This is confirmed by fact that the next verse also makes use of covenant terms: “leave” and “cleave” (“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife”). As Richard Davidson points out, the concept of “cleave” here signifies the idea of a “strong personal attachment” and is “often used as a technical covenant term for the permanent bond of Israel to the Lord” (e.g., see Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:1; Josh 22:5; 23:8).⁹⁷

The final step in vs. 24 involves the man and woman entering into a “one flesh” relationship, a term that refers to the creation of a covenant bond of community and loyalty, similar to a kinship/blood relationship. It is interesting to note that the “one flesh” union comes within the context of – in fact, follows immediately upon – the covenantal/marital language of “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh” and “cleaving.” That is to say, in terms of its divine intention, the one-flesh sexual union is part and parcel of the total covenantal experience of the marriage bond. All of this language together signals that the man and woman have entered into a covenant relationship. André LaCocque summarizes the important ramifications: “Thus, the two becoming ‘one flesh’ is model and prototype of all human kinships, while transcending them all.

*Covenant supersedes blood kinship.*⁹⁸ The imagery that expresses the process by which God creates a one-flesh relationship between the man and the woman is both amazing and revealing. God begins with one human being. He then divides the human, creating two out of the one. But then God immediately takes the two, and through the first human marriage covenant brings them together as one – literally as “one flesh” – once again. *The one became two only to become one again.* But, there is a significant difference between the first state of oneness and the final state of oneness.⁹⁹ In the final state, the one-flesh relationship leaves the *(re)unified humanity as two differentiated (male and female) persons-in-covenant relationship.*¹⁰⁰

From a Christian canonical-theological perspective, we can say that the first covenanted man and woman in Genesis 2 together image the Triune God in a unique fashion: They appear as *a reflection of a single being (one flesh) composed of differentiated persons-in-relationship (the male-female dyad).*¹⁰¹ In the words of Eastern Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov, the human covenant of marriage “is in the image of the Triune God, and the dogma of the Trinity [its] divine archetype, the icon of the nuptial community.”¹⁰²

Intriguingly, all other human relationships that image God (parent-child, friendship, communities, etc.) are possible only because of this first covenant relationship, for all humans owe their very existence to the fruitfulness that naturally flows from the male-female one-flesh relational union. The male-female marriage covenant will literally bring forth new human *life*, thus creating more human beings who will image God in a variety of other types of *agape*-love relationships. In this sense, the male-female marriage covenant relationship has the capacity to uniquely image the life-producing Triune

God.¹⁰³ The marriage covenant takes on an additional revelatory significance in that it reflects in a unique way the relationship that Jesus has entered into with his people as the divine groom betrothed to his corporate bride (more on this below). It is in light of such considerations that von Balthasar can conclude that the relational reciprocity between (maritally covenanted) man and woman “can stand as a paradigm of that community dimension which characterizes [humanity’s] entire nature.”¹⁰⁴

Note: On Imaging God in the Diversity of Human Relationships – It is important to reiterate, once again, that the forgoing discussion does *not* mean that one can only fully image God within the context of a male-female marriage covenant. In fact, the only fully perfect image of God – Jesus himself – never entered into a marriage covenant during his early sojourn (despite Dan Brown’s provocative suggestions to the contrary), and so he never expressed his imaging of God through this particular human relationship. Rather he imaged the intra-relational God in other forms of human relationship. And so too, among Kingdom people today, there will be those who follow Jesus’ example of not entering into a male-female marriage covenant, choosing instead to image God through participation in other forms of *agape*-love relationship. Thus, the claim being made here is not that the male-female marriage covenant is the only – or even the privileged – way that that humans image the Triune God. Rather, the claim is that the male-female marriage covenant is a unique and powerful way in which the intra-relationality of the Triune God is imaged within the creational context.¹⁰⁵ And yet, regardless of one’s human marital status while on earth, every human being was designed and called by God

to enter into an eternal marriage covenant with the divine Groom, Jesus, as part of the corporate bride of Christ. To this beautiful biblical theme we now turn.

b. The Temporary, Earthly Male-Female Marriage Covenant as a Shadow of the Church's Covenant-Marriage with her Eternal Groom, Jesus Christ

Throughout the Bible, the motif of the male-female marriage covenant emerges as a primary analogy of the type of covenant love-relationship God is seeking to share with his people. In the perceptive words of Walter Kasper: “the covenant between man and woman becomes the ‘image and likeness’ of the covenant between God and [humanity] . . . Marriage, then, is the grammar that God uses to express his love and faithfulness.”¹⁰⁶ The power of this image is rooted in the conviction that marriage itself is a covenant (Hebrew - *berith*), as paradigmatically presented in Gen. 2, and as affirmed in subsequent Jewish writings such as Prov. 2:16-17 and Mal. 2:14. The God-as-groom/Israel-as-bride analogy is used frequently in the OT.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, all too often the “adultery” analogy has to be used because of Israel’s constant unfaithfulness to God.¹⁰⁸ But nonetheless, God refuses to forever divorce his wayward bride. Though covenant-breaking curses occasionally fall upon Israel, God still offers hope of a “new covenant” that will arrive some day; a covenant that will literally write the wedding vows upon the heart of his bride, and so will empower her to live a covenant-keeping life (Jer 31:31-34).

With the coming of Messiah Jesus, this new covenant promise is fulfilled with the coming of the indwelling Holy Spirit. During his ministry Jesus presented himself as the (divine) “bridegroom.”¹⁰⁹ One of the most common features of Jesus’ ministry was his dinner parties – why did Jesus feast so often that he was eventually called a “glutton and a drunkard” by the Jewish religious leaders? When asked by the Pharisees why he and his disciples didn’t fast, Jesus answered them by saying that no one fasts at their *betrothal banquet* (Mark 2:18-20) – Jesus pictured his earthly ministry as an extended betrothal feast, after which he would have to “go away” for the betrothal period.¹¹⁰ During the betrothal period, Jesus said, his disciples would then “fast” from food. According to John 14, on the night of the crucifixion Jesus explained to his disciples that he had to “go to prepare a house” for them, and then would eventually return for them – the very words a newly betrothed groom would speak to his betrothed bride. The Apostle Paul tells us that believers have been “betrothed to Jesus” (II Cor 11:2-3). He also explains in Ephesians 5:25-27 that the covenant community of Jesus has become the (betrothed) bride of Christ who is being cleaned and transformed into a spotless virgin bride by Jesus himself. And in the Revelation, we read of our future marriage ceremony and wedding banquet with Jesus (Rev 19:7-9).¹¹¹ The book of Revelation ends with the “bride” (the church) saying to groom (Jesus): “Maranatha!” – “Come quickly!” (Rev 22:17). These are the very words that a betrothed bride would utter as she awaits the culmination of the long, often lonely, betrothal period. And Jesus’ response is: “I shall come quickly!” (Rev 22:20). These are the words of a passionate groom who awaits his Father’s command: “Son, the time has come to go and marry your betrothed bride!” (i.e., Mk 13:32). And so, in the same way that the male-female one-flesh marriage covenant reflects the image of the

living, relational God, so it also reflects the “one spirit” relationship that God has always desired to share with his image-bearing people (I Cor 6:17).

(c) The Marriage Covenant: Divine Intention and Purpose – A Synopsis

In her book, *Marriage: A History*, Stephanie Coontz argues that the primary purpose for marriage throughout most of human history focused on economic, political, and class concerns, while in the post-Enlightenment West the primary purpose has shifted to romantic love and intimacy.¹¹² Others have noted a more recent and distinctive shift in the contemporary Western matrimonial landscape to an individualist-centered “consumer” model of marriage.¹¹³ For some, such a move will be seen as simply one reflection of a new and liberating epoch for human romantic intimacy.¹¹⁴ From such a perspective, ideas like “starter marriages” and “mini-marriages” only make practical, if sometimes unfortunate, sense.¹¹⁵

However, from a Kingdom perspective, the primary purpose of the marriage relationship is tied to its power to reflect and image, in a unique way, the *agape*-based covenant relationship shared between the Triune God and his people. *Simply put, the male-female marriage relationship was designed by the Triune God to function as a “living parable” of the eternal marriage relationship with Jesus to which all Kingdom people are called as a single corporate bride.*¹¹⁶ And so, the human marriage relationship is divinely intended to be something of a *temporary, earthly dress rehearsal* that both images, and prepares the couple for, *the future, eternal covenant marriage with Jesus* for which all human beings were designed.

4. Human Sexual Union as the *Sign* of the Male-Female Marriage Covenant

A central claim in this paper is that the biblical vision of sexual union recognizes that it has been designed by God to function as the covenant sign of the male-female marriage relationship. Part of this claim is that the very act of sexual union itself inaugurates a one-flesh union between a man and woman. In other words, sexual union is not simply a convenient, after-the-fact metaphor to help us imagine what happens when two people get married. Rather, sexual union itself – in tandem with the covenant vows verbalized before witnesses – actually creates the one flesh marriage relationship.¹¹⁷ Thus, *in God's design plan, sexual union is meant to co-create (along with mutual vows) and sustain marriage covenants*. In other words, the covenant oath/vow is something like the “soul of the nuptial” that is subsequently “enfleshed in the nuptial consummation.”¹¹⁸

The fact that, through much of its history, the church has missed this biblical understanding of the covenant-creating/sustaining capacity of sexual union requires explanation. The apparent explanation regarding this confusion is that, early on, the church “simply accepted and conformed to Roman [matrimonial] law and Roman [matrimonial] customs so far as was compatible with Christian views, commonly confirming the union by religious benedictions.”¹¹⁹ As D. S. Bailey notes, “Inevitably [Christian] marriage came to be regarded principally from the institutional and legal standpoint,” and so the church’s understanding of marriage, in many ways, was from early on “indebted to the Civil law” of the surrounding Roman culture.¹²⁰ One point at which this indebtedness is visible is in the church’s adoption of Roman legal sensibilities

wherein “consent” (i.e., mutual verbal consent, as expressed, for example, in the contemporary wedding vows) is identified as the primary and necessary basis by which a marriage is brought into being. Bailey notes that one of the unintended ramifications of the early church’s assimilation to Roman culture regarding marriage was that

attention was never sufficiently directed to the fact that sexual intercourse alone establishes the ‘one flesh’ union. It is, of course, true that consent is integral to marriage, but it cannot by itself effect any *henosis* [i.e., deep, profound union] such as ‘one flesh’ implies.

Into the rigid framework of this legal, institutional view of marriage which became dominant in the Church both theology and relational ideals were forced, and every tendency of thought which might conflict with its basic assumptions was precluded. This is not to say that those basic assumptions were wholly wrong, but that they needed adjustment and modification in the light of the principles of sexual relation and union declared in Scripture ‘One flesh,’ therefore, denotes the essential informing principle in marriage, the interior, ontological aspect of sexual union. Every true institutional marriage is simply an embodiment or formal expression of the mysterious *henosis* established by man and woman in the consummation of their love.¹²¹

It is to an exploration of this biblical vision of the covenant-creating/sustaining capacity of sexual union as the *signing* feature of the marriage covenant that the present section of this study now turns. And we must begin by stepping back from the marriage covenant *per se* to give a more general consideration of the nature and function of a covenant sign.

a. A Word on Covenant Signs – A covenant sign serves both as (1) a constituent element of the creation of a covenant itself (i.e., signing the covenant), and (2) an ongoingly experienced (i.e., physically tangible and permanent) reminder of the covenant, one whose symbolism is, ideally, intended to capture the essence of the covenant that is being physically represented. In the ancient world, it was commonly understood that neglect, misuse, or violation of the sign of a covenant was considered tantamount to breaking the

covenant itself, thus bringing down upon the offender the curses of the covenant – often death. In a real sense, a covenant ceremony is basically a two-part reality. First, a set of promises are exchanged through spoken vows in the presence of witnesses (i.e., community). Second, the covenant is sealed/signed with a sign that both constitutes and ongoingly represents/symbolizes in the visible, physical realm the new, invisible relational reality.

b. Biblical Examples of Covenant Signs

(1) The sign of the Noachic covenant is identified as God’s bow (weapon of war), “set aside” (i.e., not *taken up* in a stance of war) in the clouds. And so, it is a statement of peace toward the creation, which reflects God’s promise to never again war against the earth via flood (Gen 9:12-17).¹²² Some have further argue that God set his bow aside in a *bent* position (i.e., an arrow strung and drawn), with the arrow facing away from earth¹²³ – and thus, perhaps, upward toward God himself. This interpretation fits with a recognizable pattern within ancient covenant-making ceremonies where ritual expressions of self-maledictory oaths are common (e.g., God involves himself in a similar self-maledictory act when making his covenant with Abraham in Gen 15).

(2) The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant is circumcision. In context (i.e., comes in Gen 17, immediately following Abraham’s unfaithful attempt to create a promised son through natural, fleshly means of having sexual relations with his wife’s servant-girl, Hagar), circumcision may well symbolize the fact that “fleshly,” merely human ways are to be “cut off” and done away with, and replaced with covenant trust in God and his

promises.¹²⁴ The consequences for not taking the sign of the covenant (circumcision) were very serious – that person was to be “cut off from among the people,” death or banishment (Gen 17:14; Exo 4:24-26; cf. Josh 5:2-8).

(3) The Sinai Covenant = Sabbath day of rest. This symbolizes the covenant “rest” promised in the Sinai covenant, patterned after God’s own rest from his creative work. The consequence of violating Sabbath rest was death (Exo 31:12-17).

(4) The sign of the New Covenant is presented as the Lord’s Supper, as seen in the following observations.

(a) “Do this in *remembrance* of me” (Luke 22:19; I Cor 11:25).

“Remember/remembrance” is often used as a covenant term. It refers to the fact that one or both of the parties is called to remember and perform a covenant promise that has been made (e.g., Exo 2:24).

(b) I Cor 11:27-30 – “. . . and for this reason some of you are sick and some have fallen asleep.” This seemingly harsh judgment upon Christians who misuse the Lord’s Supper is understandable when the Supper is seen as the sign of the New Covenant. Again, to violate a sign of a covenant was tantamount to breaking the covenant itself, and thus bringing a death sentence upon oneself.

*c. Sexual Union as the Sign of the Male-Female Marriage Covenant*¹²⁵

And now we come to a central concern of this study. As the sign of the marriage covenant, sexual union is part of the God-ordained way in which the male-female one flesh bond is initially formed and ongoingly expressed. Like any sign of a covenant, three things are true about it: (1) It is one aspect (along with covenantal vows, etc.) of the formal ritual by which the two parties initially enter into the covenant relationship.¹²⁶ (2) It is to be regularly enacted as one of the ways by which the two parties *remember* and celebrate the reality of their covenant relationship. (3) To violate the sexual sign of the covenant in any way is tantamount to breaking the covenant itself, and thus puts the violator in danger of covenantal *curses* (i.e., negative consequences that come naturally with the breaking of a covenant). A variety of biblical passages in both Testaments point to this conclusion.¹²⁷

(1) Gen 2:18-24 – As discussed above, becoming one-flesh is central to the very purpose and vocational calling of marriage to image the living, relational God. The created purpose of our sexual differentiation (“male and female”) and its expression in sexual intimacy and intercourse is tied to our vocational calling to image God. As with every covenant sign: *Once God pronounced sexual intimacy as the sign of the human marriage covenant, it was taken out of the realm of mere biology and placed in the realm of covenant intimacy and responsibility.* From this point forward, to misuse our gift of sexuality is to violate the covenant for which it was intended. This explains the serious and consistent (trans-Testamental) perspective on sexual expression throughout the Bible.¹²⁸

(2) Use of the Hebrew term “to know” (*yada*) used as a synonym for sexual intercourse (e.g., Gen 4:1; 17; 25; 24:16; 38:26; Judges 19:25; I Sam 1:19; I Kings 1:4) – the idea of *knowing* someone is often used to signify the intimate relationship shared by covenant partners; e.g., God uses this term of Israel as his special covenant people (Amos 3:2; Hosea 2:22; Jer 31:34). This is a signal that sexual intercourse is inherently intended to be linked with covenant intimacy.

(3) Explicit instances in the OT where sexual intercourse is recognized as constituting the ratification process of the marriage covenant (e.g., Gen 24:67; Gen 29:21-28; Deut 21:10-14; Deut 25:5).

(4) Deut 22:13-19 – The OT shares with many other cultures the conviction that female bleeding upon first intercourse serves as a witness to the marriage covenant. This was so much the case that the woman’s family would apparently keep the stained sheets as evidence of her virginity leading up to the wedding night, should the husband ever question it in the future.¹²⁹

(5) II Samuel 13:1-22 – In this passage, Tamar is raped by her half-brother Amnon. Prior to the rape, she warns Amnon of the great evil involved in such a deed. Amnon goes ahead and rapes her anyway, and immediately afterward he finds himself repulsed by her and tells her to “Get out.” But Tamar’s response is this: “No, my brother, for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other thing you did to me” (vs. 16). Clearly in

Tamar's mind, once she and Amnon had shared sexual union – even a forced sexual union – they were to remain together, as they were now covenantally joined as one through the sign-act of sexual intercourse.¹³⁰

(6) OT sexual laws: the different consequences for pre-marital vs. extra-marital sexual relations – Pre-marital sex is treated as one half of a wedding ceremony: If an unmarried man sleeps with an unmarried woman, they are to *complete* the act by formally taking each other as husband and wife (Exodus 22:16-17; Deut 22:28). Extra-marital sex, on the other hand, is treated as serious covenant-breaking taboo. It constitutes the breaking of a covenant (i.e., adultery), and is thus punishable by death (e.g., Deut 22:22).

(7) Mark 10:2-12; Matt 19:3-9 – In these passages, Jesus explicitly quotes the “one flesh” passage in Gen 2:24 to confront the Mosaic divorce law, and, presumably, the common first-century Jewish interpretations surrounding it. Jesus refers to the one flesh union as “that which God has joined together.” On this basis, Jesus rejects divorce because it constitutes an act of the sexual sin of “adultery.” Jesus’ argument – one that is consistent throughout the Synoptic Gospels – suggests that the one flesh relationship established by the sexual union of a first marriage renders any future sexual union adulterous, even if preceded by divorce and remarriage. The logic of this argument is rendered coherent once it is seen in the context of the conviction that sexual union is the sign of the male-female marriage covenant – a conviction grounded in Gen 2:24 itself.

(8) I Cor 6:15-16 – In the NT, Paul adopts a similar perspective in a bold manner when he makes this stunning statement: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’” Here, Paul confirms that sexual intercourse is seen to be part of what actually instigates the two-into-one-flesh transformation. Notice that, in this case, *lack of a one-fleshing intention does not negate the one-fleshing process*. Obviously, someone who goes to a prostitute is not intending to signify by the pleasure-seeking sexual act anything like a one flesh marriage relationship. But, in effect, Paul is saying: “Too bad – whether you meant to or not, sex just *does that to people!*” This means, of course, that the concept of “recreational sex” is an oxymoron. By its very nature – and like it or not – the sex act always knits the formerly two separate individuals into *one* at a very significant ontological level.¹³¹

Some have recognized the practical implications of this sort of biblical data regarding sexual union – even if the explicit covenantal sign dimension goes unnoticed, or at least unexplored. For example, Rob Bell, in his popular book, *Sex God*, makes the following observation:

This understanding of sex as marriage is found throughout the Bible because it was thought of this way throughout the ancient world Sex, in the ancient world, was marriage. If you had sex, you were married. All that needed to be worked out was the legal and financial consequences of what this man and this woman had just done. The physical union was what, in the eyes of society, made them man and wife. At the wedding then, the party didn’t start until they had sex.¹³²

Doug Baker, then, is exactly right when he states that “sexual acts” are always “covenant acts – either covenant making or covenant breaking . . .”¹³³ And even Hollywood gets it right now and then! In the movie *Vanilla Sky*, Julie Gianni (Cameron Diaz) says to David Aames (Tom Cruise): "Don't you know that when you sleep with someone, your body makes a promise whether you do or not?"

Excursus: What about Polygamy and Concubinage in the Old Testament?¹³⁴ – It might seem that the practices of polygamy and concubinage in the OT are evidence against seeing sexual intimacy as the sign of the monogamous marriage covenant. But, in fact, these practices do not undermine our basic claim, as the following considerations suggest:

(1) As mentioned above, the OT begins by stating *God's plan and ideal* for marriage: one man and one woman joined in a one-flesh relationship (Genesis 2:20-24).¹³⁵

(2) Although polygamy was an accepted practice in much of the ancient Near Eastern world surrounding Israel, none of the OT legislation commands or explicitly condones polygamy. In fact, Deuteronomy 17:17 explicitly states that the king should not “multiply wives for himself.” When polygamy is mentioned in the OT there is often an implicit critique of the practice within the narrative (i.e., a generally negative tone tends to surround reports of polygamous practice, including internal disputes within families that accommodate to this practice).¹³⁶ For example: (a) the first mention of bigamy is that of Lamech who is portrayed as a rebellious man (Genesis 4). (b) Polygamy seems to be involved in the sin perpetrated by the “sons of God” against the “daughters of men” in

Genesis 6:1-4, and (in read in context) this sin is tied to the flooding of the earth. (c) Abraham's experience of concubinage with Hagar is shown to be against God's will and an expression of Abraham taking matters into his own hands rather than trusting God's promise. This unwise choice of Abraham seems to be tied to God's choosing *circumcision* as the sign of the Abrahamic covenant in the following chapter (Genesis 17). (d) Throughout the prophets, monogamy is used as a symbol of the covenant union between God and Israel, while, by inference, polygamy and/or multiple lovers becomes a symbol of polytheism and/or idolatry (e.g., Jeremiah 2:2; Ezekiel 16:8-34; Hosea 2:18-20).¹³⁷

(3) Leviticus 18:18 – It has been argued by several OT scholars that the best translation of the original Hebrew in this verse is something along these lines: “And you shall not take a second wife as a rival to your first wife, uncovering her nakedness while your first wife is alive.” The argument given is that while the term “sister” is used here in the Hebrew, the phrase itself is a Hebrew idiom for “to take one in addition to another.” Translated in this way, it is not simply a prohibition against marrying two sisters, but rather it is a prohibition against marrying any two women at the same time. If this is the case, then the Law itself gives an explicit prohibition against polygamy.¹³⁸

(4) Regarding concubinage in particular: similar to polygamy, this was an ancient trans-cultural practice ranging from Greece through the Middle East to China. Generally speaking, concubinage in the ancient world involved a man and woman living in an ongoing, marriage-like relationship due to factors that prevented them from entering into

a legal marriage (e.g., differing social status, etc.). Again, generally speaking, concubinage in the ancient world was a privilege reserved for men of high economic and social standing (if for no other reason than it required the economic means to provide financially for more than one woman). In ancient Israel, a concubine generally was granted a level of recognition and respect similar to a legal wife, with mutual commitment and sexual exclusivity on the woman's part being part of the expected arrangement (e.g., Gen 35:22; 49:4; II Sam 3:7; 16:21-25). In this sense, apart from certain social conventions associated with official marriage ritual (e.g., a wife had a dowry while a concubine did not, etc.), the concubinage relationship of early OT times (e.g., Abraham and Hagar, Jacob and Bilhah) reflected much of the same relational dynamics as a marriage. In fact, with regard to the Jacob-Bilhah relationship, the language of both "concubine" and "wife" is reflected (compare Gen 30:3-4 and Gen 35:22). Interestingly, at this point in biblical history, the text says that it was the wife who initiated concubinage for her husband in order to prevent the shame of childlessness (Gen 16:1-2; Gen 30:1-4). In later times, the OT relates concubinage almost exclusively to Israel's kings, including Saul, David Solomon, Rehoboam, and Abijah (II Sam 3:7; 5:13; I Kings 11:3; II Chron 11:21; 13:21). In this context, concubinage no longer involves entering into a relationship with a wife's handmaiden as a surrogate means of addressing childlessness. Rather, it has apparently become a system wherein a king, who may well already have children by his legal wife/wives, takes dozens – in Solomon's case many hundreds – of concubines as a display of kingly power and prestige, similar to the practice of pagan kings (e.g., Dan 5:2). God explicitly warned Israel against adopting kingship and its associated practices when they asked for "a king . . . like all the other

nations,” since it represented the rejection of his own direct kingship over them (I Sam 8:4-22). And yet, God condescended to allow them their request, continuing to work with them as his people nonetheless. Apparently, this form of concubinage was but one of the many grievous trappings that came along with God’s temporary acquiescence to Israel’s demand for a king “like all the other nations.” But that is just the point. Like so many things through biblical history, God put up with his people indulging in things taken from their surrounding cultures, things that did not reflect God’s heart for humanity or his plans for Israel. Concubinage, like polygamy, is just one more example of this. This brings us to the final and most important point of this discussion.

(5) Jesus’ perspective on this question is clear: he states that God’s plan for marriage is one man and one woman married for life, and he bases this on the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 (Matt 19:3-6; Mark 10:2-12).¹³⁹ When the Pharisees ask him why, then, God allowed for divorce in the Law, Jesus answers: “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but at the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery” (Matt 19:8). Here we notice several things: (a) Jesus considers divorce and remarriage (except for proper reasons) to be a case of “adultery” and thus a form of something like “serial polygamy.” Clearly there is no place for polygamy of any kind in Jesus’ mind. (b) Following Jesus’ pattern of interpretation, we can legitimately say that whatever cases of polygamy were tolerated by God in the OT, they were contrary to God’s ideal plan for human marriage and sexual expression, and were only tolerated due to the “hardness” of people’s hearts and the commonness of these practices in the

surrounding culture.¹⁴⁰ (c) As Jesus consistently teaches, the pattern of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 is the pattern that reveals God’s plan for monogamous marriage and is the only model of marriage that Jesus endorses.¹⁴¹ Following Jesus, the Apostle Paul clearly upholds monogamy and explicitly rejects polygamy (I Cor 7:1-4; I Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6).

(6) The early (proto-)orthodox church followed Jesus in affirming monogamy and rejecting polygamy. Once again, the creation texts of Genesis play an important normative role. N. T. Wright summarizes the situation:

The heart of early Christianity was the belief that in Jesus of Nazareth the creator God had dealt with the rebellion and corruption of the present creation, particularly of the humans who were supposed to be in charge of it, and had opened up the new and living way into a new and living creation *in which the original intention would now be fulfilled*. And that is why, despite the centuries of apparently unrebuked polygamy in the Old Testament, the New Testament assumes on every page that monogamy is now mandatory for the followers of Jesus – and made possible, though as the disciples recognized still difficult (Matthew 19:10), by the victory of Jesus on the cross and the power of his Spirit.¹⁴²

d. The Inherent Goodness of Male-Female Sexual Intimacy – This inherent goodness and beauty of *agape*-driven sexual expression within covenant marriage deserves to be emphasized today in Christian contexts, given the long, sad track record through church history of virtually demonizing sex, often marital sex included. The early church from the second century onward, following Greco-Roman philosophical tradition, tended to view negatively anything that involved seemingly uncontrollable passions. And this led the early church to glorify sexual celibacy, while always looking at sex with suspicion.¹⁴³ Augustine claimed that “original sin” is passed genetically through the sex act, and that

part of God's 'curse' on humanity for their sin was to implant concupiscence (a Latin term that refers to strong sexual desire) within all human beings.¹⁴⁴

As Creator, God thought up the idea of sex; God designed it; and the relationality of the Triune God is reflected in it. Mike Mason has powerfully expressed the implications that lie behind the fact of God's design of human sexual intimacy:

For to call God the author of sex, as we have, is not just to say that He invented it, as he invented or created everything else in the world. It is to say, more importantly, that sexual love has its source in God's own being, in His nature, and that in the same way that human beings, body and soul, are a unique reflection in this world of God's very self and character, so the sex act itself may be said to be in God's likeness, fashioned in His Own image.¹⁴⁵

Yet, somehow in our culture today, the very opposite is commonly assumed. Often, God is painted as a sexual prude, while sexual fulfillment is commonly portrayed in figures of speech associated with the kingdom of darkness (e.g., "my wife is a little devil in bed"; "we were so naughty on our honeymoon"; etc.). In counter-cultural fashion, Kingdom people are called to bear witness to the fact that it is God's intimate, intra-Trinitarian *agape*-love that the one flesh experience of sexual union was originally designed to image. The fact that the Song of Solomon was included within the Judeo-Christian Bible should constantly remind us that male-female romantic love and sexual intimacy – to be expressed within the safe, protective bonds of covenant relationship – is a beautiful gift from God himself, and one reflecting God's husbandly heart toward his own bride, his people.¹⁴⁶

e. The Logic of Covenantal Sex

(1) The Basic Concept – Ongoing sexual intercourse is designed by God to be the intentional *re-signing ritual* – through the merging and mingling of the covenant partners' bodies – that visibly and experientially re-presents what, in fact, took place at the inauguration of the marriage covenant through the couple's spoken vows and the initial sexual consummation. But even apart from spoken vows, as Paul states plainly (I Cor 6:15-16), merely the choice to act out the sign of sexual bonding does, in some real and metaphysical sense, accomplish the feat of making the two into one. In essence, a marriage covenant is designed to take place in a two-part ceremony. Part one: making the vows of covenant commitment to each other. Part two: the physically signing (i.e., experientially affirming the verbal vows) of the covenant together by celebrating the new unitive reality in the physical realm through sexual intimacy. *Thus, to speak literally in covenantal terms, pre-marital or extra-marital sex is something of an oxymoron.*

Whenever two people choose to have sex outside of the context of verbal vows of marital commitment, they have literally just chosen to enact ½ of a marriage ceremony. They have, in a real sense, begun the marital process of *fusing their two bodies together into one covenantal flesh*. Having sex without having first created the proper context of safety and commitment by expressing the mutual covenant vows is as oxymoronic as inviting 300 people to a church wedding – renting all the tuxes and flowers, buying the reception food and scheduling the pastor – and just when it comes time to say “I do”—the parties say: “Nawww, this was just a *recreational* wedding ceremony.” Certainly no one would intentionally perform only one-half of a wedding ceremony! But viewed from its covenantal context, this is exactly what happens when humans share sexual intimacy

apart from the verbal covenant-vow. And so, to borrow a phrase from Christopher West, to engage in sexual intimacy outside of the relational oasis of a marriage covenant and its truth-speaking promises is to engage in “telling lies” with your body.¹⁴⁷

For many within more liberal theological quarters, the fact that our contemporary postmodern world no longer shares more traditional Christian perspectives on sexuality suggests that Christians must readjust their sexual ethics in order to be taken seriously by the culture. Marvin Ellison argues that, since new phenomena such as birth control, feminism, and our culture’s growing acceptance of, and even appreciation for, diverse sexual identities and erotic possibilities has led to “culture-shifting changes in the contemporary meaning of sex,” Christian sexual ethics must be recalibrated in order to be “helpful and relevant to the sexual concerns of our time.”¹⁴⁸ However, Ellison fails to consider whether God, the creator and designer of human sexuality, has bestowed a divinely-established, trans-cultural, covenantally-grounded meaning upon human sexual expression that objectively stands, regardless of whether any contingent human culture recognizes – or agrees – with it or not. This, I submit, is precisely the case.

(2) Why This “Sign” for the Marriage Covenant? Some Reflections – Through the biblical covenants, there is a pattern of God simply unilaterally choosing what seems to him to be a fitting symbolic physical expression for each covenant. In each case, what was formerly nothing more than a mere human activity is now transformed into a sacred, life-or-death representation of a certain covenant relationship. I.e., prior to making it the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, circumcision was simply a fairly widely practiced

puberty rite among a number of ancient pagan peoples. Once God designates it as a covenant sign and commands that all male infants undergo the ritual, now an Israelite male without circumcision is to be “cut off from among the people.” Similarly, prior to God designating the Sabbath day rest as the sign of the Sinai covenant, there was no expectation of God’s people resting on the seventh day, nor any consequence if they did not. Once God designates it as the covenant sign, now people can be stoned for violating it. It is God’s unilateral choice to designate some symbolic activity as a covenant sign that gives this symbol its new status as a sacred reality.

The same principle applies to sex. In other words, *what in the animal kingdom is predominantly a hormone-driven mating process designed to insure the propagation of the species is, by God’s design and decree, the very sign of the human marriage covenant.*¹⁴⁹ And with that decree, *everything changes* about human sexual union. It can never simply be a matter of biology and pleasure. While it certainly *is* about biology and pleasure, it is never *merely* so. Rather, the covenantal role it plays now must trump and thus guide the biological/pleasure dimensions.

But why would God choose *this particular sign* for the marriage covenant? It seems to me that there are several compelling reasons:

(a) First, the very act itself vividly captures the one-flesh reality that has become true of the couple through their covenant vows. It is hard to imagine a more powerfully symbolic act that is meant both to physically symbolize the spiritual reality of a two-become-one

covenant, and to offer an image of the intimately related Triune God, who is composed of differentiated Persons unified as a single being in *agape*-love.¹⁵⁰

(b) Second, the fact that this very act is the means by which new human life is created is itself another powerful physical symbolization and image of the divine principle that *agape*-love brings forth life. Just as the *agape*-love of the Triune God overflows in creative love to bring forth the entire creation, so (in a healthy marriage at least) the *agape*-love of the couple overflows to bring forth children who are then brought into the family love covenant.

(c) Finally, in the context of the male-female marriage covenant, sexual intimacy and expression—which can so easily and naturally be all about one’s hedonistic, erotic pleasure and the self-centered use of another human being to instantly gratify one’s own sexual desires—is transformed into an ongoing symbolic statement of committed, self-denying, self-sacrificial love (monogamy until death). In other words, *in the marriage covenant, an act that in the animal world is one of the most base, hormone-driven, pleasure-centered activities imaginable is transformed into one of the most sacred, intimacy-creating, self-giving activities that two human beings can engage in.* However, the choice as to whether it will function as a fundamentally self-centered, or a fundamentally self-giving, act is left to the couple to decide. It stands as a constant reminder that we are called to place *agape*-love at the center of the marriage covenant.¹⁵¹ In a culture that has virtually deified sex, this calling will be a counter-cultural challenge.

In commenting on the treatment of sexuality within the Jewish rabbinic tradition, Gary Anderson writes:

As this midrashic tradition nicely teaches, the Bible presents us with two seemingly contradictory paradigms for understanding our sexual nature. As animals we are bidden by our biology to seek a mate, but as gods we can soar beyond the confines of bodily desire.

The temptation has always been to elide one side of this equation in favor of the other. Our era, in particular, has been witness to an ever-increasing celebration of our erotic side. Devoid of any sense of purity or semblance to God, the very concept of abstinence has become unintelligible.

But the profundity of the biblical tradition has been to seek some deeper level of integration. We are both sexual beings and beings who can transcend our sexual selves. Or, to paraphrase the words of Jesus, we must live in this world but not be defined entirely by it. Our sexual nature is integral to our humanity, but it must not be allowed to define us.¹⁵²

5. Human Sexuality in Context: Pan-Human Sexual Brokenness and the Cosmic Spiritual Conflict

From as far back in history as we have record, the human family has been caught up in an almost endless variety of sexual dysfunction, brokenness, and sin. Seen in light of the pervasive biblical theme of cosmic conflict in the spiritual realm and its wide-ranging consequences in the created order, this should not surprise us. Revelation 12 states that the chief goal of humanity's spiritual Enemy has been to try and destroy the next best thing to God himself – namely *humanity*, the very image of God (e.g., Rev 12:17).

Throughout human history, it appears that the Prince of Darkness has invested an amazing amount of energy in distorting God's original covenantal design for sexual intimacy, while concocting and nurturing an endless array of alternative sexual scripts.

Fostering the misuse of the gift of sexual intimacy among humanity achieves not only the

deseccration of the sign of the human marriage covenant, but also the deseccration of the original human expression of the likeness of God in creation – the male-female one-flesh covenantal relationship – as well as the deseccration of that which points as a symbol toward faithful intimacy that characterizes the marriage relationship between the divine groom and his eternal bride-people.

In simple terms: *Each of us is born into this fallen, rebel world in a broken state, and, for virtually all of us, this includes sexual brokenness in some way, shape or form. As a human race, all of us struggle with the temptation to enact sexual desires and embrace sexual scripts that undermine the original sexual design plan given to humanity by the Triune God.*¹⁵³ Our sexual brokenness can manifest itself in a seemingly endless variety of ways.¹⁵⁴ At the core of all of this brokenness is a twisting of our sensibilities and desires – sexual and otherwise – for relationship, intimacy and union away from the beauty of their divinely intended purposes, and toward some other function. The sexual brokenness that we all struggle with is particularly powerful due to the fact that it is tied both to our biological drive for sexual pleasure and our natural desire for relational intimacy.

But sexual healing – for all Kingdom people – is part of the holistic healing promised within the New Covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. Like so many of the New Covenant promises, this promise reflects the “already-not yet” reality of God’s Kingdom on earth. For all of us, in different ways, our sexual healing in Christ can begin already,

but will not yet be completed until the eschaton. But even in the midst of the not-yet, God's promises, presence, and power can sustain us. As Marva Dawn observes:

[T]he Bible gives us courage to deal with [our] sexual problems . . . because it announces to us the defeat of the principalities and powers. These forces which contribute to the sexual pollution of our world have been defeated already by Christ (Col 2:14-15), and we have been given the weapons of the Spirit to stand against all the methods of the demonic (Eph 6:10-20). Truth is listed as a primary component of our armor, and that is exactly what our culture needs. Our world is desperate for the truth about our sexual design and how the Creator intends for it to be maintained and enjoyed.¹⁵⁵

It is here that the unique missional witness of the church is called to intersect with its theology of sexual union. The church simply cannot take its vision and values of concerning sexuality from the cultural wisdom of whatever host society it happens to find itself within. To do so is to abandon its calling to serve as a witness to a distinctive Kingdom way of living out our sexuality in this world. Johann Christoph Arnold, a leader among the Anabaptist-inspired Bruderhof community, captures this insight:

We must demonstrate that a new way exists and show the world a new reality, the reality of God's righteousness and holiness, which is opposed to the spirit of this world. We must show with our lives that men and women can live lives of purity, peace, unity, and love wherever they dedicate their energies to working for the common good Above all, we must witness to the power of love In order to demonstrate God's will, the church must first concrete steps toward forming a genuine sexual counter-culture Marriages and families will continue to splinter unless the church forms a *life together* on totally different terms.¹⁵⁶

Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas grasps the import of such a calling:

There is no way that the traditional Christian insistence that marriage must be characterized by unitive and procreative ends can be made intelligible unless the political function of marriage in the Christian community is understood I will try to show that the claim that a sexual ethic derives its form from marriage is a political claim, as it makes sense only in terms of the church's understanding of its mission. Therefore, a Christian ethic of sex cannot be an ethic for all people,

but only for those who share the purposes of the community gathered by God and the subsequent understanding of marriage

The ecclesiology of most of the more liberal sexual ethics assumes that the church is a voluntary association that exists for the spiritual enrichment of the individuals composing it [Here, Hauerwas could just as easily have included “conservative evangelical sexual ethics,” for this individualist ecclesiology typifies most evangelical churches as well.]

I believe that we cannot expect to begin to develop an adequate Christian sexual ethic without starting with the insistence that sex is a public matter for the Christian community. For our sexual ethic is part and parcel of our political ethic. How we order and form our lives sexually cannot be separated from the necessity of the church to chart an alternative to our culture’s dominant assumptions.¹⁵⁷

Thus, a major role of a Kingdom community is to provide a place where followers of Jesus can be ruthlessly open and honest about the ways in which this fallen world has tainted our sexual orientations and desires, and to provide a communal network of loving, supportive, and challenging brother-and-sister relationships that enable us all – *as a witness-bearing covenant community* – to walk the path toward the healing and faithful expression of our innate sexuality.¹⁵⁸ Marva Dawn’s words on this matter bear repeating. As an “alternative society,” the Kingdom community of Jesus has been “liberated” from surrounding, competing ways of life, from

its values, its oppressions, its non-intimacy, and we have been brought by Christ into a whole new creation – namely, the reign of God. We don’t have better ideas than our society about our sexuality, but God does, and we have the privilege (and the responsibility) to be God’s ambassadors, proclaiming God’s Kingdom principles¹⁵⁹

Similarly, Jean Vanier, founder of the l’Arche communities, reminds us that, as sexually broken people, authentic Christian community is the most hopeful context for growing toward “sexual integration.” He writes: “At l’Arche, it is evident to us that the most essential thing for human beings is to have deep relationships of friendship.”¹⁶⁰ As such, one of the chief goals of Christian community is

to help people grow toward wholeness and to discover their place, and eventually exercise their gifts, in a network of fellowship and friendship, and, ideally, in an acknowledged covenant relationship. This means the integration of one's sexuality in a vision of fellowship and friendship. It implies that each one, man or woman, in his or her sexual being, is called to discover that they are appreciated and loved. They need to learn to love others, entering into relationships of communion, gift, tenderness, and service. The integration of sexuality means that one is no longer ruled by sexual compulsions and the selfish search for pleasure, using others for self. Rather, it is a matter of being faithful to relationships with other people True community is a place of covenant; like a family its members are linked to one another in mutual trust and respect, and by a deep sense of belonging A family has one soul and one heart. A collection of individuals has neither heart nor soul; it only has rules and a hierarchy of power; in such a situation people can look elsewhere for a life of tenderness and bonds of love. And one of the ways of seeking elsewhere is the cry for genital sexuality, through seduction, obsessions, and even perversions If we could stop looking at the manifestation of genital sexuality as a right to pleasure or a problem to be solved, and could recognize it more as a cry to create permanent bonds in order to escape isolation and to become more fully human, we would take an enormous step toward understanding True sexual integration, in the way I have described it, needs a community with a heart and a soul, a sense of belonging and celebration, a fruitfulness, but especially many personal relationships.¹⁶¹

Of course, for a Christian community to think and live in this way, they would have to become very clear that their primary identity is found in Christ and his Kingdom community first and foremost – *above all other identities, loyalties, and citizenships*.

Michael Budde refers to this conviction as “ecclesial solidarity,” which he defines as:

the conviction that “being a Christian” is one’s primary and formative loyalty, the one that contextualizes and defines the legitimacy of other claimants on allegiance and conscience – those of class, nationality, and state [and, I would add, of sex, gender, and sexual orientation].¹⁶²

This will mean that within a counter-cultural Kingdom context, we will be called to unmask the cultural lie that one’s particular form(s) of sexual desire is constitutive of one’s core identity. Within the Kingdom, Jesus Christ – and God’s call to us to become progressively conformed to his image within the context of Christian community – must

be the core “already-not yet” identity that shapes our self-perception. Anything else that we allow to take such a core, identity-shaping role in our lives becomes just another form of idolatry that competes with Christ for lordship and ownership in our lives, both individually and collectively.¹⁶³

Initial Reflections on Moving from a Covenant-centered Theology of Human Sexuality to Discernment Regarding Particular Sexual Issues

A covenant-centered theology of human sexuality along the lines of that articulated above serves to provide an explanation of why the Bible (both OT and NT) treats human sexual intimacy as it does. It also serves to provide the foundation for a coherent pattern of response to a wide variety of human sexual ethics issues in any human culture, including our own sexually confused culture today.¹⁶⁴

1. The Biblical Pattern of Sexual Ethics – As the preceding covenant-centered, Trinitarian-inspired theology of human sexuality would lead us to expect, the consistent biblical pattern of sexual ethics serves to offer protective guidelines around the use of the sign of the marriage covenant. The consistent seriousness with which the Bible treats violations of sexual intimacy expressed outside of the protective bonds of the *agape*-oriented, monogamous, male-female marriage covenant gives further witness to the fact that this *is* the God-designated sign of that particular covenant. God’s message regarding human sexual intimacy is, in essence, this: *“I have sovereignly chosen sexual intimacy as the sign of the male-female marriage covenant – use it for nothing outside of this covenant, for if you do, it will, sooner or later, inevitably damage you and whoever you*

share it with, regardless of your intentions.” This explains why all other forms of intimate sexual expression and union are universally prohibited throughout the Bible, such as pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, homosexual sex, incest, zoophilia (bestiality), etc.¹⁶⁵ This pattern is clear within the scriptures, and there are no exceptions that allow the expression of human sexual intimacy outside of the male-female dyad. Given the biblical pattern, we are justified in calling other forms of sexual activity/intimacy/union into question, such as pornography, adult-child sex, group sex, and the plethora of dehumanizing paraphilias (e.g., sadomasochism, etc.).

By designating it the sign of the male-female marriage covenant, God has effectively made sexual intimacy *holy* – that is, *set apart* – from all other contexts in which humans experience and express inter-connection, intimacy, and covenantal relationship. In fact, at one point the Apostle Paul states that the “will of God is your sanctification” and goes on to give as his primary example “that you abstain from sexual immorality.” He continues by noting that one of the character traits of the set-apart follower of Jesus is the ability to “control your own body in set-apartness and honor,” i.e., set apart from the “Gentile pattern” of following one’s own self-oriented sexual desires (I Thess 4:3-6). The only realm appropriate for this particular covenantal bonding experience is the male-female one-flesh relationship. Any other use of sexual intimacy – no matter how well-intended by the human participants – is considered by God to be a violation of its divinely set-apart covenantal status, and thus constitutes an instance of covenant violation. To say to God: “But that’s not fair!” is as covenantally nonsensical as it would be for an ancient male Gentile convert to Judaism to respond to the requirement of circumcision with: “But

it's not fair that I have to be circumcised to be among God's covenant people." It is God's prerogative to unilaterally choose a covenant sign, and once he does, it simply *is* the sign of that particular covenant, whether humans agree with God's decision or not.

All this being said, at the same time it is important to emphasize that God's vision for his New Covenant people is not merely the creation of a rule-following community. As the NT consistently reiterates, within the New Covenant and its Kingdom community "law" finds its fulfillment in *agape*-love (e.g., Matt 22:36-40; Rom 13:8-10; I Cor 13:1-13; James 1:22-27; 2:8), "rules" are useful only to the degree that they serve the higher purpose of growth in character and Kingdom virtues.¹⁶⁶ In the surrounding culture today, we see some people lobbying for a sexual free-for-all on one hand, and we find other people self-righteously condemning others for not living up to a certain set of legalistic sexual behavior codes (codes that they themselves are frequently seen to violate, as a number of public sexual scandals have revealed). Within the Kingdom community, both of these patterns are to be rejected. We are to be a people who, though broken ourselves, strive to live and grow as a humble, loving, communal witnesses to God's original, beautiful plan for creation – including his plan for human beings to image God through the faithful covenantal expression of sexual intimacy.

2. Kingdom Sex and the Counter-Cultural Way of the Cross – To embrace this vision of sexual intimacy will, of course, put us in direct conflict with contemporary Western culture's view of sexual expression. In our contemporary context, with its individualistic presuppositions, sexual expression is primarily about *individual fulfillment and*,

*therefore, about having the “right” to pursue one’s personal preferences.*¹⁶⁷ Seen by many people primarily as a pleasure-centered activity, sexual expression is easily construed as just another way in which we seek personal fulfillment in our highly self-oriented, individualistic, hedonistic, consumeristic world. In fact, like most things that bring pleasure in our contemporary culture, sexual expression has effectively been commodified and packaged into just another “product” that a person can negotiate – or even purchase – for purposes of self-fulfillment. This is explicitly the case with prostitution and pornography. It is also the case, if more subtly, with many forms of romantic relationship itself, which (as divorce and adultery statistics reveal) are often treated as contractual relationships that can be annulled or re-negotiated if the individual finds him or herself feeling emotionally or sexually unfulfilled – or maybe just bored.

The reflections of Gary Anderson are pertinent here:

In our present age, talk of eroticism is almost invariably linked to the pursuit of individual pleasures. In considering the goodness of any particular sexual practice, the most significant concepts are those of consent and privacy. What two persons mutually agree to in the privacy of their own homes is their own business. End of question. There is little room for talk about the intrinsic goodness of a particular form of sexual practice or the power of the claims of a community over the behavior of any given individual. In Judaism [and the Bible itself], the reverse is the case. Because the relation of God to Israel [and the church] is imagined in erotic terms, it is incumbent on the people of God to be faithful stewards of this precious gift. Sexual passion is a matter of divine command.¹⁶⁸

A Kingdom approach to sexual intimacy is diametrically opposed to a self-oriented perspective. A Kingdom perspective frames sexual intimacy within the context of committed, other-oriented, self-sacrificial, covenant relationship. In doing so, a Kingdom perspective understands the expression of sexual intimacy within the wider context of the call to a life of radical, self-sacrificial discipleship within the community of God, which

strives to submit every realm of one's life to God and his ways.¹⁶⁹ As the Apostle Paul emphasizes in I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 7, a covenant-centered, Kingdom oriented sexual ethics is “one of the most important examples of Christian countercultural practices that [can] set the community apart as a holy people dedicated to God.”¹⁷⁰

In this light, we can see that the community of followers of Jesus are called self-sacrificially to “die” to self-orientation *for the sake of their future groom, Jesus*, and are called to contain the expression of sexual intimacy within the bounds of the male-female marriage covenant. Depending upon one's form of sexual brokenness, this will require varied choices and practices of self-sacrificial suffering for the sake of the Divine Groom and his Kingdom.¹⁷¹ But this is only one of many ways that the community of Christ followers are called *imitate Jesus*, to willingly – even *joyously* – walk the path of *agape*-love modeled for us by Jesus himself, and in so doing to willingly choose to “suffer with Christ” for the sake of self-giving love and the ultimate glory of the Triune God (e.g., Phil 3:10).¹⁷² And, as both the Apostles Paul and James remind us, it is by our willingness to die to self-orientation and remain faithful to God and our covenant partner in the face of temptation that produces the very character of Jesus within us (Rom 5:3-5; James 1:2-4).

We must also consider here the vitally important notion of *the inter-connectedness and corporate solidarity* of the church of Jesus.¹⁷³ As a Kingdom community who literally, together, forms the representative body of Jesus on earth in this present age, our individual choices and behaviors actually affect the entire community – not merely in

terms of reputation or image, but literally, organically, ontologically. This concept will be very difficult to grasp – let alone to “feel,” existentially – for those of us living in (post)modern Western contexts where individualism and social contract theory rule the day. We must get our mind around the reality that, for NT Christianity, the claim that the church is the single body of Christ is not a nice metaphor or a cute cliché – it is an *ontological fact*.

Thus, the Apostle Paul is clear that, as a deeply inter-connected body-community, the broken covenant relationships (i.e., sin) of one Christian affect the whole of the community. In other words: *Sin – sexual and otherwise – is never simply an individual matter, but is always-already a community concern!* From a NT perspective, we could say that sin is like ecclesial cancer. If I were to find I had cancer in my pancreas, I would never say to myself, “Well, that’s not a problem for my other organs.” To the contrary, pancreatic cancer threatens the health – the very life – of the whole body. In Paul’s view:

a Christian must protect himself and his community from pollution usually caused by *porneia* [sexual sin] So, for instance, in I Corinthians 5-6 . . . , [u]sing the example of the man who lives with his father’s former wife, Paul attempts to show that this action, incest, defiles not only the incestuous man but also the whole community.¹⁷⁴

But as Rodney Reeves points out:

We don’t relate to Paul in this matter, because we have privatized our spirituality. We think sin is a private matter. Faith is an individual response. Sex is personal. Marriages are not arranged. Church is an option – take it or leave it. And that’s what some Christians do: if we don’t like what’s going on, we find another church But Paul didn’t think there was “another church.” The problems of one house church affected them all; the sexual immorality of the incestuous couple “leavened” the entire church (I Cor 5:6) . . . This is more than about marriage; it’s about family. These are our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is about *our* relationship with the Lord – every single one of us. We’re suppose to “bear one another’s burdens” just as Christ did for us (Gal 6:2). Paul was right. Our

sexuality is dependent upon our devotion to Christ. We can't have marriage without the church. In the body of Christ there is no such thing as private sin – especially when it comes to sex.¹⁷⁵

3. The Pleasure and Goodness of Covenant-centered Sex

As a final word of balance: the above considerations do not mean that a Kingdom vision of human sexuality is all about suffering and the absence of pleasure. God designed humans for relational intimacy, with sexual intimacy being only one of many such forms of inter-human intimacy. The more we discover about the brain, the more we can understand the ways in which God designed humans – even at the neuro-chemical level – to find personal fulfillment and happiness as something of a natural by-product of relationships characterized by intimacy and trust. For example, it has been demonstrated that, particularly with regard to females, the release of oxytocin into the bloodstream that follows from participation in romantically/sexually intimate behavior serves to foster feelings of *trust in and bonding with* one's partner. Similarly, particularly for males, the release of vasopressin (referred to by some as the “monogamy molecule”) into the system through participation in romantically/sexually intimate behavior tends to foster feelings of *bondedness* with the female partner (and with his children).¹⁷⁶ When it comes to sexual intimacy, once again the path of the Kingdom of God offers us an unexpected paradox. As the famous 1994 Chicago study on human sexuality (the most thorough study of American sexual attitudes and practices to date) has documented, it turns out that the most sexually fulfilled people in our culture are to be found among monogamous married couples who have chosen to remain faithful to their covenantal vows. To quote from the findings of this study:

We are left with a picture that does not fit any of the popular images Those having the most partnered sex and enjoying it the most are married people In real life, the unheralded, seldom discussed world of married sex is actually the one that satisfies people the most.¹⁷⁷

And so, the pleasure and goodness of sexual intimacy/union has its place within its appropriate covenantal context. But the same is true of pleasure and goodness associated with the wide variety of ways in which human beings are called to connect and relate within a Kingdom context. And so, Stassen and Gushee appropriately conclude:

Human beings require stable, rightly ordered sexual relationships in order to flourish. This does not mean that all are called to physical sexual activity, but that all are called to the expression of their God-given sexuality within the bounds of God's covenant will.¹⁷⁸

Notes

¹ D. Michael Lindsay and Philip Ryken (interviewed by Timothy C. Morgan), “Sailing into the Storm,” *Christianity Today* (March 2012), 26.

² In a recently published dialogue with Shane Claiborne, Tony Campolo voices this very concern: “When discussing sexuality I become aware of how little in the way of a theology of sex has been developed among us Christians. Until we do develop a satisfactory theology, it will be hard for any of us to answer a lot of questions about what is right and what is wrong when evaluating sexual behavior.” Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What if Jesus Really Meant what He Said?* (Nashville: Nelson, 2012), 134. A related observation is made by Stanley Hauerwas and Allen Verhey, “From Conduct to Character – A Guide to Sexual Adventure,” in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, eds. Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 175-81. See also Stanley Hauerwas, “Sex in Public: How Adventurous Christians are Doing It,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). A similar concern appears to lie behind the 2009 document entitled “Theology of Sex” produced by the National Association of Evangelicals, available online at http://www.naegeneration.com/images/content/ToS_-_BW.pdf.

³ William Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts* (Louisville: Westminster Knox, 2010), 27. Richard Hays has noted how flawed doctrines of sin, redemption, and eschatology can fuel mistaken conclusions regarding human sexuality; see *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 402.

⁴ As Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker explain, sexual scripts “specify not only appropriate sexual goals—what we ought to want—they also provide plans for particular types of behavior and ways to achieve these sexual goals: the right thing to say at the right time, what not to do, who leads, how to hook up, where they should go, who should bring the condom, what’s too much to ask of someone, etc.”; *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 237. See pp. 236-41 for their insightful discussion on the relationship between guiding narratives and the transmission and institutionalization of sexual scripts.

⁵ A 2009 study conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy found that 80 percent of unmarried evangelical young adults, ages 18 to 29, said that they have had sex; slightly less than the 88 percent of unmarried adults. This data was widely shared in the Christian media. See Tyler Charles, “(Almost) Everyone’s Doing It,” *Relevant* (Sept/Oct 2011), 64-69. In his book, *Just Cohabiting? The Church*,

Sex and Getting Married (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), Duncan Dormer (Dean of St. John's College, Cambridge) argues that, in light of where our contemporary culture is at, the church should "[a]bandon an indiscriminating opposition to premarital sex" (pp. 116). "The difficulty" with the church's traditional stance of sex as exclusively reserved for marriage, he suggests, is "that the Church has failed in the contemporary context to articulate a clear rationale for this opposition to intimate sexual expression outside marriage. It simply doesn't make sense to most people when the average age at marriage is about 30 and highly effective contraception is readily available." He continues: "Such a failure also reflects, I would suggest, at least in part, a lack of conviction from within the Christian community itself" (p. 117).

⁶ Mark Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 203.

⁷ Ibid. (emphasis added).

⁸ Ibid., 207. This inability of younger Christians to articulate a distinctively Kingdom sexual ethic is simply a sub-set of a wider problem. As a number of researchers have shown, young American Christians generally are "*incredibly inarticulate* about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices, and its meaning or place in their lives." Christian Smith with Melissa Lundquist Denton, *Soul-Searching: the Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 131 (emphasis in original). See also Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18-9. Referring to the work of philosopher Charles Taylor, Smith and Denton (*Soul-Searching*, 267) remind us that "inarticulacy undermines the possibilities of reality." It appears that a simplistic Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is swiftly becoming the predominant religious worldview among many younger American Christians (on which see Smith and Denton, *Soul-Searching*, 262; Dean, *Almost Christian*, 12-15, 21, 29-30). Dean (*Almost Christian*, 39-40) writes: "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is what is left once Christianity has been drained of its missional impulse, once holiness has given way to acculturation, and once cautious self-preservation has supplanted the divine abandon of self-giving love."

⁹ "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church," www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church. This article is reporting on findings discussed in David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011). For a report on the dark side of our "sexually liberated" culture, as experienced by young American adults, see Christian Smith, et al., "The Shadow Side of Sexual Liberation," in *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 148-94.

¹⁰ Ibid. In their book, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), David Kinnaman (of the Barna Group) and Gabe Lyons argue that "churches and Christian leaders are not only

missing the chance to address the sexual struggles of young people but are piercing the confidence of young believers by not offering a biblical response to the issue of homosexuality [Y]oung people are facing a candid, sexually diverse world, often without assistance or biblical counsel from their churches or their parents” (pp. 100-01).

¹¹ Caroline J. Simon, *Bringing Sex into Focus: The Quest for Sexual Integrity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 12.

¹² Hauerwas, “Sex in Public,” 503-4. While I will not be focusing upon “singleness” *per se* in this study, with Hauerwas I absolutely affirm its importance for the mission of the church. However, I must register a significant linguistic caveat here. “Singleness,” meaning, of course, “not married,” is a completely oxymoronic term from a Kingdom perspective, since no Christian is “single” or “alone,” but rather is a valuable brother or sister within the family of God, the body/bride of Christ. Only a worldview that privileges marriage and biological family to the point of idolatry would characterize the state of being “not married” as being “single.” I haven’t found a sterling replacement for this term yet, and so for now I suggest we simply use the more cumbersome – but more appropriate – category of “unmarried.” Even this term, however, ends up naming the person in terms of something lacking, namely a spouse. Our very linguistic inability here reflects the profound degree to which the assumed normativity of marriage has affected our language. The Anabaptist tradition has something to teach us here. As C. Arnold Snyder (*Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* [Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora/Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1995], 287) explains: “The marriages that were performed in the Anabaptist communities themselves were predominantly religious unions in which the commitment of the believers with God in Christ was held to be primary over their union to one another. A very frequent way in which Anabaptists referred to their marriage partners was to call them ‘wedded brother’ or ‘wedded sister’ in the Lord. The language is significant. The brotherhood/sisterhood bond of faith was considered primary; the ‘wedded’ aspect was secondary.” Johann Christoph Arnold (*A Plea for Purity: Sex, Marriage, and God* [Farmington, PA: The Plough, 1996], 13) of the Bruderhof community expresses this Anabaptist principle when he writes: “Marriage is not the highest goal of life. God’s image is reflected most brightly and completely where there is love first for him and then for our brothers and sisters.” For a helpful resource that can aid the church in rethinking and repenting from the idolatry of biological family, see Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009).

¹³ Hauerwas, “Sex in Public,” 482.

¹⁴ **On Terminology** – My primary concern in this study is to explore the place and purpose of human sexual intimacy/union from a biblically-informed, theologically focused, evangelical Christian perspective. While crossing the disciplinary line into Christian ethics is unavoidable in a study such as this, my primary concerns will be theological in nature. Regarding terminology: The terms “sex” and “sexuality” can be used to refer to a range of aspects of humanity, and I make no pretense in this paper of exploring most of them. In the literature on human sexuality today, “sex” and “sexuality”

are also used in equivocal fashion. For example, James Nelson distinguishes “sex” from “sexuality” in a way that renders the latter as a much more comprehensive category. He writes: “Sexuality is our self-understanding and way of being in the world as male and female. It includes our appropriation of attitudes and characteristics which have been culturally defined as masculine and feminine. It involves our affectional orientation toward those of the opposite and/or same sex. It includes our attitudes about our own bodies and those of others. Because we are ‘body-selves’, our sexuality constantly reminds each of us of our uniqueness and particularity: we look different and we feel differently from any other person. Sexuality is a sign, a symbol, and a means of our call to communication and communion.” James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 17-18. On the other hand, many today use the term “sexuality” to refer to one’s sexual orientation/desire.

Throughout this study, I will be using the phrases “sexual intimacy” and/or “sexual union” quite intentionally. What I intend to indicate by them certainly includes the act of genital intercourse, but not only genital intercourse. In our current cultural climate where the idea of “having sex” is often taken exclusively to mean genital intercourse, we require a term whose semantic range extends beyond simply genital intercourse to also indicate other forms of intimate sexual expression. On the other hand, there are countless ways that human relationships represent unions, corporate realities that literally create a ‘new thing’ over and above the individuals who compose them. This fact is largely lost on our (post)modern Western culture due to its embrace of various forms of individualism. Nonetheless, this is the biblical view and the one that shapes any robustly covenantal understanding of human relationships. (For a brief statement on the importance of corporate solidarity to the Christian faith, see John Polkinghorne, “The Corporate Christ,” in *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today? Pathways to Contemporary Christology*, ed. Andreas Schuele and Günter Thomas [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009], 103-11.) Moreover, there are countless ways in which intimacy can and should be experienced and expressed between and among human beings within various relationships. What I will be focusing on in this study is simply one select dimension of human relationship, trying to make sense of it as guided by the Christian scriptures – namely sexual intimacy/union.

I use the specific terms of *sexual intimacy/sexual union* to reflect the fact that the range of sexual behaviors that constitute a central component of the marriage covenant-making/sustaining process is not legalistically indexed to genital intercourse alone – as if one could indulge in any number of forms of sexual intimacy (short of intercourse) with no relational/covenantal/moral ramifications. Interestingly and perhaps instructively, the OT appears to use the idea of “uncovering” someone’s “nakedness” (e.g., Lev 18:6-19) as a catch-all euphemism to indicate the range of sexually intimate behaviors that can transpire between two people once they have become vulnerably “naked” together. In our Christian sub-culture, the line of thought suggested here can quickly provoke the question: “So where is the line?!?” – i.e., “How far can we go without sinning?” While not necessarily a bad question, it can quickly lead down one of two equally unhelpful paths: either that of point-missing legalism on one hand, or, alternatively, of creative loophole design on the other. The danger of both paths is that they each miss the Kingdom orientation of displaying an inner heart attitude of seeking to honor the precious

covenant-making process of sexual-intimacy-that-leads-to-union. With regard to the question: “As Christians, how far can we go outside of marriage?,” the most Kingdom-like response I’ve heard is: You are free to express your romantic affection for each other in any way that does not produce in either of you the sorts of sexual desires that can only be righteously satisfied within the context of a marriage covenant. To do otherwise simply is not in accordance with the exercise of wisdom and *agape*-love, whether toward God, your romantic partner, or yourself.

¹⁵ Although having grown up in the Church of the Brethren, I have not been associated with one of the historic Anabaptist fellowships for many years. But along with my fellow pastors at Woodland Hills Church (St. Paul, MN), over the last decade I have found myself re-awakening to the powerful expression of the Kingdom of God embodied in the thought and life of Anabaptism. A major factor in this transition has been my ongoing theological dialogue with my close friend, academic colleague, and fellow pastor, Greg Boyd. I have come to embrace much of the content – and all of the spirit – of three of Greg’s books that capture important aspects of the heart of the Anabaptist vision: Boyd, *Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgment to the Love of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); idem, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); idem, *The Myth of a Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). Additionally, I have been further encouraged in my Anabaptist trajectory by the relationship we at Woodland Hills have entered into with our sisters and brothers at The Meeting House in Toronto, Ontario. In particular, my friendship and ongoing conversations with Tim Day and Bruxy Cavey have become an important part of my journey. See Bruxy Cavey, *The End of Religion: Encountering the Subversive Spirituality of Jesus* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007); Tim Day, *Inside Story* (forthcoming). Another important influence has been our friendship and ongoing dialogue with David Boshart, the executive conference minister of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference, Mennonite Church USA. At this point in my life – and the life of my ecclesial home, Woodland Hills – it is probably most accurate to say that we are now living within the diverse and growing movement of what Stuart Murray has termed “naked Anabaptism.” See Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2010).

¹⁶ Regarding the (proto)orthodox Christian tradition, see Arland J. Hultgren, *The Rise of Normative Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 563-4.

¹⁷ For discussions of Jesus’ view/use of scripture, see John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 91-5. The claim that the Christian scriptures are divinely inspired/authoritative is, of course, part and parcel of the wider Christian worldview. But this conviction should not be left as a mere theoretical claim detached from the wider realm of/quest for truth. With Peter Hill, I believe the claim of divine inspiration/authority of the scriptures suggests that we can confidently expect them to offer explanatory power with regard to the areas of reality they touch upon – in this case, human sexuality. See Peter C. Hill,

“Living on the Boundary: Scriptural Authority and Psychology,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33/2 (2005), 98-112.

¹⁸ **On the Bible and Sexuality:** Even some scholars of theologically liberal convictions can agree that the Bible has a largely sex-positive perspective and that it can function as a helpful (if not always reliable) guide for Christian sexual ethics today. J. Harold Ellens (*Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration* [Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006], 7-13) takes this approach, while mostly blaming the later tradition for the sex-negative thread within Christianity. On the other hand, I can imagine that some are wondering how they can take seriously my claim that the scriptures ought to serve as our primary guide concerning the proper vision and purpose of human sexuality. For example, some claim that “[t]here is no biblical sex ethic. The Bible knows only a love ethic.” Walter Wink, “Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality,” *Christian Century* (December 7, 1979), 1085; see also James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 59-62. However, while it is true that the biblical writings do not contain a comprehensive, systematic sexual ethic, they do provide a recognizable vision of human sexuality, including insight into the divine purposes behind this important area of human life.

Others critics claim that the biblical texts exhibit such a negative, patriarchal perspective on things sexual that they offer more problems than solutions for a contemporary sexual ethic. While it is true that the OT and NT were written in cultural contexts quite different from ours, the fundamental goodness of human sexuality comes through these texts, even while they consistently warn of the dangers associated with such a powerful force. By analogy, if one were to talk extensively about nuclear power today, there would be moments when it sounds like we are discussing a wonderful energy source, and other moments when it sounds as if nuclear energy may prove to be the very destruction of the world as we know it. Both are true – the positive and the negative potentials. Extremely powerful things often work that way. That being said, there is a trend today among some more liberal scholars toward portraying the Bible’s approach to sexuality in broadly negative terms – i.e., as little more than contradictory, archaic, patriarchal sources of sexual repression/oppression. E.g., Michael Coogan, *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says* (New York: Twelve, 2010); Jennifer Wright Knust, *Unprotected Texts: The Bible’s Surprising Contradictions about Sex and Desire* (New York: HarperOne, 2011); Darrel Ray, *Sex & God: How Religion Distorts Sexuality* (Bonner Springs, Kansas: IPC, 2012). More popularly, see Ben Edward Akerley, *The X-Rated Bible: An Irreverent Survey of Sex in the Scriptures*, 2nd ed. (Venice, CA: Feral, 1998 [1985]).

For a helpful study of sexuality in the OT that displays its positive perspective of sexual intimacy within the context of committed covenant relationship, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007). Also helpful here is John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 3: *Israel’s Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 350-83. It is true that Second Temple Judaism was influenced by Hellenistic/Greco-Roman thought in significant ways, including views of the passions in general and sexual desire specifically. William Loader has done a series of very helpful studies that bring to light the range of ways in which Second Temple Judaism(s) approached the question of sexuality. See William

Loader, *Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); idem, *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); idem, *The Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); idem, *Sexuality in the New Testament*; idem, *Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

When it comes to Jesus (i.e., the ‘Jesus tradition’) and sexuality, culturally surprising things happen. On one hand, contrary to the dominant cultural pattern of his day, Jesus did not treat women as if they were inherently sexually dangerous. The NT reports Jesus befriending, interacting with, and traveling among a range of women (e.g., Luke 8:1-3; John 4:1-30; [8:1-11]; 11:5; etc.), some of whom would have been considered particularly ‘sinful.’ E.g., Jesus allows a woman to anoint him without rebuke (Mark 14:3-9; John 12:3), etc. In important ways, Jesus challenges the culture of his day by equalizing male – female relationships in the Kingdom of God. While this trajectory of Jesus could be seen as a relaxing of his culture’s moral sensibilities, there is another contrasting side to Jesus’ teachings about sexuality. Not infrequently, Jesus actually intensifies and internalizes the requirements of the Sinai law – including certain aspects of marriage and sexuality. In this sense, Jesus teaches a vision of sexual expression/behavior that is more rigorous and demanding than that of much of his culture (e.g., see Matt 5:27-32). As William Loader (*The New Testament on Sexuality* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012] 491) concludes in his landmark study of sexuality in the New Testament: “There seems little doubt that on the spectrum of leniency to strictness Jesus was to be found at the latter end in matters sexual.” But this being said, it is important to add that Jesus never attacks or demeans sexuality – nor even sexual desire itself. Rather, the question for Jesus is what one does with it – i.e., whether one keeps sexual expression within its divinely intended bounds of the male-female marriage covenant. For a focused study on sexuality within the Jesus tradition, see William Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). Sensible, exegetically responsible studies such as Loader’s contrast with others that reflect a desire to uncover a provocative image of Jesus, even at the expense of an historically responsible one. E.g., Calum Carmichael, *Sex and Religion in the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), ch. 3, where Carmichael attempts to read the narrative of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) as Jesus making sexual innuendos to the woman. As one reviewer of Carmichael’s book has noted, the real worth of such a book is mostly “found in its curiosity value”; Stefan Fischer, review of C. Carmichael, *Sex and Religion in the Bible*, www.bookreviews.org (2012).

The Apostle Paul has often come under fire for having a less than positive view of marriage and/or sex. Dale Martin, for example, portrays Paul as adopting the strand of the Greco-Roman culture that condemns sexual desire and teaches that – if one is married – then passionless sex within marriage is the goal. See Dale B. Martin, “Paul without Passion: On Paul’s Rejection of Desire in Sex and Marriage,” in his *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), ch. 5. Some argue that when it comes to marriage and sex, Paul’s teachings are “inconsistent,” revealing that he is a hopelessly “muddled thinker” on such matters; e.g., Richard M. Price, “Celibacy and Free Love in Early Christianity,” *Theology and Sexuality* 12 (2006), 125, 140. However, as a broad range of authors have argued,

understood in its proper context and seen in light of his dominant eschatological concerns, Paul's approach to sexuality does not reflect a negative view of either sex or marriage. In his rigorous study of this issue, Edward Ellis demonstrates the weaknesses of Martin's view, and concludes that Paul's first-century readers would have "had good reason to see in Paul's words an affirmation of sex and sexual desire in marriage"; J. Edward Ellis, *Paul and Ancient View of Sexual Desire: Paul's Sexual Ethics in I Thessalonians 4, I Corinthians 7 and Romans 1* (New York: Clark, 2007), 160. Along these same lines, Will Deming's important study of Paul's view of sex and marriage in I Cor 7 reveals that "the understanding of I Corinthians 7 held by most scholars and church leaders today derives from an early Christian reinterpretation of Paul," and that "this text has been essentially misunderstood almost since its composition"; Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of I Corinthians 7* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), xxi. As Deming convincingly shows, it was Paul's concern for the practical ramifications of Christians facing the uncertainties, tribulations, and missional responsibilities of the final days before Christ's return that fueled his suggestion of remaining single and celibate – *not an ascetic theological commitment to celibacy per se* (pp. xxii, 214-15). Deming writes: "Paul's treatment of whether single Christians should marry or remain celibate is thus based wholly on the expediency of the times—and this cannot be stressed enough To overlook this is to overlook the underlying rationale of his argument" (p. 214). See also Frederick E. Brenk, "Most Beautiful and Divine: Graeco-Romans (especially Plutarch), and Paul, on Love and Marriage," in *Greco-Roman Culture and the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune and Frederick E. Brenk (Boston: Brill, 2012), 88; Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 152-234, 493-4; Rodney Reeves, *Spirituality according to Paul: Imitating the Apostle of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), ch. 7. On the importance of the eschatological element for Paul's ethics more broadly, see Wolfgang Schrage, *Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 181-86, 222-29. Lisa Sowle Cahill (*Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985]), picks up on the importance of eschatology for understanding Paul's approach to sexuality (pp. 62-8), but she also makes another crucial observation – the priority within the NT of *communal* considerations when approaching ethical questions (e.g., see p. 67). Cahill wisely foregrounds this important NT conviction throughout her study of sexuality, allowing it to call into question the individualist assumptions that drive so many contemporary sexual ethics projects, Christian and otherwise.

There appear to me to be several common ways in which Paul's statements on sex and marriage in I Cor 7 and elsewhere can be easily misinterpreted: (1) First, some readers come to Paul with a solidly settled sexual ethic shaped by our contemporary Western (post)modern sensibilities. They then set out to engage Paul – either to enlist him in support or to critique him – in light of their *a priori* sexual ethic. Whether cast in the role of friend or foe, Paul is then read in ways that, while furthering that particular sexual ethic's agenda, in the process end up caricaturing Paul's own views on sexuality. This error, of course, can be made by anyone along the conservative-liberal theological spectrum, and so we all must do our best to guard against this natural tendency, while being open to the warnings of others when they suggest we have failed to do so.

(2) Another way in which Paul can easily be misread is by setting Paul's

arguments in a foreign historical-cultural context. It is now commonly recognized that Paul was dealing with a group of Christians at Corinth that included a sector of folks – focusing on young women – committed to a radical sexual asceticism. And so, for example, a number of scholars now recognize that when Paul opens his discussion of sexuality with the words: “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch [i.e., have sexual intimacy] with a woman” (I Cor 7:1), he is quoting a maxim that has become common among the Corinthian believers (see e.g., Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 503-10). While he does his best to honor what he can of this Corinthian sentiment, Paul pushes back by explicitly teaching that each man and woman should have a spouse (v. 2), and that *both husband and wife* are to have their sexual desires fulfilled within the marriage (v. 3-5). As Thiselton (*The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 251) notes, here Paul “is astonishingly ahead of his time in recognizing that sexual intimacy can give pleasure not only to man but also to woman (in contrast to the prevailing view of the time that the function of woman was to give one-sided pleasure to man). He stresses the *mutuality and reciprocity of the sexual relationship within marriage*” (emphasis in text).

Paul is trying to find common ground with his audience – not wanting to appear to diminish the admirable nature of their motive, part of which is to exhibit a radical commitment and love for God – while at the same time helping them to see that sex within the context of marriage is a good and appropriate thing for Kingdom people. On the importance of this historical background, see Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*; and esp. Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), ch. 4.

(3) Finally, most works that are critical of Paul’s (and other biblical authors’) perspectives on sexuality – and, quite frankly, most that are not! – reveal a glaring lack of awareness of the recent seismic shift going on today in biblical studies with regard to interdisciplinary findings on the nature and function of orally-oriented ancient texts and the attendant implications for interpreting the biblical writings themselves. On the ways in which a written text can be oral-like, see John Miles Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Slavica Ranković, “The Oral-Written Continuum as a Space,” in *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Reflections and Their Implications*, ed. Slavica Ranković, et al. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 39-71. For an introduction to this broad inter-disciplinary area of research and its implications for biblical (particularly Gospel) studies, see Paul Rhodes Eddy, “Orality and Oral Transmission,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, forthcoming); Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), esp. chs. 6, 7, and 10. The work of Jennifer Knust (*Unprotected Texts*) exemplifies this problem in a variety of ways. Throughout her book, we find claims like this: “The Bible fails to offer girls – or anyone – a consistent message regarding sexual morals and God’s priorities” (p. 5); “As we will see, biblical teachings regarding desire, marriage, and the human body are entirely inconsistent” (p. 16-17); “Could one imagine a more contradictory set of teachings [on sex and marriage] collected

within one set of sacred texts?” (p. 8). Part of the reason for Knust’s sense of the contradictory nature of biblical teachings on sexuality is that, at every turn, she uncritically chooses to read the biblical texts in ways that contradict the more ‘traditional’ interpretation of these texts. And so, for example, she is confident that the book of Ruth (i.e., the Ruth-Boaz encounter) and the Song of Songs as portraying and implicitly condoning premarital sex (e.g., see pp. 5, 24, 27-37), and the relationship between David and Jonathan as “erotic” in nature (pp. 41-42). These interpretations have been shown to be highly unlikely by a range of biblical scholars, which, of course, removes the supposed “contradictions” that they are said to pose to other texts. It doesn’t take much to interpret a set of texts in ways that appear to set them in painful self-contradiction. But often texts so treated are read in a polemical context with an unsympathetic eye. Knust appears to have come to the biblical texts with a desire to defend (post)modern intuitions about sexual liberation from traditional norms, and the biblical texts as traditionally understood stand in her way. Her deconstructive project and her conclusions of “contradiction” are thus hardly surprising. Moreover, one is not filled with hermeneutical confidence in her project when Knust eventually states that biblical narratives have “no single meaning. Therefore the issue for readers of the Gospels is not whether a particular interpretation is valid but whether it is valuable, and why” (p. 240). This sort of exegetical anarchy serves the agenda of a postmodern sexual ethic quite well, but it does serious damage and disrespect to the integrity of the biblical texts in the process. Beyond this, Knust’s engagement with the biblical texts shows no hint of awareness of their orally-oriented nature and the implications for sound interpretation. For example, her use of the categories of “inconsistency” and “contradiction” are profoundly indebted to her own Western, highly-literate, post-Gutenberg, (post)modern academic culture, and she shows no awareness of the way in which her criteria of “inconsistency” is indexed to her own ethnocentric, chronocentric precision standards, and an utter lack of appreciation for the dynamics of traditional referentiality and metonymy that operate within written texts in an orally-dominant setting. For an excellent introduction to these concepts, see Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*; idem, “Selection as *pars pro toto*: The Role of Metonymy in Epic Performance and Tradition,” in *The Kalevala and the World’s Traditional Epics*, ed. Lauri Honko (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002), 106-27. On these phenomena as related to contemporary biblical studies, see Eddy and Boyd, *Jesus Legend*, 229-31, 396-406, 419-38.

The Apostle Paul’s use of the marriage relationship as a primary analogy for the relationship between Christ and the church (e.g., II Cor 11:2-3; Eph 5:21-33) must also be factored into his view on the good of marriage. In fact, Michael Tait has argued that Paul’s bridal image is actually the likeliest source for his understanding of the church as the “body of Christ”; see Michael Tait, “The Two Shall Become One: Paul’s Bridal Image as the Source of his Body Language about the Church,” *Scripture Bulletin* 38/2 (2008), 80-91. That Paul held to a predominantly/exclusively procreational model of marital/sexual purpose, as claimed by some (e.g., Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity* [Berkeley: University of California press, 2003], ch. 5) is not born out by the evidence (although, soon, many early church fathers would read him this way).

Unfortunately, the post-NT church (second century onward) would come to read an alien sexual asceticism back into Paul's words. The irony in all of this is that, in I Cor 7, Paul is actually attempting to defend sex within marriage against a group of folks in the Corinthian church who were set against it. On the ways in which later Christians read sexual renunciation back into the biblical texts, see esp. Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); idem, "Sexuality," in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2 vols., ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1997), II:1053-55; Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 216-19. Relatedly, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); esp. ch. 2; Gary Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), esp. chs. 2 and 3; Bill J. Leonard, "Celibacy as Christian Lifestyle in the History of the Church," *Review and Expositor* 74 (1977), 21-32. At the same time, we must be careful to not make a simplistic argument that attributes all of the sex-negative features of post-NT early Christianity to an alien "Hellenistic" influence, as if the NT texts themselves played no catalyzing role here whatsoever. On the importance of finding a careful historical balance in this regard, see Richard M. Price, "The Distinctiveness of Early Christian Sexual Ethics," *Heythrop Journal* 31 (1990), 257-76.

¹⁹ **On the Theological Interpretation of Scripture:** Sources (from a variety of perspectives) that I have found particularly helpful in guiding the enterprise of the theological interpretation of scripture (TIS), include: Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman, eds., *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); C. Clifton Black, "Trinity and Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 19 (2010), 151-80; Brevard S. Childs, "Toward Recovering Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997), 16-26; Richard S. Briggs, *Virtuous Reader, The: Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); Richard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr, eds., *A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, Academic, 2012); Barry L. Callen and Richard P. Thompson, *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2004); Richard B. Hays, "Reading the Bible with Eyes of Faith: The Practice of Theological Exegesis," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1 (2007), 5-21; Johnson T. K. Lim, *Grace in the Midst of Judgment: Grappling with Genesis 1-11* (New York: De Gruyter, 2002); Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall, *The Bible for Theology: Ten Principles for the Theological Use of Scripture* (New York: Paulist, 1997); C. Kavin Rowe, "Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics," *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002), 295-312; Christopher R. Seitz, *The Character of Christian Scripture; The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Charlie Trimm, "Evangelicals, Theology, and Biblical Interpretation: Reflections on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20 (2010), 311-30; Kevin Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for*

the Theological Interpretation of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Miroslav Volf, "Reading the Bible Theologically," in *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 3-40.

²⁰ **On the Biblical Meta-Narrative and Use of Scripture in Christian Theology and Ethics:** The essential contours of the meta-narrative that one discerns within the scriptures will have significant bearing on one's exegetical, hermeneutical, theological, and ethical conclusions. The reason is simple: One's sense of the broad meta-narrative of scripture inevitably serves as the implicit, and often unconscious, context within which particular portions of scripture are understood. This, I submit, is true, despite the protest against anything 'meta-narrative' in nature from certain postmodern quarters. On the importance of self-consciously reading the Christian scriptures as a meta-narrative – i.e., as a grand story that is going somewhere – see Michael W. Goheen, "The Urgency of Reading the Bible as One Story," *Theology Today* 64 (2008), 469-83; Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, "Story and Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, and Robin Parry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 144-71; N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible be Authoritative?," *Vox Evangelica* 21 ((1991), 7-32; idem, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011). On the importance of a Trinitarian hermeneutic for a Christian reading of the Old Testament, see Craig G. Bartholomew, "Listening for God's Address: A Mere Trinitarian Hermeneutic for the Old Testament," in Bartholomew and Beldman, eds., *Hearing the Old Testament*, 3-19. See also idem, "Philosophy and Old Testament Interpretation: A Neglected Influence," in Bartholomew and Beldman, eds., *Hearing the Old Testament*, 45-66.

While we must be careful of treating early Anabaptist biblical interpretation as a single monolithic enterprise (see the warning of John D. Roth, "Community as Conversation: A New Model of Anabaptist Hermeneutics," in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin [Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994], 35-47), the recognition of the importance of reading the Bible as a grand story that is going somewhere – and for which Jesus Christ must function as the unrivaled interpretive lens – appears to have been one of the distinctive aspects of early Anabaptist hermeneutics vis-à-vis other Protestant approaches. For example, in their public disputes with magisterial reformers, the Anabaptists pushed for a hermeneutical privileging of the NT and especially, the life and teachings of Jesus, while the magisterial reformers characteristically lobbied for a leveling of the OT and NT as equally determinative for Christian belief and practice. See Walter Klassen, "The Bern Debate of 1538: Christ the Center of Scripture," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 106-14; idem, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics: Presuppositions, Principles, and Practice," in Swartley, ed., *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives*, 5-7. On the early Anabaptist recognition of the importance of reading the biblical texts as something like one unfolding story, see Klassen, "Bern Debate of 1538," 110-11; John Howard Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 41 (1967), 298-99, 306-07.

With a host of other biblical scholars, I believe the bi-Testamental biblical meta-narrative can, in broadest outline, be captured by the motifs of creation—fall—redemption—restoration-of-all-things. See e.g., N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), parts III-V; Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Volf, “Reading the Bible Theologically,” 22-25. It should be noted here that the divergences between the theology of sexuality offered in this study and more liberal Christian theologies/sexual ethics can, in part, be explained by the very different senses of the import – and/or the contours and implications – of the biblical meta-narrative (and its textual anchor posts) that guides our respective biblical and theological conclusions.

A number of liberal Christian theologies tend toward a panentheistic model of the divine wherein there is little room for taking the notion of a *cosmic fall* – one that affects the created order, humans included – seriously. On the other hand, I cannot for the life of me see how the reality of a cosmic fall can be avoided if we are to take seriously the biblical narrative on its own terms. As Albert Schweitzer revealed over a century ago, liberal Christianity has never had an easy time embracing Jesus’ apocalyptic eschatology. But if we are to do justice to Jesus and his historical context, we simply cannot avoid this. Jesus embraced, modified, and passed along a particular version of the apocalyptic eschatology of his day. And at its heart is the conviction that God’s good cosmos is nonetheless both “fallen”/corrupted in significant ways, and is in an ongoing state of spiritual war. The Good News of the Gospel is not that the creation is not fallen. Rather, the Good News is that it won’t remain this way forever. On the centrality of the notion of cosmic spiritual warfare within the biblical narrative(s), see Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

Indebted to biblical and theological convictions such as these, it would be natural for this sort of project to eventually lead toward a virtue/character ethic of human sexuality. Here my intuitions run along lines similar to those of Stassen and Gushee in their *Kingdom Ethics*, esp. pp. 110-18. While I find what they refer to as a contextualist/narrativist model of Christian ethics as primary to the Christian moral life, I strongly agree that one cannot therefore simply jettison the notions of ethical rules and principles. As they note: “Rules and principles make clear what we understand to be the implications of the gospel story and our life stories for concrete ethics” (p. 117).

Like any attempt to move from the Bible to a Christian ethic, the movement from biblical text to a theology of sexuality to a fully-orbed Christian sexual ethic is complex and contentious. A range of books offer various reflections on the pathways and pitfalls of such a journey. But frequently the advice offered raises as many questions as it answers. For example, in his book, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), Charles Cosgrove proposes five hermeneutical rules when using the Bible as a moral guide: (1) The Rule of Purpose – “The purpose (or justification) behind a biblical moral rule carries greater weight than the rule itself” (p. 12); (2) The Rule of Analogy – “Analogical reasoning is an appropriate and necessary method for applying scripture to contemporary moral issues” (p. 51); (3) The Rule of Countercultural Witness – “There is a presumption in favor of according greater weight to countercultural tendencies in scripture that express the voice of the powerless and the marginalized than to those tendencies that echo the dominant voice of

the culture” (p. 90); (4) The Rule of Nonscientific Scope – “Scientific (or ‘empirical’) knowledge stands outside the scope of scripture” (p. 116); and (5) The Rule of Moral-Theological Adjudication – “Moral-theological considerations should guide hermeneutical choices between conflicting plausible interpretations” (p. 154).

But what may initially appear as commonsensical advice and/or practical hermeneutical wisdom can quickly begin to unravel once the practice begins and more specific questions are posed. The Rule of Purpose, for example, seems quite solid at first – and, theoretically, probably is. However, to function appropriately in any given instance requires that one accurately discern the correct purpose or justification behind any given biblical moral rule. And the practical problem here is that, frequently, there is room for significant debate about the second-level purpose of a first-level biblical rule.

At first glance, the Rule of Countercultural Witness sounds wonderful – especially to one (such as myself) who identifies with the Anabaptist tradition. However, as Cosgrove unpacks this rule, my own hermeneutic of suspicion is quickly triggered. The first irony is that, as Cosgrove formulates and fleshes out his rule of “countercultural witness,” one has the nagging feeling that the freight carried by this rule is anything but “countercultural” – at least with regard to Cosgrove’s own 21st century, Western, academic sub-culture. The “countercultural” values that Cosgrove proposes – i.e., the liberationist privileging of the powerless and marginalized – are the dominant and unquestioned cultural values of Cosgrove’s post-1960s, elite academic sub-culture. Of course, I have nothing against these values. They are, in fact, Kingdom values solidly rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus. But they just happen also to be the values championed by virtually all contemporary Western academics (particularly within the humanities and social sciences), whether theists, deists, atheists, or agnostics. They are not, in other words, *distinctively* Kingdom values. Now, this is all well and good. I think we can all be glad when people of all theological – or anti-theological – persuasions agree on caring about the voices of the powerless and marginalized. But my question is: Shouldn’t Cosgrove’s Rule of Countercultural Witness be reconfigured and redeployed in order to be able to pose troubling questions to the dominant culture among the Western academic elite? How about a countercultural rule that threatens not just the ancient biblical world but also the world of the contemporary Western academy (which is, I recognize, my own world too) with a Kingdom-centered countercultural critique? Again, I’m fully on board with the basic notion of such a rule. But the type of countercultural witness we need to consider is one whose shape and character derives from the fully-orbed Kingdom values as expressed in the full range of Jesus’ life and teachings, and not simply from the “countercultural” impulse of the 1960s Euro-American youth movement and its progeny, academic and otherwise.

In turning to Cosgrove’s Rule of Nonscientific Scope, it can initially appear quite helpful. The Bible is not an instance of the genre “scientific textbook,” and whenever that fact has been forgotten through Christian history, the church and its cause have usually suffered in the long-run. However, upon further consideration, Cosgrove’s rule turns out to be fraught with problems. It aligns closely with one well-meaning strategy within modern liberal theology to end the conflict between theology (Bible) and science once and for all by relegating their respective subject matters, interests, and language games to separate – even incommensurate – realms. Frequently this separation has taken the form

of “facts” vs. “values.” One example of this strategy is offered by the late Harvard biologist and professed atheist, Stephen Jay Gould, in one of his last books, *Rock of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1999). While the goal is noble – ending the conflict between science and theology/Bible – the cost is simply too high for the Christian worldview. One problem here is that “science,” as the realm of “facts,” creeps into a virtually endless series of domains in life – and into the Bible and theology. It is a strategy that begins by refusing the Bible/theology any voice on matters of (scientific) “fact” and relegating it to matters of “values” (read “ethics”). But even then the encroachment is not finished. Soon, “science” becomes an arbiter of ethics and values themselves, and, in the end, the biblical texts become little more than a supplier of sacred-sounding clichés designed to dress up scientifically established ethical conclusions arrived at quite nicely without any actual help from the Bible itself. Within this context, it becomes easy to undercut inconvenient ethical conclusions in the Bible simply by calling into question the pre-modern, antiquated “science” which serves as its ground. In Cosgrove’s words: “This kind of analysis permits us to see how a scriptural moral judgment would have to change . . . if a different set of empirical [i.e., “scientific”] facts were assumed” (p. 149). This means that the Bible’s revelational value with regard to any particular ethical issue is made contingent upon the ancient science that would support it. Suppose that God desires to reveal a trans-cultural ethical principle to his people in scripture, one that is ultimately based upon a “fact of science” known to God – one that will eventually be discovered by modern science – but a fact that is entirely unknown to the culture of the biblical author. According to the assumptions underlying this rule, it seems that God’s revelational hands are tied until the age of modern science dawns. But seriously, why think this is the case? It is hardly a stretch to imagine that an omni-resourceful God could reveal an ethical principle to his people even while the scientific grounding of the principle remains undiscovered for centuries – or, perhaps, remains undiscovered by human beings forever. To conclude otherwise is to divest the notion of divine revelation of anything like its robust traditional content. As Cosgrove himself notes, other criticisms potentially attend this rule as well, including its “overly modernist” assumptions and its doing “violence to scripture” (p. 149).

Finally, Cosgrove’s Rule of Moral-Theological Adjudication is helpful in a descriptive sense in that it highlights the fact that one’s exegesis/hermeneutics are as frequently the result of, rather than the basis of, one’s moral/theological proclivities. But when it comes to a prescriptive moment, all the rule can really do is “command that we take responsibility for our constructive part in interpretation . . .” (p. 178). But the really important question, practically speaking, is “Whose morality? Which theology?” In discussing this rule, Cosgrove devotes space to consideration of the role the “rule of love” has played in Christian interpretive history, deriving from Jesus’ two-part love commandment (pp. 158-61). As an Anabaptist, I welcome a central role for the “rule of love” within an interpretive methodology. But even this rule leaves the practical question: “Whose love? Which *agape*?” The ubiquitous use of the term “love” and its vast, often conflicting, range of meanings and implications in contemporary theology and ethics today can leave one baffled. In the end, I possess more of a Hirschian (i.e., E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967]) optimism than Cosgrove (pp. 178-9) – at least in spirit if not always in letter. I am convinced that

ascertaining the essential gist of the intentions of the authors – both human and divine (and they are not always in one-to-one correspondence) – is something to strive for as an asymptotically attainable goal. My optimism about this is primarily grounded in the theological conviction that God himself both intends to reveal himself and his ways in scripture and has the ability and ingenuity to do so. There is, then, a *faith commitment* here, i.e., faith as covenant trust in God and his claim to speak through the scriptures. For a thoughtful study that “resurrects” a place for the author (in conjunction with speech-act theory) in biblical interpretation (and beyond), see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), esp. pp. 201-80. See also Volf, “Reading the Bible Theologically,” 25-32.

Oliver O’Donovan’s theological reflections on these issues are helpful (“The Moral Authority of Scripture,” in *Scripture’s Doctrine and Theology’s Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008]): “Christian moral reasoning begins not with the authority of created structures but rather with the authority of Christ And from speaking directly of Jesus’ authority, we are bound to speak of the authorities that his authority authorizes In speaking of Scripture, . . . we properly speak of the voice of God as well as of the voice of its human authors The faith demanded of the reader of Scripture is faith in the saving work of God attested there, which is therefore a faith in Scripture too. It implies willingness to accept the testimony of Scripture without presuming to improve upon it—by excision, by correction, or by privileging a canon within the canon – but instead simply seeking to understand it in fidelity, without presuppositions or conditions” (p. 166-7). Clearly O’Donovan’s is, at best, an asymptotic goal. And yet, that we do have it as an intentional goal is vital to a truly Christian engagement with scripture. In this sense, Volf (“Reading the Bible Theologically,” 34) reminds us of the importance, *as Christian readers*, of coming to the Bible with a “*hermeneutic of respect* rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion.” As Volf properly warns us, in an age such as ours “of individual choices and shifting commitments suspicion is easy and its thrills are cheap” (p. 33). Along similar lines, Richard Hays encourages Christian readers of scripture, following “the pattern of Jesus’ own faith-obedience,” to approach the biblical text with a “hermeneutic of trust,” rather than with the currently fashionable suspicion exemplified by postmodern literary critics who self-righteously assume their own moral superiority over against the the authors whom they presume to responsibly interpret. Richar

“Salvation by Trust? Reading the Bible Faithfully,” *Christian Century* (February 26, 1997), 218-23 (here pp. 220, 219).

²¹ Bartholomew, “Listening for God’s Address,” 3, 4.

²² Marva Dawn, *Sexual Character: Beyond Technique to Intimacy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 37.

²³ For a helpful guide here, see Don Thorson, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). Stanley Grenz has proposed a tripartite approach to theological

sources/norms: scripture, church tradition, and culture (specifically, “the thought-forms of contemporary culture”). See Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 16-20.

²⁴ A wide spectrum of theologians exploring issues of sexual ethics commonly appeal to the four elements of the Wesleyan quadrilateral as a methodological guiding light. E.g., Cahill, *Between the Sexes*, 5; Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 182-96; Nelson, *Body Theology*, ch. 4. But a point of methodological disagreement arises with this question: Which of the four elements is granted priority when they come into conflict? Liberal theologians regularly critique the biblical perspective with an appeal to inter-disciplinary studies (i.e., reason) and various data from human experience. Some (e.g., James Nelson, *Body Theology*, 58-65), mention scripture and tradition, but go on to conclude that little of concrete, practical value can be gleaned from them for a contemporary sexual ethic. For a number of liberal scholars, it turns out that their discussion of scripture in the context of sexual ethics is mostly critical and dismissive (e.g., Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* [Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1994], 55-62), and in the end amounts to no more than an appeal to the values of “love” and “justice,” both of which are frequently defined in terms far more compatible with the (post)modern western (neo)liberal vision than with scripture itself. In any case, the liberal Christian trajectory uniformly gives human reason and/or experience pride of place when constructing a theology/ethics of sexuality. E.g., James Gustafson (“Nature, Sin and Covenant: Three Bases for Sexual Ethics,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 24 [1981], esp. 483-97), although using biblically oriented terms such as “sin” and “covenant,” explicitly states that “human experience” and various “philosophical tests” are the primary criteria for shaping a sexual ethic (p. 485). Thus, sin and covenant are central for him not primarily because they are central to scripture, but rather because they are “aspects of our experience as sexual beings” (p. 487). In fact, any meaningful appeal to scripture is entirely lacking in Gustafson’s article, and when he ends up defending elements of “traditional” Christian sexual ethics, his reason for doing so is “based on comprehensive vindicating reasons that continue to be valid” (p. 492; cf. 495). Marvin Ellison (*Erotic Justice: A Liberating Ethic of Sexuality* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996]), distinguishing his more radical structural-liberationist approach to sexual ethics from that of traditional liberalism, calls for a Christian ethic of “erotic justice” (pp. 28-9) wherein, methodologically speaking, one willingly relativizes all four theological sources – scripture, tradition, reason, and experience – by submitting them to the higher value of “the needs of marginalized communities in their movement toward justice” (p. 68). In his more recent book, *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), Ellison’s “justice-love” ethic removes marriage, covenantal opposite-sex relationships as the uniquely appropriate context for the expression of sexual intimacy, and even unconditional sexual fidelity as normative moral criterion for sexual expression, replacing them with his sole axiom of “justice in sexual relationships” (p. 58, emphasis in original). This move eventually leads him to entertain polygamy, extra-marital sex (adultery), and polyamory as viable options for Christians – as long as they are guided by a “justice-love” ethic (see pp. 41-58).

More conservative theologians are convinced of the divinely inspired nature of the scriptures, and thus feel bound to allow the scriptures to raise critical questions for the deliverances of contemporary reasoning and experience that conflict with its witness. I share this conviction. However, the tendencies – as well as the very categories of ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ – are never nice and neat, and should not preclude genuine dialogue across these categories and the fostering of a mutually shared hermeneutic of self-suspicion.

²⁵ I.e., the term “evangelical” has become for many today first and foremost a political term, roughly equivalent to ‘a religious conservative/Republican.’ As a Christian who self-identifies with Anabaptism and its historic recognition of the importance of keeping the Kingdom of God distinct from all of the various kingdoms of this world (political and otherwise), my embrace of the term ‘evangelical’ is purely theological, not political. In this sense, I mean by the term ‘evangelical’ someone committed to the inspiration and authority of the Christian scriptures, the importance of other-oriented covenant relationship with God through Jesus and with God’s people, etc. Regarding my own theological method as an evangelical, I have been influenced by the approach of my former teacher, mentor, and friend, David Clark. See David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003). For further reflections on evangelical theological method, see John G. Stackhouse, ed., *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

²⁶ Feldmeier and Spieckermann (*God of the Living*, 96) write: “The christological and ecclesiological dimensions of biblical monotheism sound the themes that led to the development of Trinitarian dogma in the early church. Therefore, despite its ties to the thought processes of a later period, Trinitarian dogma is not a speculative aberration, the accusation often made especially since the Enlightenment, but is grounded in the specific shape of NT monotheism, which understands the unity and uniqueness of God, like all other divine attributes, inclusively.”

²⁷ Particularly in a study on sexuality, when emphasizing with I John 4:8, 16 that God is *agape*-love, it is wise for us to remember a warning from Karl Barth: “If we say with I John 4 that God is love, the converse that love is God is forbidden until it is mediated and clarified from God’s being and therefore from God’s act what the love is which can and must be legitimately identified with God.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Clark, 1957), II, 1, 276.

²⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000 [1994]), 71-2. **On God as (Agape) Love:** Similarly, reflecting upon the stunning revelation of I John 4:8 that God is *agape*-love, the Roman Catholic thinker, Peter Kreeft, writes: “Nowhere else does Scripture express God’s essence in this way. Scripture says God is just and merciful, but it does not say that God is justice itself or mercy itself. It does say that God *is* love, not just a *lover*. Love is God’s very essence. Everything else is a manifestation of this essence to us, a relationship between this essence and us. This is the absolute; everything else is relative to it.” Peter Kreeft, *Knowing the Truth About God’s Love: The One Thing We Can’t Live Without* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988), 91.

For a sampling of other scholars who, following I John 4:8, 16, have concluded that self-giving *agape*-love names the essence of the Triune God, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), II:1, 272-97, esp. 280; Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappraising the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 49; Gregory A. Boyd, *Repenting of Religion: Turning From Judgment to the Love of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 2004) chs. 1-3; Vincent Brümmer, “Bestowed Fellowship: On the Love of God,” in *Understanding the Attributes of God*, eds. G. van den Brink and M. Sarot (New York: Lang, 1999), 33-52; idem, *The Model of Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); T. A. Campbell, “‘Pure, Unbounded Love’: Doctrine about God in Historic Wesleyan Communities,” in *Trinity, Community, and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology*, ed. M. D. Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood, 2000), 85-109; Gary Chartier, *The Analogy of Love: Divine and Human Love at the Center of Christian Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2007); Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*, trans. M. E. Biddle (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 127; John R. Franke, “God is Love: The Social Trinity and the Mission of God,” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, eds. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 117; Brian Gaybba, “Love as the Lamp of Theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 65 (1988), 27-37; Justo González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 131-38; E. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. D. L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 315; Adrio König, “Covenant Partner and Image: Deriving Anthropology from the Doctrine of God,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 88 (1994), 37, 39; George Newlands, *God in Christian Perspective* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994), 40; Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: *The Living God* (Peabody, MA: Prince, 1998), 118; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991 [1988]), I, 422-32; Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 81-83; Clark Pinnock and Robert Brow, *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: IL, 1994); A. J. Torrance, “Is Love the Essence of God?,” in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 114-37; Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994); John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), II, note on I John 4:8; Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1972); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir’s, 1985); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004). Regarding von Balthasar on this matter, see also the helpful explication of his thought in Robert S. Pesarchick, *The Trinitarian Foundation of Human Sexuality as Revealed by Christ According to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2000), 140-43, 150-54. For a sampling of exegetes who have arrived at a position complementary to this, see Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, I, 288; John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2: *Israel’s Faith*

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2006), 165-72; Richard B. Hays, “The God of Mercy Who Rescues Us from the Present Evil Age: Romans and Galatians,” in *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology*, eds. A. A. Das and F. J. Matera (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 123-43.

²⁹ This succinct way of describing *agape*-love was developed in conversation with my fellow pastor and friend, Kevin Callaghan. Along these lines, Anthony Thiselton (*The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 249) describes the *agape*-love of I Cor 13 as “a manifestation of a *desire and will to seek the best for the other*” (emphasis in text).

³⁰ On the importance of recognizing the distinctly cruciform nature of *agape*-love in the doing of Christian ethics, see Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 200-03. See also Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 361-2.

³¹ That perichoretic *agape*-love is the unifying essence of the “oneness” of the Triune God has been proposed by numerous scholars. See e.g., Franke, “God is Love,” 116-17; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 174-75; Miroslav Volf, “Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God: A Congregational Model of Church Order and Life,” in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 227.

³² For several studies that provide helpful guidance in understanding an appropriate Trinitarian vision of God, see Allan Coppedge, *The God Who Is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007); Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Cornelius Plantinga, “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988), 37-53. I am convinced that a carefully construed Social Trinitarianism offers us the best conceptual pathway toward a human understanding of the Triune nature of God. Contra e.g., Mark Husbards (“The Trinity is *Not* Our Social Program: Volf, Gregory of Nyssa and Barth,” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009], 120-41), a carefully nuanced, robust social Trinitarianism offers a valuable – and biblically grounded (e.g., John 17) – pathway by which to understand the revelation of the Triune God in Jesus. And one can affirm this while granting with Husbards such things as Moltmann’s tendency to over-play his critique of “monotheism,” and the common contemporary misconstrual of “Western” vs. “Eastern” conceptions of the Trinity in the early church.

³³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, reprint ed., trans. N. H. Smith (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995 [1949]), 53, 54.

³⁴ For helpful discussions on this question, see Stanley J. Grenz, “Is God Sexual? Human Embodiment and the Christian Conception of God,” *Christian Scholars Review* 28 (1998), 24-41; Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 169-74.

³⁵ Donald D. Hook and Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., “The Pronouns of Deity,” in *This is My Name Forever: The Trinity and Gender Language for God*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 73.

³⁶ It has been suggested by some OT scholars that the structure of Gen 1:26-28 does not connect the “image/likeness” of God with “male and female.” Often, those who make this claim base their conclusion on the famous study by Phyllis Bird, “Male and Female He Created Them’: Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981), 129-59. See also Bird’s related reflections in idem, “Sexual Differentiation and Divine Image in the Genesis Creation Texts,” in *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995 [1991]), 5-28; idem, “Genesis I-III as a Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality,” *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987), 31-44; idem, “‘Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh,’” *Theology Today* 50 (1994), 521-34. I will return to Bird’s exegetical claims below.

³⁷ This is not to ignore, of course, the many anthropomorphic depictions of God within the scriptures, including his figural corporealization. Nor is it to deny the important ways in which humanity is created “theomorphic” in nature. However, this pattern within the scriptures is also tempered in ways so as to make clear that God is not embodied in the way humans are. This becomes especially clear in the NT (e.g., John 4:24).

³⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: Knox, 1982), 33. Gerhard von Rad (*Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1: *The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], 27) suggests that the divine *creation* of sexual differentiation in the Genesis accounts functions as a polemic against the “divinization of sex” that was common among Israel’s neighbors.

³⁹ For examples of the claim of a feminine dimension of the Holy Spirit and its importance, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981 [1980]), 57; Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jürgen Moltmann, *Humanity in God* (New York: Pilgrim, 1983), 101-02, 106; Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jürgen Moltmann, *God – His and Hers* trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1991 [1991]), 8-9, 36-37. Regarding such a proposal, Marianne Meye Thompson concludes: “Unfortunately, such approaches end up not with a God who is without gender but with a God of dual gender”; *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 181. For a critique of designating the Holy Spirit as feminine, see Hook and Kimel, Jr., “Pronouns of Deity,” 75-78.

⁴⁰ Some have offered as an additionally argument that fact that the Holy Spirit is not found in the masculine case in either of the two biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek). In fact, in Hebrew the Spirit (“*ruah*”) takes the feminine case (though in the Greek [“*pneuma*”], it takes the neuter case). However, others argue that the case of a word is not a decisive consideration.

⁴¹ Connected to this, Feldmeier and Spieckermann (*God of the Living*, 91) point out: “the divine name Father affirms that the bond with a counterpart [i.e., Son] belongs so fundamentally to God’s nature that . . . the human Jesus Christ as God’s Son assumes his name and participates in his power, indeed, can even himself be called God.”

⁴² Garrett Green, “The Gender of God and the Theology of Metaphor,” in *Speaking the Christian God*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 64.

⁴³ E.g., see Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in Light of the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 251. However, for a critique of this line of concern, see Thompson, *Promise of the Father*, 178-81.

⁴⁴ Ben Witherington III and Laura M. Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty: Father, Son and Spirit in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 59.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁴⁶ Elaine Storkey, “Evangelical Theology and Gender,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, eds. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 172.

⁴⁷ **On the Theological Use of the Genesis Creation Accounts:** Genesis 1:26-27, as well as other passages from the first few chapters of Genesis, will play a significant role in this theological study of human sexual intimacy/union. Joel Kaminsky is certainly correct that the first two chapters of Genesis “provide a veritable theological feast of ideas”; “The Theology of Genesis,” in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel H. Lohr, and David I. Petersen (Boston: Brill, 2012), 638. Terrence Fretheim reminds us of the significance of how one interprets these opening chapters of Genesis: “How we think about the God of Genesis, indeed of the Bible as a whole, will be sharply affected by how we portray the God of the creation accounts”; “The Self-Limiting God of the Old Testament and Issues of Violence,” in *Raising Up a Faithful Exegete: Essays in Honor of Richard D. Nelson*, ed. K. L. Noll and Brooks Schramm (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 181. For our purposes, it is important to remember that the same thing can be said of the portrayal of “humanity” – and of “male” and “female,” of “man” and “woman” – in the Genesis creation accounts. To appeal to these texts in a responsible manner, several potential problems should be addressed and clarifications must be made as to *how* these texts are – and are not – being used.

First, it is quite clear that the first two chapters of Genesis guide NT reflection on human sexual union – in this, the Apostle Paul follows the lead of Jesus himself (e.g., note Jesus’ direct reference to Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:24 in Mark 10:2-9 and Matt 19:3-6; Paul’s quotation of Gen 2:24 in I Cor 6:16; and Paul’s likely echo of the male and female of Gen 1:26-27 in Rom 1:26-27). On the importance of the Genesis creation accounts for the NT’s reflections about human sexuality, see Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament*, 27, 121-22.

Second, while a number of exegetical insights about the opening chapters of Genesis will play an important role in this study, they will not serve as an end in themselves. Rather, they serve the broader, explicitly *theological* purpose of drawing a Christian theological vision of human sexual intimacy from the wider, bi-Testamental biblical narrative. In this sense, specific exegetical insights will remain in service to a broader canonical-theological reading of scripture. R. W. L. Moberly helpfully describes the theological impetus behind such an approach: “One key aspect of the canonical preservation and reception of a book like Genesis is *recontextualization*. As part of a canonical collection, Genesis is read alongside other texts, with other perspectives and practices, many of which may not have been envisaged by those writers and editors responsible for Genesis . . . but which now form part of the frame of reference within which Genesis is received. For Christians, this canon includes the NT, in which God becomes definitively understood in the light of the incarnation – the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.” Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14-15. Of course, care must be taken in how one proceeds in a theological interpretation of scripture in general, and Genesis in particular. Sources that prove especially helpful for entering into theological interpretation of Genesis itself include: Richard S. Briggs, “The Book of Genesis,” in *A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture*, eds. Richard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 19-50; Brueggemann, *Genesis*; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); R. R. Reno, “Beginning with the Ending,” in *Genesis and Christian Theology*, eds. Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott, and Grant Macaskill (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 26-42; idem, *Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010). While I have benefitted from each of these scholars’ works, I don’t know that any of them would entirely agree with the following theological interpretation of key passages in Genesis 1-2 – after all, these two chapters in Genesis are among the most canvassed and controversial sections of scripture within contemporary scholarship today.

Finally, given the role that the theological interpretation of Genesis 1-2 plays in this paper, I must respond to several arguments suggesting that this portion of scripture does not provide useful source material for such a project. Three objections will be discussed. (1) Bob Becking has argued that the narrative(s) of Genesis 1-3 is written in “relatively neutral wording” that leaves its significance under-determined and thus open to a wide range of interpretations. Therefore, anything like “objective exegesis” of this text is an “illusion.” Bob Becking, “Once in a Garden: Some Remarks on the Construction of the Identity of Woman and Man in Genesis 2-3,” in *Out of Paradise: Eve and Adam and Their Interpreters*, ed. Bob Becking and Susanne Hennecke (Sheffield:

Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 1, 5. In response to Becking's concern: While responsible exegesis and theological interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis are complex enterprises – ones that have frequently led to misunderstanding and misuse throughout Jewish and Christian history – this does not mean that the attempt to do serious exegetical analysis can lead only to “illusion.” Becking's claim to the contrary confuses categories (i.e., meaning vs. significance, etc.). That being said, Becking's objection does signal the abuse that this text – and following from it, people themselves (most frequently women) – have suffered through the centuries because of the misinterpretation of these chapters. Any contemporary theological projects that refer to the opening chapters of Genesis must be aware of, and vigilant against, any sort of eisegesis in service to oppressive ideologies.

(2) David Kelsey has argued that, because the Genesis creation texts appear to be tainted with concerns of “deliverance” and “eschatological blessing,” they “should provide norms for no theological address whatsoever to the anthropological question, what is a human being?” Rather, the “canonical Wisdom literature provides a creation story whose implied answers to the questions of what is a human being are more hospitable to scientifically warranted secular anthropological claims than are the anthropological implications of the Genesis creation stories that have traditionally provided norms for Christian anthropology.” David Kelsey, “Wisdom, Theological Anthropology, and Modern Secular Interpretation of Humanity,” in *God's Life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 44. In response to Kelsey: His reduction of the essence of Wisdom's creation texts to “the narrative logic of an expressive gesture or spontaneous play” (p. 55) is hardly an obvious reading of these texts. But, it is an understandably attractive move for Kelsey in that it provides a sufficiently innocuous theological motif such that there is little of substance to be derived from it that could in any way conflict with the presuppositions and/or data of modern scientific disciplines. His prior claim – that the Genesis accounts are inappropriate for serious anthropological consideration because they are influenced by logically subsequent themes of deliverance and eschatology – is, again, hardly obvious. In fact, from a Christian canonical-theological perspective – as noted above, a perspective that guides this current project – it is a significantly wrong-headed claim. Contrary to Kelsey, the “narrative logics” of creation, on one hand, and deliverance and/or eschatological blessing, on the other, need not be viewed as conflictive, let alone mutually exclusive. Moreover, from a canonical-theological perspective, the wider meta-narrative of scripture encompasses and coordinates these sub-narratives in way that renders them complementary and mutually enriching. More specifically, both the salvation and the teleological goal (i.e., eschatology) of humanity can shed valuable theological light upon the divine intentions connected to humanity's original creation, etc. Contrary to Kelsey's claim, Phyllis Bird (“Genesis I-III as a Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality,” 40) rightly argues that Genesis creation accounts have a major role to play in a contemporary theological anthropology: “Theological anthropology has been dominated by concept of the divine image as determinative for an understanding of humanity in its created nature, and rightly so, since this stands as the lead and controlling statement of the combined [Genesis] creation accounts, giving to the human species a unique identity and dignity, grounded in a special relationship to God. It is therefore the foundational concept for all canonical reflection on the nature of humankind”

Whether the Genesis creation accounts will make for a conflict-free interaction between Christian theology and contemporary anthropology is another matter. But the desire for such an interaction cannot be allowed effectively to ban such a crucially important portion of scripture from entering the anthropological conversation.

(3) Finally, the claim has been made by some that Genesis 1 and/or 2 reflect a less-than-loving context for God's creational activity in these chapters. See e.g., Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon, 1986), esp. ch. 2 (pp. 47-92); Dale Patrick and Alan Scult, "Genesis and Power: An Analysis of the Biblical Creation Story," in *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1987), 103-25). The primary claims here are that: (1) remnants of an ancient cosmic combat myth are evident in Genesis 1, which speaks to violence at the heart of creation and can foster human violence; and (2) creation represents the imposition of God's absolute, transcendent will upon all else, which does not reflect mutuality and loving, egalitarian relationship. In brief response, many biblical scholars reject the idea that there are remnants of a cosmic combat narrative in Genesis 1; see e.g., J. Richard Middleton, "Creation Founded in Love: Breaking Rhetorical Expectations in Genesis 1:1-2:3," in *Sacred Text, Secular Times: The Hebrew Bible in the Modern World*, eds. L. J. Greenspoon and B. F. LeBeau (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2000), 47-85. However, even if one does recognize such elements in Genesis 1, this in no way implies that the creation is not motivated by divine love or that human violence is thereby condoned, as demonstrated by the following studies: Gregory Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997); Karl Möller, "Images of God and Creation in Genesis 1-2," in *A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on His 60th Birthday*, eds. J. A. Grant, A. Lo, and G. J. Wenham (New York: Clark, 2011), 3-29. Regarding the claim that creation violates a vision and ethic of mutuality and peace due to the imposition of the absolute, transcendent divine will: as numerous scholars have shown, Genesis 1-2 does not merely reveal a God of transcendence but one of immanence and relationality as well. In the words of J. Richard Middleton ("Creation Founded in Love," 67): an appropriate theological reading of the biblical creation text itself reminds us that "we ought not to separate our redemptive vision of God's love from God's creative power . . . without theological contradiction [we can say that] Genesis 1:1-2:3 converges on John 3:16. In both creation and redemption, 'God so loved the world that he gave . . .'" See also Möller, "Images of God," esp. 27-29. For a powerful exploration of the OT revelation of a vibrantly and passionately *relational* Creator God, see Terrence Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005).

⁴⁸ The question of the precise meaning of the terms "image" [*selem*] and "likeness" [*dēmût*] has been the subject of much discussion and speculation through church history. It is not uncommon to find thinkers in the early church giving quite different meanings to the two terms corresponding to two distinct aspects of human nature (e.g., Irenaeus). Many commentators today see them as functional synonyms. Some have argued that the language of "*in* our image" and "*according to* our likeness" suggests that humanity is "a copy of something that has the divine image, not necessarily a copy of God himself"; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word, 1987), 32. However, read in context, the

prepositions appear to be interchangeable, and the “usage shows that *b* = ‘in’ and *k* = ‘as’ have roughly the same value in these texts. God indeed created [humanity] *as* the divine image. Humans do not conform to a representation of God, they are the divine image”; Peter J. Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12/1 (2008), 31. As Gentry notes (p. 31), this slightly less direct way of signaling the fact that humanity *is* the image of God is most likely “used in the cultural and linguistic setting of the ancient Near East to prevent [humanity] from being considered an idol and worshipped as such.”

There has been a long history of discussion and debate as to what, exactly, Gen 1:26-27 means to signify by referring to humanity as the “image of God.” For a survey, see G. A. Jonsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-27 in a Century of Old Testament Research*, trans. M. S. Cheney (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988). Helpful studies of this important passage and/or concept include: Kari Elizabeth Børresen, *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); P. E. Dion, “Ressemblance et Image de Dieu,” in *Suppléments aux Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. H. Cazelles and A. Feuillet (Paris: Letouzey and Ané, 1973), 55:365-403; W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity and Monotheism* (Boston: Brill, 2003); J. R. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005). Among OT exegetes, there is a wide consensus that the phrase “image of God” is to be understood not as an explication of the *essential nature* of humans, but rather of their God-given *function or calling (specifically tied to the command to rule)*. See e.g., Karl Löning and Erich Zenger, *To Begin with, God Created . . . : Biblical Theologies of Creation*, trans. Omar Kaste (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000 [1997]), 107-9; P. D. Miller, “Man and Woman: Towards a Theological Anthropology,” in *The Way of the Lord: Essays in Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 310-18. This perspective has often been embraced over against the traditional “substantial” view that was driven more by systematic theological concerns than by exegesis. However, once Gen 1:26-28 is read in light of the ancient Near Eastern concept of divine image as a *sacred (living) statue*, new nuanced possibilities emerge. Peter Gentry (“Kingdom through Covenant,” 32) explains: “Thus the image is both physical and yet goes far beyond being merely physical. This is an interpretation that allows for the physical aspect of ‘image’ but results in an emphasis such that the character of humans ruling the world is what represents God. It is important to note that this definition of the divine image is not a functional one, but an ontological one [Humanity] *is* the divine image.”

⁴⁹ See Neal H. Walls, ed., *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005).

⁵⁰ Examples of ANE kings being designated as the “image” of a god are numerous, including an Akkadian text from the time of Esarhaddon (7th century BCE): “The Father of the king my lord is the (very) image of [the god] Bel, and the king my lord is the (very) image of Bel”; Robert H. Pfeiffer, *State Letters of Assyria: A Transliteration and Translation of 355 Official Assyrian Letters Dating from the Sargonid Period (722-625 B.C.)* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1935), 120. At least in the Egyptian

context, it appears that idea of the King as the “image” of the god is grounded in the idea that he is a “son” and thus ruling vice-regent of the god. See Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury, 1978), 247-56.

While the kingly function is undoubtedly a significant aspect of the wider implications of “image of God” in Gen 1:26-27, I suggest that the notion of a sacred statue, more specifically a “living statue,” is an equally helpful – and perhaps a logically prior – concept for unpacking the full implications of humanity as the “image of God.” As such, it is a concept that will inform the theology of human sexual intimacy that follows. That being said, with regard to a theology of human sexuality and gender, the kingly function is absolutely crucial, since, among other things, it reveals that *all human beings* – both male and female – are equally tasked with this vice-regency/ruling function. See Richard S. Hess, “Splitting the Adam: The Usage of *ādām* in Genesis I-V,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton (New York: Brill, 1990), 12-13; Middleton, *Liberating Image*; Miller, “Man and Woman”; Bird, “Male and Female He Created Them,” 144, 159. On the concepts of “likeness” (*dēmūt*) and “image” (*selem*) within their wider ANE context, see the very helpful study of Randall Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, esp. 117-76.

Richard Briggs has explored the “image of God” concept in Genesis from a canonical perspective, concluding that image of God language functions as “a relatively underdetermined place holder for something that can only be more clearly defined by seeing how the canonical narrative develops, beyond Genesis, and indeed beyond the OT.” See his “Humans in the Image of God and Other Things Genesis Does Not Make Clear,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4 (2010), 111. While I absolutely agree with Briggs regarding the importance of further canonical development for understanding the image of God, I am a bit more optimistic than he concerning what the Genesis text itself (understood within the context of the wider ANE world and related OT traditions) can offer in this regard.

Throughout this study, two concepts that emerge in the opening chapters of Genesis will play a pivotal role in understanding humanity – the “image of God” and covenant relationship. In recognizing the centrality of these themes for a theology of human sexuality, I find myself in agreement with Adrio König who argues that these two concepts are fundamental to a theological anthropology grounded in the doctrine of God. See König, “Covenant Partner and Image.” Similarly, Peter Gentry (“Kingdom through Covenant,” 32) has demonstrated the important connections between the image of God and covenant relationship in Gen 1.

⁵¹ For discussion, see J. J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 99-115.

⁵² On ancient Near Eastern divine images and their perceived relation to the god inhabiting them, see A. Berlejung, “Washing the Mouth: The Consecration of Divine Images in Mesopotamia,” in K. van der Toorn, ed., *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 45-72; Christopher Walker and Michael B. Dick, *The Induction*

of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mīs Pī Ritual (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 6-8; Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology*, 99-110. See also the essays contained in Michael B. Dick, ed., *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999); and Walls, ed., *Cult Image and Divine Representation*.

⁵³ Walker and Dick, *Induction of the Cult Image*, 8. Of the idea of an image in this ancient context, Doug Baker reminds us: “An ‘image’ is a physical representation of something that may or may not be physical; the most common use of the word is in referring to idols. The image need not, therefore, actually bear any physical resemblance to the object, king, or god that is represented”; *Covenant and Community: Our Role as the Image of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 68.

⁵⁴ A point recognized by Jürgen Moltmann, *Man: Christian Anthropology in the Conflict of the Present*, trans. John Sturdy (London: SPCK, 1974), 109.

⁵⁵ Löning and Zenger, *To Begin with, God Created*, 108. H. Niehr notes regarding Gen 1:27-27: “Humans were thus created to be living statues of the deity.” Niehr, “In Search of YHWH’s Cult Statue in the First Temple,” in K. van der Toorn, ed., *The Image and the Book*, 93 (note: one does not have to embrace Niehr’s conclusions regarding the image of Yahweh in the First Temple in order to appreciate his insight on this passage in Genesis). Similarly, Joseph Blenkinsopp points out that the strong polemic against idols in Isaiah 40-48 “suggests that creation in the image of God implies polemic against the cult of other images, idolatrous images, in the sense that the human being is to be the only replica and representative of God on earth”; *Creation, Un-creation, Re-creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (New York: Clark, 2011), 28. In her Harvard University PhD dissertation, Catherine Beckerleg thoroughly explores this idea, concluding that comparative study of other ancient Near Eastern texts “suggests that *selem* [image] and *dāmūt* [likeness] in Gen 1:1-2:3 functioned in at least two ways: to compare mankind to (and to contrast him with) a divine statue, but also to present the divine-human relationship in terms of kinship.” See Catherine Leigh Beckerleg, “The ‘Image of God’ in Eden: The Creation of Mankind in Genesis 2:5--3:24 in Light of the Mis Pi Pit Pi and Wpt-R Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt” (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2009), 4. Beckerleg’s study concludes that “in Gen 2:5–3:24 the subtle allusions to divine statue animation texts suggest that, as in Gen 1:26–27, *selem* [image] is being redefined as a human being” (from the abstract). For a thorough discussion, see Beckerleg, “‘Image of God’ in Eden,” 193-244. See also Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 107; Rikk E. Watts, “The New Exodus/New Creational Restoration of the Image of God,” in *What Does it Mean to Be Saved? Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 15-41; Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 160-61.

⁵⁶ In their appropriately titled biblical theology, *God of the Living*, Feldmeier and Spieckermann explore the centrality of the theme of the ‘living God’ in scripture (see esp. their conclusion to the book, pp. 519-50). They write: “The Old Testament discussion of the ‘living God’ . . . is attested without exception in post-exilic texts and testifies to the intensifying reflection on the fundamental connection between God and life” (p. 525).

⁵⁷ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 33-34.

⁵⁸ Note carefully here that I am *not* making the exegetical claim that the author of Gen 1:26-27 was intending cryptically to refer to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity! However, within a Christocentric, canonical-theological approach, it is appropriate to look for textual seeds in the OT that later blossom in the NT (eventually coming to succinct articulation in early Christian creeds) in surprising ways. The intra-relational nature of God is one example of this. Karl Barth, of course, famously argued in this direction; see *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, p. 191-92. For an insightful Christian theological engagement with Genesis 1:26-27 in the content of exploring the Triune nature of God, see Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 283-88. For a helpful summary of the development of Grenz’s theological engagement with Genesis 1:26-27, including reflections on criteria for an appropriate Christian theological use of this text, see Jason S. Sexton, “The *Imago Dei* Once Again: Stanley Grenz’s Journey toward a Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4 (2010), 187-206. On the Christian theological use of Gen 1:26-28 and the *imago Dei* motif, see also the thoughts of Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 71-77, 97-100, 119-25, 152-56, 178-82, 189-93, 198-99. All of this being said, it is worth noting that several OT scholars have argued that, exegetically speaking, Gen 1:26-27 can legitimately be read as referring to some sort of plurality within God himself. See e.g., D. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 16 (1967) 53-103; Johannes C. de Moor, “The Duality in God and Man: Gen 1:26-27 as P’s Interpretation of the Yahwistic Creation Account,” in *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor (Boston: Brill, 1998), 112-25; and especially T. Keiser, “The Divine Plural: A Literary-Contextual Argument for Plurality in the Godhead,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34 (2009) 131-46. More broadly, some of the reflections of Aubrey R. Johnson remain relevant. See *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961).

⁵⁹ And so, as Joel Green reminds us: “The concept of the *imago Dei*, then, is fundamentally relational, or covenantal” *Body, Soul, and Human Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 63.

⁶⁰ Thomas A. Smail, “In the Image of the Triune God,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003), 32. Similarly, see Pesarchick, *Trinitarian Foundation of Human Sexuality*, 179-88; Miroslav Volf, “Being as God Is: Trinity and Generosity,” in Volf and Welker, eds., *God’s Life in Trinity*, 5-7. See also Volf’s extended argument for conceiving of the vocation of the church as that of imaging the Triune God; *After Our*

Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). On the centrality and importance of a Trinitarian approach to a Christian theological reading of scripture, see Black, “Trinity and Exegesis”; Rowe, “Biblical Pressure”; Geoffrey Wainwright, “Trinity,” in Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 815-18. Just how a properly “Trinitarian” reading of the Bible in general, or any specific passage in particular, should unfold is, of course, a matter of discussion and debate amongst theological interpreters. And thus the constant need within the church for exegetical dialogue and theological humility.

⁶¹ Thus, in reflecting on the implications of Gen 1:26-28, Richard Bauckham notes: “Creation in the image of God does not make [humans] demigods. They are unequivocally creatures”; “Humans, Animals, and the Environment in Genesis 1-3,” in MacDonald, Elliott, and Macaskill, eds., *Genesis and Christian Theology*, 183.

⁶² Beckerleg, “‘Image of God’ in Eden,” 286. Along these lines, Beckerleg emphasizes that the Genesis author reinterprets the ANE concept of a divine image. Among the modifications is that, although humans are portrayed as the image of God, they are not presented “in terms of a divine manifestation” (p. 291).

⁶³ For an excellent survey of this restoration process as evidenced through the biblical narrative, see Watts, “New Exodus/New Creational Restoration of the Image of God.”

⁶⁴ For a more extended discussion of each view, see Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, “The Divine Image Debate,” in *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009 [2002]), ch. 5. See also the helpful discussion in Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 223-56.

⁶⁵ Some fear that even the word “stewardship” does not sufficiently guard against unhealthy interpretations of this passage. In response, Brandon Frick has argued that a covenant-centered approach to reading Genesis can help to assuage such concerns. Such a proposal fits well with the covenant-focused nature of this present paper. See his “Covenantal Ecology: The Inseparability of Covenant and Creation in the Book of Genesis,” in MacDonald, et al., eds., *Genesis and Christian Theology*, 204-15.

⁶⁶ As demonstrated, for example, by the careful study of this passage by Jeremy Cohen, *“Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It”*: *The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). And thus contra, for example, the famous essay by Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 21 (1969), 42-47.

⁶⁷ On “power over” vs. “power under” models of leadership, see Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), chs. 1-2.

⁶⁸ Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 33, 34. Or, as Richard Bauckham (“Humans, Animals, and the Environment in Genesis 1-3,” 181) notes: “For the mandate to fill the

land and subdue it we may appropriately use the term ‘stewardship,’ since it is a right to responsible use of the land that belongs ultimately to God.”

⁶⁹ Both Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics*, III/1, sect. 41:2; cf. III/4, sect. 54) and Emil Br nner (*The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics II*, trans. Olive Wyon [London: Lutterworth, 1952], 22) are famously known for articulating versions of the relational view of the *imago Dei*.

⁷⁰ Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39.

⁷¹ Other perspectives and/or nuances appear as well. E.g., John Polkinghorne writes: “To my mind, it is the love of God bestowed on each individual, and the implicit ability to be aware of the divine presence, that constitute the essence of the *imago Dei*”; *Testing Scripture: A Scientist Explores the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 25.

⁷² Some will argue that the functional view, with its idea of rulership and dominion, comprehensively expresses this representational aspect of the *imago Dei*. However, others (e.g., Barth) have argued that rulership emerges in Gen 1 (and even Psalm 8) as, in the words of Grenz, “the consequence, rather than the definition, of the divine image”; Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 621.

⁷³ See Caroline W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200 – 1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 24-30; Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, “Anthropology, Sexuality, and Sexual Ethics: The Challenge of Psychology,” in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, eds., Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 118-36.

⁷⁴ Jones and Yarhouse, “Anthropology, Sexuality, and Sexual Ethics,” 122.

⁷⁵ **On Intersexuality/DSD:** The question can arise at this point: What of intersexual persons (formerly known as “hermaphrodites”) who experience atypical development of physical sexual attributes/characteristics (i.e., DSD – disorders of sex development), whether in terms of genitals, internal reproductive organs, or sex-related chromosomal and/or hormonal variations? For information on the range of biological phenomena that can fall under the category of DSD, see the leading U.S. support organization, Accord Alliance (<http://www.accordalliance.org/>). On the genetic and hormonal factors involved in intersexuality, see Stephen F. Kemp, “The Role of Genes and Hormones in Sexual Differentiation,” in *Ethics and Intersex*, ed. Sharon E. Sytsma (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 1-16. With regard to Intersex/DSD, it is increasingly recognized that the modern medical impulse to rush to sex assignment and surgery for intersexual children is often unwise and unhelpful. See e.g., Katrina Karkazis, *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For a brief reflection on this issue from a Christian perspective, see Amanda Riley Smith, “What Child is This? Making Room for Intersexuality,” *Re:generation* 8 (Winter 2003), 27-30.

Megan DeFranza (“Intersex and Imago: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Postmodern Theological Anthropology” [PhD Dissertation, Marquette University, 2011]) has proposed that we can think more appropriately about intersexuality when we consider Isaiah’s (56:1-7) and Jesus’ (Matt 19:12) teachings about eunuchs. (The phenomenon of eunuchs in times past is often misunderstood today. For helpful treatments, see Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001]; Piotr O. Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati: A Cultural History*, trans. J. A. Broadwin and S. L. Frisch [Princeton, NJ: Wiener, 2001 (1999)].) DeFranza also warns about what can happen when we emphasize the male-female binary of Gen 1-2 in theology without giving due attention to those with intersexual/DSD conditions who do not fit these nice, neat, unambiguous categories. This is a concern that the evangelical church has typically neglected, and DeFranza’s work offers a helpful study that should provoke further consideration. See also Heather Looy, “Male and Female God Created Them: The Challenge of Intersexuality,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 21/1 (2002), 10-20. See also the evangelical Christian based Intersex Support Group International at <http://www.xyxo.org/isgi/content.html>.

We must be careful when considering the implications of intersex/DSD for the question of the male-female sex binary. To begin, some radical postmodern social constructionists have made quick and easy assumptions of ideological alliance between intersex/DSD persons and the “queer” theory/theology (on which see note 66 below) that has arisen out of certain sectors of the LGBT coalition, the latter of which presses for the deconstruction and elimination of the “hegemonic” male-female sex binary. While some within the intersex/DSD community affirm alliances with the LGBT communities, others have questioned such alliances as an instance of the intersex/DSD community being unfairly co-opted and pressed into use without adequate consideration of the uniquely different experience of intersexuality. For example, in her essay “Intersex and Gender Identity” (http://www.ukia.co.uk/voices/is_gi.htm) Mairi MacDonald (associated with the UK Intersex Association – UKIA), writes: “There is a growing tendency to assume that all the varieties of phenotype (apparent physical sex), gender identification and sexual orientation are all merely different shades in one large rainbow. It is becoming increasingly common to hear people lump together transsexual, intersexual, transgender, gay and lesbian in the one sentence with the implication that all these issues share a common history or have common interests [T]he idea that discrimination and oppression indicate commonality of interests among those oppressed is wishful thinking. While collaboration and co-operation may be possible where interests coincide, attempts at coalition are unlikely to be successful. There is a . . . set of contradictions facing those who would try to combine the various interests of those within the intersex, transsexual, transgendered and gay communities [I]n general, we are distrustful of those who wrongly presume that their experiences are similar to ours. We tend to view suggestions of alliances built on this basis as invasive and attempting to appropriate our experiences for agendas other than our own. And we are particularly suspicious of those who imagine that our various histories can be reduced to a matter of gender identity.”

Even for those aware of this potential problem, avoiding it can be difficult. For example, in her exploration of intersex/DSD and Christian theology, Susannah Cornwall states the problem, even quoting MacDonald on this point; see *Sex and Uncertainty in the*

Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2010), 18. Yet, on the very next page, Cornwall – a non-intersexed person – questions the move within the U.S. intersex community of embracing the name “disorders of sex development” because it “seems to fail to disrupt adequately medical-social paradigms of normalized sex and gender” (p. 19). More specifically, it is clear throughout her book that at the forefront of Cornwall’s agenda is the disruption/deconstruction of the virtually demonized ‘male-female binary.’ But it is far from clear that this is on the agenda of most intersex/DSD people. As Emi Koyama (“From ‘Intersex’ to ‘DSD’: Toward a Queer Disability Politics of Gender,” <http://www.intersexinitiative.org/articles/intersectodsd.html>), founder of the Portland-based Intersex Initiative, has pointed, one of the most common misperceptions of intersex/DSD is that “[i]ntersex people are neither male nor female.” To the contrary, she writes, “most people born with intersex conditions do view themselves as belonging to one binary sex or another. They simply see themselves as a man (or a woman) with a birth condition like any other.” Cornwall herself is aware of this fact (which she notes on p. 46), and yet her book consistently employs intersex/DSD phenomena as evidence of the necessity of deconstructing the male-female binary.

⁷⁶ **On Contemporary Challenges and Complexities Regarding the Study of Human Sexuality:** There has been an increasing recognition that we must distinguish at least three separate issues here: (1) “Sex” – i.e., the biologically oriented sexual differentiation of human beings as “male” and “female” (taking into account, of course, various Intersex/DSD biological phenomena) rooted in things such as chromosomes, hormonal profiles, and internal and external sex organs. (2) “Gender” – the socially/culturally shaped expression of human sexual differentiation in terms of “masculine” and “feminine” with regard to self-identity, cultural norms and expectations, etc. (3) “Sexuality” – i.e., the nature and orientation of one’s sexual desires, etc. For a philosophical discussion that reveals some of the complexities of the sorts of concepts and categories that are being used in the contemporary conversation about human sexuality, see Alan Soble, “Sexual Concepts,” in *The Philosophy of Sex and Love: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (St. Paul: Paragon, 2008 [1998]), 47-67.

The distinction of (biologically determined) “sex” vs. (socially shaped/constructed) “gender” was inspired by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage, 1953) and her famous claim that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 267). This distinction was eventually solidified in studies such as Robert J. Stoller’s *Sex and Gender: The Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Science House, 1968). See Mary Vetterling-Braggin, ed., “Femininity,” “Masculinity,” and “Androgyny”: *A Philosophical Discussion* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, and Co., 1982), esp. parts III and IV.

More recently, some postmodern theorists have argued that even ostensive biological determinedness of one’s “sex” is, in fact, also socially constructed. A major voice here is Judith Butler. See Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theater Journal* 40 (1988), 519-31; idem, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006 [1990]); idem, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits*

of “Sex” (New York: Routledge, 1993); idem, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Butler’s work is indebted to Michel Foucault’s highly influential work on human sexuality: *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols., trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978-86 [1976-84]). For a helpful summary of Foucault’s unique approach to sexuality, see Alan Sheridan, “Sexuality, Power and Knowledge,” in *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* (New York: Tavistock, 1980), 164-94. For other perspectives on the socially constructed nature of gender and/or sexuality, see R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005 [1995]); David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Gilbert Herdt, ed., *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (New York: Zone, 1994); Stephen O. Murray, *Homosexualities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Serena Nanda, *Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2000); Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kehily, *Gender, Youth and Culture: Young Masculinities and Femininities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Lisa M. Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women’s Love and Desire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Particularly controversial today is the question of gender difference with regard to brain chemistry (e.g., prenatal hormonal effects, the hormonal effects of sexual intimacy, etc.). All too often, the inter-disciplinary skirmish involving the biological-evolutionary and the social constructivist approaches fosters an unhelpful either-or rhetoric, with little appreciation for the likely both-and complexity involved in this question. Here, something like an epigenetic model would, I believe, prove to be more fruitful for all parties involved. For a range of perspectives see Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Men, Women, and the Extreme Male Brain* (New York: Penguin, 2007); Deborah Blum, *Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences between Men and Women* (New York: Penguin, 1997); Larry Cahill, “Why Sex Matters for Neuroscience,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 7 (2006), 477-84; Louis Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the Developing Social Brain* (New York: Norton, 2006); Lise Eliot, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain: How Small Differences Grow Into Troublesome Gaps – And What We Can Do About It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009); Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference* (New York: Norton, 2010); Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic, 2000); Rebecca M. Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Doreen Kimura, “Sex Differences in the Brain,” *Scientific American* (May 2002), 32-37; Lesley Rogers, *Sexing the Brain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Robert T. Rubin and Donald W. Pfaff, eds., *Hormone/Behavior Relations of Clinical Importance: Endocrine Systems Interacting with Brain and Behavior* (Boston: Elsevier, 2009). For a sustained, yet sensitive, argument for the growing biological evidence regarding sexual dimorphism and/or diergism at the level of neuroscience, see Rubin and Pfaff, eds., *Hormone/Behavior Relations of Clinical Importance*, esp. chs. 6-12

The “social construction of gender” school is just one development of the wider “social constructionism” (sociology of knowledge) school. For the classic statement, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in*

the Sociology of Knowledge (garden City, NY: Anchor, 1966). For more recent surveys, see Vivien Burr, *Social Constructionism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003 [1995]); Andy Lock and Tom Strong, *Social Constructionism: Sources and Stirrings in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). The opposing school, typically known as “essentialism,” holds that reality is grounded in inherent, trans-cultural essences that are independent of human consciousness. Social constructionist perspectives come in “strong” and “weak” forms, and in fact run along a continuum. For a helpful discussion of these categories (with a strong bias toward the constructivist view), see Jennifer Harding, *Sex Acts: Practices of Femininity and Masculinity* (London: Sage, 1998), 8-22. For an insightful analysis of social constructionism that seeks a balanced *via media*, see Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). For a recent statement on human sexual identity that draws heavily on social constructionist theory from an evangelical Christian perspective, see Janell Williams Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex is Too Important to Define Who We Are* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011). From the perspective of contemporary science, a number of scholars have advocated something of a “both-and” approach by recognizing both the socio-cultural shaping of gender roles as well as some apparently biologically-based sex distinctives. See e.g., Leslie Brody, *Gender, Emotion and the Family* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Janet Shibley Hyde, *Half the Human Experience: The Psychology of Women* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004); Donald W. Pfaff, *Man and Woman: An Inside Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Carol Tavris, *The Mismeasure of Woman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

Inspired by the deconstructionist work of Michel Foucault (Jacques Derrida, et al.), and in line with Judith Butler’s aforementioned work, contemporary Queer theory/theology focuses attention on questioning the commonly assumed stability of our concepts of sexuality and gender by deconstructing a wide range of oppressive “binary” tropes (e.g., sex/gender, male/female, heterosexuality/homosexuality, etc.). In Foucault’s (*Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan [New York: Vintage, 1995 (1975)], 199) words: “Generally speaking, all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal)” For a brief history on the rise and development of queer theology, see Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), chs. 6-8. See also e.g., Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury, 2011); Anna I. Corwin, “Language and Gender Variance: Constructing Gender Beyond the Male/Female Binary,” *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* 12 (Feb. 12, 2009), available at <http://www.ejhs.org/Volume12/Gender.htm>; Robert E. Goss, “Queer Theologies as Transgressive Metaphors: New Paradigms for Hybrid Sexual Theologies,” *Theology and Sexuality* 10 (1999), 43-53; Gerard Loughlin, ed., *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); J. Nestle, C. Howell, and R. Wilchins, eds., *GENDERqUEER: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary* (Los Angeles: Alyson, 2002); Steven Seidman, ed., *Queer Theory/Sociology* (Cambridge, MA:

Blackwell, 1996); Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). From this perspective, there is much to be gained by challenging and subverting the more “traditional” idea that the “male” and “female” sex binary as in any sense “natural,” essential, or normative. Rather, (biological) sex – along with gender and sexual orientation – is characterized by such concepts/terms as fluid, malleable, polymorphous, and continuum. This trajectory of thought about human sexuality has deeply influenced certain theologies of sexuality such that, for many today, the very notion of the male-female sexual differentiation as privileged in any sense is seen as naively traditionalist and hopelessly oppressive. E.g., see Sarah A. Coakley, “The Trinity and Gender Reconsidered,” in Volf and Welker, eds., *God’s Life in Trinity*, 133-42; Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*; Robert Di Vito, “‘In God’s Image’ and ‘Male and Female’: How a Little Punctuation Might have Helped,” in *God, Science, Sex, Gender: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Christian Ethics*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung and Aana Marie Vigen, with John Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 167-83; Elaine L. Graham, “Gender, Personhood and Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 48 (1995), 341-58; John McCarthy, “Interpreting the Theology of Creation: Binary Gender in Catholic Theology,” in Jung, Vigen, and Anderson, eds., *God, Science, Sex, Gender*, 123-39; Stephen J. Pope, “Social Selection and Sexual Diversity: Implications for Christian Ethics,” in Jung, Vigen, and Anderson, eds., *God, Science, Sex, Gender*, 187-200.

From an evangelical Christian perspective, what are we to say to such approaches to human sexuality and the philosophical schools of thought they represent? To begin, we can certainly affirm some of the motives behind these radically deconstructive approaches to sexuality. Sexual differentiation and the male-female binary frequently have been used throughout history to legitimate a range of unjust and oppressive hierarchies that privilege the “male” over the “female,” as well as over anything that does not nicely fit into these categories (e.g., the eunuch, the intersexual, etc.). As Mathew Kuefler (*Manly Eunuch*, 3) notes: “Within the framework of sexual difference between male and female, it is claimed, a whole, range of the dichotomies of human thought can be placed: culture/nature, form/matter, mind/body, subject/object, good/evil, self/other.” As those concerned with encouraging a properly Christian (i.e., Christ-like) reading of the scriptures, evangelicals should be at the forefront of any movement to take back the Bible from the misuse to which it has been subjected over the centuries. We can also affirm that there are clear indications of the social construction of gender and even “biological sex,” as documented in a range of studies. E.g., see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). Laqueur’s research suggests that, contrary to our contemporary culture’s sensibilities, in “pre-Enlightenment texts, and even some later ones, *sex*, or the body, must be understood as the epiphenomena, while *gender*, what we would take to be a cultural category, was primary or ‘real’ To be a man or woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurate sexes. Sex before the seventeenth century, in other words, was still a sociological and not an ontological category” (p. 8). But this being said, to acknowledge important elements of social construction of gender/sex is not to conclude that it is merely human construction “all the way down.” As Megan DeFranza notes: “To

say that some gender differences are socially constructed is not to say that there are no real differences between men and women.” DeFranza goes on to apply this insight to her work on intersexuality: “In fact to speak about intersex is to say that there must exist two categories, male and female, and that some people do not fit neatly into either category because they display characteristics of both. We could not even talk about intersex if we did not uphold real differences between the sexes.” DeFranza, “Gender Construction in Society and Church: What Can We Learn from the Intersexed?” Paper presented at the 2009 Christians for Biblical Equality annual conference, 18 pp. (here, p. 11).

But from a strong “social construction of sex/gender” perspective, one can conclude that sexuality is nothing but social, flexible, malleable, constructed – external to us, and imposed upon us, by our surrounding culture. From here, some have moved to something of an “androgynous viewpoint” wherein maleness and femaleness “are external characteristics which have no bearing on the fundamental humanness that forms the true essence of all persons regardless of sex”; Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 38. Again, it is important to recognize that gender roles have culturally diverse expressions, and that this points to important elements of social construction. However, the question is one of balance. Under a “strong” form of social constructionism, sexual differentiation becomes social construction “all the way down” in a radically reductionistic sense. From the perspective of an historic orthodox Christian worldview – whether we are talking about “reality” in general or sexual differentiation in particular – this conclusion is simply untenable. The utter reduction of gender and biological sex to nothing more than human social construction – and/or unrestrained “performativity” re-shapings by autonomous personal choice – are, perhaps, logical corollaries of a non-theistic, postmodern worldview wherein human beings become the ultimate “creator” of their own, always malleable, essence, and thus “free” of the constraints not only of a dominant culture, but also of the design plan of a Creator God. In Foucault’s words (“On the Genealogy of Ethics,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982], 237): “From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art.” For Foucault and his postmodern atheistic progeny, among the most oppressive concepts imaginable is that of the “Panopticon,” i.e., a prison architecturally designed to ensure that the inmates (believe they) live under an unending state of surveillance. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 195-228. In Foucault’s words: “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (p. 201). From this perspective, anything like the omniscient God of the Christian faith can only be interpreted as the ultimate expression of the eternal Panopticon – and thus, by definition, an eternal threat whose very idea must be resisted and renounced as a ploy of inexorable power. From a Christian perspective, however, the character of this God – revealed in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ – rids the notion of an omniscient God of such an oppressive, “power-over” dynamic. Furthermore, from a Christian perspective, the Foucaultian interpretive paradigm, while understandable, is seen ultimately as just one more instance of the ongoing human project of attempting to free oneself from the inherently limiting condition of creatureliness and, instead, aspiring to usurp the position of Creator. While social construction certainly

plays a role in human experience and expression of gender/sex, human sexuality a “male and female” is fundamentally grounded in God’s design-plan and creative action. In this sense, I find Miroslav Volf’s approach and insights on this complex matter to be both instructive and quite compatible with the theological intuitions of this study. See his “Gender Identity,” in *Exclusion and Embrace*, 167-90.

One does not have to be an evangelical Christian to see the problems inherent in radical/strong social (de)constructionist theories. For example, there is Peter Berger’s (a father of the modern sociology of knowledge movement) own warning to his fellow social constructionists in his book, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969). Here, he reminds us of the temptation for social constructionists to relativize everyone else’s claims to knowledge, but to leave their own virtually immune to the process – a “hidden *double standard*” (p. 51). But a consistent, thoroughgoing constructionism will recognize that, in the process, the “relativizers are relativized, the debunkers are debunked—indeed relativization itself is somehow liquidated” (p. 53). In such a setting, Berger concludes: “One has the terrible suspicion that the Apostle Paul may have been one-up cognitively, after all” (p. 52). This is not to do away with the important insights of social construction theory. It is, however, to issue a call for equal opportunity interrogation. And, in the process perhaps, to realize that (de)construction all the way down – while an intriguing idea that makes for endlessly new possibilities for PhD dissertation topics and graduate school courses/textbooks in the elite Western academy – is quite simply *unlivable*, and thus fails a basic test of any human worldview. Along these lines, see George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). The inherently patronizing, homogenizing ramifications of the radical postmodern approach to much of the fashionable identity/recognition politics going around today never seems to occur to its ardent proponents. (The ironies here are boundless.) They could benefit from the incisive analysis of Charles Taylor, who exposes the logically demeaning end-game of what he refers to as “subjectivist, half-baked neo-Nietzschean theories” which derive “frequently from Foucault and Derrida,” ones where “recognition” is not *recognition* in any meaningful sense of the term. See Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-73 (here, p. 70). While engaging poststructuralists in another disciplinary context, Arthur Gibson (*Text and Tablet* [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000], ix) offers some comments that also apply to our concerns at this point. He writes of perspectives that can “cut against the grain of fashion that construes itself as progress,” and of the resultant “odd reaction of those poststructuralists who prioritize difference, not progress” and yet, ironically, certainly seem to regard it as progress whenever “protectionist conservative interpretation” is undercut.

The reflections of other feminists also serve as a corrective to the radical constructionist approaches that strive to deconstruct all gender/sex differences without remainder. In her perceptive essay, “On Not Being Afraid of Natural Sex Differences,” philosopher and feminist Mary Midgley warns of the “pursuit of standardisation [sic] – the failure to value a difference,” and notes that such pursuits can go “beyond a mere passing mistake” to become “actively pernicious” (p. 36). She calls her fellow feminists to engage in a rethinking that necessarily will involve letting go of “the currently

orthodox view that there are no natural, genetically determined sex differences. This orthodox view does not really rest on factual evidence, though such evidence is sometimes brought in to back it. (There is no hypothesis which cannot find some facts to support it.) It is held because people believe the acceptance of natural sex differences to be dangerous. The danger has been a real one, but it has flowed entirely from distorted views about what the differences are, not from acceptance of difference as such. Difference does not mean better or worse, it means different.” (p. 37). Midgley goes on to question the notion of personal freedom and autonomy that frequently coincides with the contemporary deconstruction of sexual differentiation, wherein freedom means the having the ‘right’ and power to ‘perform’ whatever sexual script one wants to create for oneself (i.e., reminiscent of the type of language found today in Butler’s work, queer theory/theology, etc.). Midgely writes: “The power to become absolutely anybody goes beyond any normal definition of omnipotence; why should it be a necessary part of freedom? The idea of freedom which lies behind this kind of demand is confused in the same way as the idea of equality which calls for standardisation [sic] What is called ‘biological determinism’ is not more of an attack on freedom than the social determinism (or economic determinism) which is accepted without moral qualms throughout the social sciences. What is injurious is not determinism but fatalism Our inheritance, both social and natural, is not a shocking intrusion on our privacy and freedom, but a realm for us to live in” (pp. 38, 39). Incidentally, it is interesting to note that some radical feminist theorists have taken to task the work flowing from Judith Butler, et al. as, ironically, serving to undermine the importance of *material embodiment* – a phenomenon that all contemporary radical feminist and queer theorists depend upon. In this regard, see the critique of a Butlerian-like approach by Susan Bordo, who questions this type of postmodern “stylish nihilism” (p. 283) which treats the body as if it were purely a text to be re-written at will, and in the process inadvertently denies the materiality, givenness and locatedness of bodies (p. 38). See Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), esp. Introduction and part III. For a helpful piece that contrasts Butler and Bordo, see Susan Hekman, review of Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, and Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, *Hypatia* 10 (Fall 1995), 151-57.

A further problem with the radical (de)constructionist approach to sexuality is one that is frequently, and conveniently, ignored by its proponents. This involves the application of the complete equalizing of various sexualities and their expression to less glamorous sectors of the human sexuality spectrum. Sexual practices that are now being legitimated by the same sorts of Foucaultian, discourse-based, social constructionist arguments include: (1) Sadoomasochistic sex – e.g., Andrea Beckmann, *The Social Construction of Sexuality and Perversion: Deconstructing Sadoomasochism* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); Darren Langdridge and Meg Barker, eds. *Safe, Sane, and Consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadoomasochism* (New York: Palgrave, 2007). (2) Polyamory (i.e., multiple sex partners) – e.g., Eric Anderson, *The Monogamy Gap: Men, Love, and the Reality of Cheating* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Richard Coon, “Theorizing Sex in Heterodox Society: Postmodernity, Late Capitalism and Non-monogamous Sexual Behavior,” *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* 9 (April 18, 2006), <http://www.ejhs.org/volume9/coon.htm>; Barry Smith, “There's No Such

Thing as Polyamory,” *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* 14 (April 7, 2011), <http://www.ejhs.org/volume14/NoSuch.htm>. (3) Inter-generational sex (i.e., pedophilia, hebephilia, ephebophilia) – e.g., Richard A. Yuill, “Interrogating the Essential: Moral Baselines on Adult-Child Sex,” *Thymos* 4 (2010), 149 – 67; idem, “Male Age-Discrepant Intergenerational Sexualities and Relationships” (PhD dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2004); see also Michael Matthew Kaylor, *Secreted Desires – The Major Uranians: Hopkins, Pater and Wilde* (Brno, Czech Republic: Masaryk University, 2006). (4) Adult pornography – e.g., Michelle Mars, “What Do You Like? Women’s Pornpleasures,” *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* 10 (September 18, 2007), <http://www.ejhs.org/volume10/pornopleasure.htm>. (5) Child pornography – e.g., Harris Mirkin, “The Social, Political, and Legal Construction of the Concept of Child Pornography,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 56/2 (2009), 233-67. (6) Objectophilia (i.e., romantic/sexual relations with inanimate objects) – e.g., Amy Marsh, *People Who Love Objects: Love’s Outer Limits* (n.p.: Carnal Nation, 2009), <http://carnalnation.com/content/35197/999/people-who-love-objects-part-i>. (7) Zoosexuality/Zoophilia (Bestiality) – e.g., Rebecca Cassidy, “Zoosex and Other Relationships with Animals,” in *Transgressive Sex: Subversion and Control in Erotic Encounters*, eds. Hastings Donnan and Fiona Magowan (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 91-112; Hani Miletski, “Is Zoophilia a Sexual Orientation? A Study,” in *Bestiality and Zoophilia: Sexual Relations with Animals*, ed. Anthony L. Podberscek and Andrea M. Beetz (London: Berg, 2009); idem, *Understanding Bestiality and Zoophilia* (Bethesda, MD: East-West Pub., 2002); Peter Singer, “Heavy Petting,” Nerve.com (2001), <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/2001----.htm>.

Related to this, William A. Percy (Professor of History, University of Massachusetts – Boston), in his characteristically brash style, advocates for what he refers to as the “sexual minorities that LGBTers (and the movement’s pet-poodle Social Constructionist academics) usually prefer to wash away” – including what he refers to as the “seven Ps,” i.e., pederasty (i.e., sex with youths), the paraphilias (e.g., sadomasochism, etc.), public sex, prostitution, promiscuity, pornography, and the Poètes Maudits. See http://www.williamapercy.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main_Page. As Percy point out, most of the academic social constructionists using Foucaultian deconstructivist methods to undermine traditional sexual values suddenly stop the sexual deconstructive project when it comes to these more questionable sexual practices, even though the logic of their method provides no reason for doing so – a telling phenomenon. For example, the *Handbook of the New Sexuality Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2006) edited by Steven Seidman, Nancy Fischer, and Chet Meeks, is dominated by a post-structuralist, sexuality-as-exhaustively-social-construction model. In this *Handbook*, almost every article has as a primary concern the challenging of more traditional, dominant culture sexual values, and the championing of alternative sexual identities, desires, and/or practices. And yet when one turns to the index to find discussions of the more avant garde sexualities, one is met with virtual silence. For example, “zoophilia” never shows up once in the index. “Pedophilia” only appears in one article on sexual tourism, where it is used in a purely negative fashion. And “incest” only appears in terms of “abuse” (e.g., p. 32-34). In other words, the supposedly radical deconstructive project of post-structurally influenced Western academic elites seems to turn to a decidedly traditionalist “vanilla” flavor when

it comes to these more exotic areas of human sexual expression. Apparently, pragmatics wins out over ideological consistency, since a robustly consistent application of their theory to such areas of sexual desire would, no doubt, put their own reputations and employment in jeopardy. Both de Sade and Nietzsche would be disappointed in their progeny.

In light of all this, there is good reason to heed Sarah Coakley's ("Trinity and Gender Reconsidered") warning that "feminist theology [and, I would add, various other forms of contemporary theology] up to now has been unduly influenced by secular theories of gender, theories that are then either wielded critically against the Christian tradition or smuggled in some form into the Christian doctrinal corpus (or both)" (p. 134). Thus, she calls Christian theologians to be critical of any theological discourses of sex/gender that "come primarily from secular sources in the first instance, not from a radical questioning, even rupturing, of those secular views as found in God" (p. 138). The disappointment comes when, after all this, Coakley herself turns to Judith Butler's atheistically-grounded secular theory of sex/gender as a primary source for a theology of gender. She even explicitly recognizes the problem here when she muses: "I too then am subject to the same riposte . . . , and could be accused of merely being the purveyor of current secular gender fashion in theological disguise" (p. 139). One can only respond: "Do you think?!" Other contemporary liberal theologians, however, show no signs of even being aware of this distinction, let alone being concerned about it. As Coakley observes, for many such theologians, when it comes to issues of sexuality, it is the Christian tradition that is to be rejected and the secular theories that are to be embraced. For a good example of just such a trend, see Graham Ward, "Divinity and Sexual Difference," in his *Christ and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 129-58, where the Christian theologians Barth and Balthasar are, for the most part, easily dismissed, while secular (post)modern theorists such as Althusser, Butler, Irigaray, and Lacan are taken with utter seriousness.

If we are going to stand in the tradition of historic orthodox Christianity and take the scriptures seriously as revelation from God – which I as an evangelical Christian am committed to – it is going to be difficult to do away with the male-female sexual distinction of Genesis 1-2 (not to mention the rest of the Bible) in the cavalier fashion exhibited by those mentioned above. *This is a conclusion arrived at not through an uncritical capitulation to "biological essentialism," but rather as an acknowledgement of an important aspect of humanity that has been divinely revealed in scripture.* Those who have embraced the worldview of atheistic post-structuralism – including liberal "Christian" theologians who fall within this camp – may never understand this acknowledgment, since it is grounded in the conviction of a living God who determines the parameters and basic constitutive components of reality, and who himself grounds human rationality and speech about reality (i.e., Logos is *not* dead, not even ailing – and his name is Jesus Christ!). In other words, it is indebted to a fundamentally different worldview than that which reigns in the extremely small, elite, literary-focused enclaves of the secular Western academy – namely *the worldview of Christian Trinitarian theism*. And when we turn to this biblical text, the distinction of "male and female" and its importance for humanity is unquestionably present. As Phyllis Bird herself ("Bone of My Bone," 524, 528) notes regarding the Genesis creation accounts: "But differentiation

is also the precondition for community, and sexual differentiation is the basis for the primary community; it constitutes a paradigm for all differences that divide and unite. Man and woman confront one another as ‘other,’ yet as sharing a common nature, identity, and destiny. The two need each other – to survive, to perpetuate the species, and to know the full meaning of their humanness Both creation accounts make gender [i.e., biological sex] indispensable to their understanding of humankind by explicit attention to the sexual differentiation of the species.” Grounded in her work on Genesis 1-2, Bird even goes so far as to say: “Sex is the constitutive differentiation, observable at birth and encoded in our genes, essential for the survival of the species, and basic to all systems of socialization. It plays a fundamental role in the identity formation of every individual. It must consequently be regarded as an essential datum in any attempt to define the human being and the nature of humankind – and thus provides a primary test for false notions of generic humanity” (p. 531). For anyone convinced of the inspired nature of scripture then, the revelation of the male-female distinction as having a divinely designed role in the human economy cannot be done away with simply by pointing out the contingent historical conditions of the Israelites at the time of its revelation reception as, for example, Robert Di Vito (“‘In God’s Image’ and ‘Male and Female,’” 175-77) seems to assume.

Finally, something must be said about the issue of intersex/DSD and the male-female distinction. As noted above, while many have tried to use intersex/DSD phenomena as a tool to deconstruct the ‘male-female binary’ (e.g., Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*), as it turns out most people born with intersex conditions do view themselves as belonging to one binary sex or another. They simply see themselves as a man (or a woman) with a birth condition like any other” (Koyama, “From ‘Intersex’ to ‘DSD’”). Koyama addresses this issue in a letter she wrote to an organization that was trying to be sensitive by including “intersex” as a third sex option along with “male” and “female” on their forms. Koyama (“What is Wrong with ‘Male, Female, Intersex,’” <http://www.intersexinitiative.org/articles/letter-outsidein.html>) writes: “Vast majority of people born with intersex conditions live normally as a woman or a man, and do not view themselves as a member of a different gender/sex category. Most people born with intersex conditions do not think ‘intersex’ to be who they are; it is simply a medical condition, or a lived history of medicalization. Most people with intersex conditions would answer ‘no’ if they are asked ‘are you intersex?’ . . . Using ‘intersex’ as a gender or sex category is not simply incorrect—it is hurtful because it makes intersex seem like a neutral, stigma-free category. Intersex activists feel that using ‘intersex’ as a neutral gender or sex category trivializes the actual pain of medical abuse that people go through when they are labeled ‘intersex.’” Similarly, some will appeal to the transgender phenomenon as evidence of the need to do away with the constraints of the male-female binary. However, as Maira MacDonald (“Intersex and Gender Identity”) points out, “The majority of trans people I know have the desire for confirmation of gender in one of the two categories accepted by society, which is why they transition, i.e., to express a definite gender identity, male or female, different from the one usually indicated by their current phenotype Most trans people I know identify themselves absolutely comfortably within one or other of the specified classes [of male or female].” And so, ironically, the experiences of the vast majority of both intersex/DSD and

transgender people actually serve, each in their own way, to confirm the general stability and applicability of the frequently criticized ‘male-female binary.’ This being said, it is true that some intersex/DSD people report that their experience of biological sex ambiguity has left them without a clear gender identity of either male or female. MacDonald, as one of these people, writes: “However, given the choice of ‘male’, ‘female’, ‘intersex’, I would unhesitatingly select ‘intersex’ - but society does not give me that option so I select ‘female.’ I do so with deep reservations, gritting my teeth at a society which will not accept my right to simply be who I am.” This phenomenon of biological sex ambiguity leading to internal gender ambiguity is one that, historically, the church has not given the empathetic care or consideration that it deserves. I want to state clearly here that my own emphasis in this study on the importance of the male-female distinction and its intended place in the divine design for humanity cannot be allowed to call into question either the full image/likeness or the divinely blessed Kingdom life and calling of those whose biological characteristics have left their sex ambiguous in one way or the other. As DeFranza (note 65 above) has emphasized, Jesus’ counter-cultural teaching on the dignity of the “eunuch” within a Kingdom economy provides insight into God’s love for, and favor upon, those with sex ambiguity. All this being said, it is also important to state that the fact of sex ambiguity associated with intersex/DSD cannot legitimately be used to deconstruct the importance and relevance of God’s creational design of humanity as “male and female.” To borrow a relevant observation made by the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga in another context: “The existence of twilight is not an argument against the distinction between night and day” (reported to me by my friend and colleague, Jim Beilby, from a personal conversation with Plantinga).

⁷⁷ Pesarchick, *The Trinitarian Foundation of Human Sexuality*, 180. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988-1998), II/1, 365.

⁷⁸ David Kelsey states that the significance of the concept of the “image of God” for understanding humanity is most clearly seen when “the question asked of the phrase ‘image of God’ is ‘Who is the “image”?’ rather than ‘What is the “image”?’ and the answer is ‘Jesus Christ.’” David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), II:938. Kelsey makes an essential point here concerning the centrality of Jesus for a Christian understanding of the image of God. However, this should not lead us to conclude that the question “what is the image”? is an irrelevant one.

⁷⁹ Watts, “New Exodus/New Creational Restoration of the Image of God,” 33.

⁸⁰ For an insightful reflection on Jesus as the true image of God, see Stanley Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004), 617-28. See also Stephen R. Holmes, “Image of God,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (hereafter *DTIB*), ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 319.

⁸¹ A survey of a good range of contemporary studies of human sexuality from a liberal Christian perspective reveal that few give anything like a place of significance to the covenantal nature and context of sexual union. See e.g., L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Ellison, *Erotic Justice*; idem, *Making Love Just*; Raymond L. Lawrence, *Sexual Liberation: The Scandal of Christendom* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007); and most of the essays in Marvin M. Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, eds., *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010 [1994]). James Nelson (*Embodiment*), does appeal to the concept as important to marriage (p. 151, cf. 258-60), and yet is cautiously open to the possibility of the “redefinition of marital fidelity” to allow for extra-marital sexual relationships (p. 150). I would suggest that this confusion stems from the fact that he has not adequately recognized and integrated the concept of sexual union as the covenantal “sign” into his idea of the marriage covenant. James Gustafson (“Nature, Sin and Covenant”) recognizes covenant as one of the experience-based grounds for a sexual ethics, but his discussion of it is rather generalized and vague, and he never identifies sexual intimacy as a covenantal sign. Margaret Farley (*Just Love*, 226), while not doing much with the concept of covenant relationship per se, does propose “committed love” as one of her norms. On the other hand, Christine Gudorf (*Body, Sex and Pleasure*, 26-7) mentions the concept of covenant only to explicitly reject it when, bizarrely to my mind, she equates “covenant” with “contract,” while contrasting it with “marital love” and the “bride/groom analogy.” (For a defense of the concept of covenant relationship against several ethical challenges, see Harry Bunting, “Covenants, Special Relationships, and a Perfectly Loving God,” in *The God of Covenant: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson [Leicester, UK: APOLLOS, 2005], 200-20.) A much more nuanced and insightful approach to the relationship of sexual intimacy, covenant relationship and marital love is expressed by Charles A. Gallagher, George A. Maloney, Mary F. Rousseau, and Paul F. Wilczak (*Embodied in Love: Sacramental Spirituality and Sexual Intimacy* [New York: Crossroad, 1983], 86) when they explain that it is most helpful to understand “marriages, and human relationship in general, as covenants rather than contracts. Contracts are based upon power – their participants possess power, and agree to restrain it in return for certain benefits Covenants, by contrast, are based on love. Their partners seek each other’s welfare in mutual altruism. Violators of covenants are met by a loving willingness to forgive, seventy times seven.”

⁸² Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection*, 50, 52 (emphasis in text).

⁸³ It is worth noting that, in the ancient Near East, it was not uncommon for a culture to express its understanding of creation and human origins in at least two complementary narratives that view creation with different focal points – a first account written in “more general and abstract terms” and a second written in “more specific and concrete terms” – just as we see in the two creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2. See Isaac M. Kikawada, “The Double Creation of Mankind in *Enki and Ninmah*, *Atrahasis* I, 1-351, and Genesis 1-2,” *Iraq* 45 (1983) 43. This helpful essay is reprinted in R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura,

eds., *"I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood": Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 169-74.

⁸⁴ As a number of scholars have argued, the language of male and female in Rom 1:26-7 suggests an allusion to Gen 1:27, as does the references to marriage and the goodness of creation in I Tim 4:1-4. See e.g., Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 301, 313-14; James W. Aageson, "Genesis in the Deutero-Pauline Epistles," in *Genesis in the New Testament*, eds. Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 123. Aageson (p. 123) notes that the argument of I Tim 4:1-4 "sees the biblical story as presenting a view of creation that provides instructive value for the present controversy." On the Genesis creation text as inspiring Paul's argument on marriage in Eph 5:21-33, see N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2011 [2005]), 189-91.

⁸⁵ Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*, 174. John Meier emphasizes this point as well when he notes that, for Jesus, "the order of creation, revealed in Genesis 1-2, trumps the positive law of divorce in the Pentateuchal law code, promulgated in Deuteronomy." John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 4: *Law and Love* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 123. The pervasive influence of Genesis 1-2 upon the NT tradition is clear, as noted by Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament*, 27, 121-22. On Jesus' use of Gen 1:27 and 2:24 (with an emphasis on the issue of monogamy), see Craig A. Evans, "Genesis in the New Testament," in Evans, Lohr, and Petersen, eds., *Book of Genesis*, 470-81. Jesus and the NT are not entirely unique at the point. The Damascus Document (CD 4:19-5:2), found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, also appeals to the creations texts of Genesis 1-2 in its critique of polygamy.

Unfortunately, Countryman's own exploration of biblical/Christian sexual ethics is hampered by a seriously truncated view of what the Bible indicates as truly significant about human sexuality –i.e., as articulated in his purity and property theory. The addition of a covenantal model, and a more robust notion of NT purity in terms not merely of ritual but of *relationship*, would have benefitted his study. For a different, to my mind more helpful, approach to the notion of purity/holiness in scriptures – with an emphasis on the NT – see the relevant essays in Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson, eds., *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). With regard to holiness and sexuality in particular, see David Peterson, ed., *Holiness and Sexuality* [Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004], esp. chs. 1 & 2.

⁸⁶ John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2002), 294. Similarly, see Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, "Genesis in Mark's Gospel," in Menken and Moyise, eds., *Genesis in the New Testament*, 33-4. F. Scott Spencer ("Scripture, Hermeneutics and Matthew's Jesus," *Interpretation* 64 [2010], 377) helpfully nuances this issue when he claims that Jesus affirms the teachings of both Genesis and Deuteronomy as "creation prototype and wilderness proviso" respectively.

⁸⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988-97), III, 10.

⁸⁸ **On the Relationship of the “Image/Likeness of God” and the “Male and Female” Sexual Differentiation in Genesis 1:26-27:** In reading the male-female sexual differentiation of Gen 1:27 as connected to the “likeness” (specifically and exegetically) and “image” (more broadly and theologically) of God, I am departing from the influential counter-reading of Phyllis Bird in her well-known 1981 article, “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation.” Here, Bird argues that Gen 1:26-27 specifically “dissociates the word of sexual distinction, specifically sexuality, from the idea of the divine image, and from the theme of dominion, and associates it with a larger theme of sustainability or fertility running throughout the narrative of creation” (p. 134). Bird bases her argument for disconnecting “image of God” from “male and female” largely on grammatical grounds, including a detailed analysis of the chiasmic structure of the passage. Bird (“Genesis I-III as a Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality,” 40) is clear about the import of these exegetical conclusions for her feminist concerns: “Traditional interpretation of Genesis 1-2 has commonly imposed the vertical concept of the image on the horizontal concept of sexual differentiation, transforming the hierarchy of orders into a hierarchy of the sexes.” Luise Schottroff names another feminist concern with this type of interpretation: “This interpretation means that patriarchal marriage with its factual inequality is firmly established, although this is not directly stated.” Luise Schottroff, “The Creation Narrative: Genesis 1.1-2.4a,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 36.

Granted, inappropriately sexist and patriarchal implications have frequently been drawn from this portion of scripture throughout Christian history. But, the linkage of the image of God with sexual differentiation need not follow such a trajectory. In fact, quite frequently, other scholars have affirmed and celebrated this very linkage that Bird denies, noting that such a connection explicitly dignifies both sexes by grounding “male” and “female” equally as the image of God. E.g., one of the earliest feminist interpretations of this passage argued that the linkage of the image of God with male and female is “a plain declaration of the existence of the feminine element within the Godhead, equal in power and glory with the masculine.” Elisabeth Cady Stanton, ed., *The Woman’s Bible* (New York: European, 1895), 14.

With regard to Bird’s claims regarding the grammatical structure of the text, others have understood the poetical dimensions of the passage and the implications for the “image of God”—“male and female” components in a very different way. For example, Bird’s literary-critical observations that serve as the basis of her exegetical conclusions are in direct conflict with the well-known literary-rhetorical analysis of Gen 1:26-27 offered by Phyllis Tribble in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 12-23. Both of these women clearly have feminist concerns that hinge on the outcome of their (conflicting) textual conclusions. Yet, while Bird wants to *distance* the “image of God” from the male-female dyad, Tribble makes the case that this very *connection* is vital to understanding the rhetorical effect of the text. In her words (p. 17): “Clearly, ‘male and female’ correspond structurally to ‘the image of God,’ and this formal parallelism indicates a semantic correspondence. Likewise, the switch from the singular pronoun ‘him’ to the plural pronoun ‘them’ at the end of these two parallel lines provides a key for interpreting humankind (*hā-‘ādām*) in the first line. The plural form

reinforces sexual differentiation within the unity of humanity.” In his study of feminist interpretations of Gen 1-3, Joseph Abraham compares Bird and Tribble on this point of exegesis: “In short, for Bird, sexual differentiation means procreation, and for Tribble equality. Both arguments are partially true, but that is not the full statement of the truth. Sexual differentiation in a broader context entails all these aspects together. Emphasizing one aspect over the other is a mistake.” Abraham, *Eve: Accused or Acquitted? A Reconsideration of Feminist Readings of the Creation Narrative Texts in Genesis 1-3* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2002), 221.

Ronald Hendel, Chana Kronfeld, and Ilana Pardes also see some connection between the “image of God” and “male and female”: “The expressive use of rhyme – ‘adam/’otam, salmo/’oto – and the shifting chiasms and word order in each line, which are the biblical poem’s stock in trade, help articulate “the human” (and, by implication, God’s image) as both ‘male and female.’” Ronald Hendel, Chana Kronfeld, and Ilana Pardes, “Gender and Sexuality,” in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, ed. Ronald Hendel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 76. A number of scholars have pointed out that the complementary parallelisms of Gen 1:26-27 have ramifications for this issue. For example, Richard Davidson (“The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26 [1988], 9) argues that the “synthetic parallelism of vs. 27c, immediately following the synonymous parallelism of vs. 27a-b, indicates that the *mode* of human existence in the divine image is that of male and female together.” On this point see also Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study of Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 45. Others emphasize that the odd use of the divine plural in Gen 1:26 (“Let Us create . . .”) finds its obvious linguistic/poetic complement in the plural “male and female he created them.” See e.g., de Moor, “Duality in God and Man,” 122; Mary Phil Korsak, “Genesis: A New Look,” in Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, 45-6. Bird (“Sexual Differentiation and Divine Image, 10) does her best to distance God and his “image” from the sexual differentiation of “male and female,” instead linking the latter to the blessing associated with the “creatures of the sea and sky (vs. 22).” But as other commentators have pointed out, within the context of Genesis 1, “[n]o such sexual differentiation is noted in regard to animals. Human sexuality is of a wholly different order from that of the beast.” Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 13. David Carr explicitly challenges Bird on this point. See his *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22-24, 183 n. 12. See also Terence Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, 12 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), I:345-6; V. H. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 138.

These sorts of departures from Bird’s conclusions signal the need for a deeper analysis of the question at hand. Just such an analysis has now been done by W. Randall Garr in his 2003 book, *In His Own Image and Likeness*. Garr’s book represents one of the most exhaustive treatments of Gen 1:26-27 to date. In turning to the question of whether there is a connection between God’s image/likeness and the sexual differentiation of male and female, Garr’s conclusions are as nuanced as they are intriguing. While *selem* (image) and *dēmût* (likeness) share clear semantic similarities, Garr’s research reveals

that – contrary to what is commonly assumed – these two terms are *not* simply being used as functional synonyms in this passage. And as it turns out, while *selem* (image) is not connected to sexual differentiation (“male and female”), *dēmût* (likeness) *is* so connected. Garr explores the import of the concept of “likeness” for human sexuality. Regarding Gen 5:1-2, he notes: “The sense as well as the syntax suggests that human [“likeness”] is expressed sexually For among humans beings at least, ” [*dēmût*/likeness] and its genealogical transmission require the joint involvement and joint participation of both gendered segments of the population, male and female. Human [*dēmût* /likeness] presumes heterosexuality” (p. 128, 129). And again: “It is also true that, among human beings, ‘likeness’ is expressed physiologically, in sexual differentiation or sexual complementation” (p. 131). And from this observation, Garr makes an important connection: “Inasmuch as ‘likeness’ is a genealogical trait that connects humankind and divinity, especially the procreative role of humankind and the creative role of God, these two parties betray a homological function. Stated generally, human beings imitate God in this respect, representing God to the world. To the extent that they represent God in perpetuity, they register his everlasting presence in the world. They are, then, a theophany. Specifically, Adam, Seth, and his descendants share the God-given ability/capability to generate . . . and populate the world with human beings. More God-like than god-like, they engender, produce, and sustain human life” (p. 132). And so, contrary to Bird, there is a direct connection between God’s “likeness” (if not technically his “image” per se) and the sexual differentiation of “male and female” (see pp. 167-69 for a helpful summary of Garr’s argument of this point). I am thankful to Randall Garr for a personal email exchange that helped me to clarify my understanding of his analysis of this issue. In her ground-breaking 2009 dissertation, Similarly, Catherine Beckerleg (“Image of God in Eden,” 290) also argues that the divine image/likeness in Genesis is to be understood not only in light of cult and kingship, but also *kinship* – as evidenced by such things as the parallel in Gen 5:1-3, the references throughout the OT to God as “father,” and “by the content of Gen 1:22-27 in which humans were created ‘according to God’s kind.’” Contra Bird, this data suggests connections to between the image/likeness and procreation, and thus the “male and female” of Genesis 1:26-27.

All this being said regarding the purely exegetical level of the text, however, my primary concern is with the final form of the text and its reading from a wider Christian canonical-theological perspective. As Stephen Fowl reminds us: “Christians, by virtue of their identity, are required to read scripture theologically.” Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 30. From this vantage-point – and in line with Tribble’s observations – the juxtaposition of male-female sexual differentiation and the image of God in Genesis 1 can be seen as an intriguing signal (whether consciously or not on the part of the original human author makes no difference at this juncture) of the mutually enlightening relationship between the image of God and the male-female dyad. In this sense, Bird’s critique (p. 133) of what she sees as Karl Barth’s “attractive, but mistaken, interpretation of the meaning of sexual distinction in Gen 1:27,” misses the fact that, whereas the OT exegete instinctively draws upon ancient Near Eastern sources contemporaneous with the human author of Genesis to supply the context necessary for proper interpretation, Barth and other theological interpreters of scripture see the entire Christian canon as the most important

(though not necessarily the sole) context by which to determine the (divine Author's) full sense (*sensus plenior*) of the text. On this important methodological distinction between exegetical (e.g., Bird) and theological (e.g., Barth) approaches to Gen 1:26-28, see Nathan MacDonald, "The *Imago Dei* and Election: Reading Genesis 1:26-28 and Old Testament Scholarship with Karl Barth," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10 (2008), 305-13 (while MacDonald's explication of this point is very illuminating, I find his critique and reconstruction of Barth viz. sexual differentiation and the *imago Dei* less than convincing). David Kelsey (*Eccentric Existence*, II:936) makes a related point when he concludes that "the inconclusiveness of the exegetical disputes" concerning the meaning of the "image" and "likeness" of God in Gen 1:26-28 does not have to perpetually derail the question of the significance of the "image of God" for theological anthropology, since the NT picks up on and clarifies this important motif in Christological fashion. See also Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 115. From a theological interpretative perspective, it is worth noting that from at least the third century onward (i.e., Clement of Alexandria), and under the NT's influence of the (soteriological) equality of the sexes "in Christ" (e.g., Gal 3:28), Christian thinkers commonly read the "sexual differentiation expressed in Gen. 1,27b" as "linked to the preceding image text of Gen. 1,26-27a." Kari Elisabeth Børresen, "God's Image, Man's Image? Patristic Interpretation of Gen. 1,27 and I Cor. 11,7," in Børresen, ed., *The Image of God*, 188. Again, while one can debate the legitimacy of this tendency at the level of the purely *exegetical* interpretation of scripture (viz. Bird), at the wider level of *theological* interpretation of scripture – i.e., read in light of the truth about humanity, as male and female, revealed in and through the life, teachings, and atoning work of Jesus Christ – this approach to Gen 1:26-27 must be taken seriously. Here, see also Cahill, *Between the Sexes*, 46-53. Thus, while at the exegetical level I will anchor my connection between the "likeness" of God in Gen 1:26 and "male and female" in 1:27 in Garr's detailed textual analysis, when speaking in a distinctively theological mode I will refer to the connection between the "image" of God and "male and female" in Gen 1:26-27, based on broader canonical-theological considerations.

Two important caveats at this point: (1) It is important to note here that one can agree with much of Barth's general thesis without embracing either the complete route by which he arrived at this thesis (i.e., his particular use of Buber's "I-Thou," etc.), or all of his particular conclusions about male and female that he imagined to follow from it. For one important example, many find Barth's connection of the *imago Dei* with male and female problematic in that he argues that the creational *order* of male and then female in Genesis 2 "means succession. It means preceding and following. It means super- and subordination"; *Church Dogmatics* III/4, p. 169. However, as Elizabeth Frykberg has demonstrated, there are other ways of developing Barth's basic intuitions about the importance of male and female differentiation that lead to a vision of male-female egalitarian mutuality rather than female subordination. See Frykberg, *Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology: An Analogical Critique Regarding Gender Relations* (Princeton: Princeton Theological seminary, 1993).

(2) Finally, as mentioned earlier, any contemporary Christian theologian who develops this type of thesis regarding "male and female" in connection with Gen 1-2, etc. must be very aware of the implications their thesis suggests for intersexual/DSD persons. Megan

DeFranza rightly warns us about theologies of this type that “continue to neglect the presence of intersexed persons within the human community and problematize not only their humanity but also their ability to image God.” Megan K. DeFranza, “Intersex and *Imago*: Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Postmodern Theological Anthropology” (PhD Dissertation, Marquette University, 2011), 178. She concludes her dissertation by reminding us that “Christian theological anthropology can aid the case of the intersexed by showing that intersex persons have been among the human family and recorded in the history of Christianity for millenia . . . , that the intersexed were honored by Jesus (who raised them up from symbols of shame to become icons of radical discipleship), that the intersexed have participated in church leadership and public service in the Church and Christian societies, and that they have provided resources for thinking theologically about the significance of sex, gender, and sexuality in this life and the life to come” (p. 321). And yet, as DeFranza points out, the fact of intersexuality does not undermine the idea of two sexes: “. . . intersex does not mean that there are no real differences between men and women. One could not even speak about intersex if there were not two categories of sex able to be ‘inter’-mixed in various ways. In this way, John Money’s critique of Anne Fausto-Sterling’s ‘Five Sexes’ is valid. Intersex is ‘not a third sex’ but ‘a mixed sex or an in-between sex’” (p. 205). (Here she makes reference respectively to: Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough,” *The Sciences* 33/2 (1993), 20-24, reprinted in: *Constructing Sexualities: Readings in Sexuality, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Suzanne LaFont [Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003], 166-71; John Money, *Sex Errors of the Body and Related Syndromes: A Guide to Counseling Children, Adolescents and Their Families*, 2nd ed. [Baltimore: Brookes, 1994], 6.) I strongly believe that theologians on the more conservative side of the Christian spectrum must engage the implications of intersex/DSD for theological anthropology and sexuality, and the work of DeFranza (who writes from within the evangelical context) offers a wonderful place to begin. While I would take issue with her regarding the degree to which we should embrace the postmodern discourse on sexuality and its presuppositions, rooted in anti-essentialism and social (de)constructionism, she has done the evangelical (and wider theological) world a great service in raising awareness of about intersex/DSD and its theological import.

⁸⁹ Janet Martin Soskice, “Image Dei,” *The Other Journal* 7 (April 2, 2006), <http://theotherjournal.com/2006/04/02/imago-dei/>

⁹⁰ For an insightful theological critique of the common “loneliness” interpretation, see Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 2003), 115-22. Ash and I both see something else going on here. But while our perspectives are, to my mind, complementary, we pursue different emphases. Where, with regard to the divine purpose for marriage, he understands “relationship in the context of task” (p. 185), I would reverse – or at least equalize – the two.

⁹¹ There has been an unfortunate tendency through church history to interpret the woman as “helper” in terms that, whether implicitly or explicitly, relegate woman to something less than man – i.e., here “helper” (Hebrew = *ezer*) is interpreted as meaning that Eve is

merely to be Adam's assistant (or subservient lackey?). Anything like this interpretation should be dispelled by the fact that this Hebrew term is commonly applied to God himself as Israel's "helper" (Psa 30:10; 54:4; 146:5; cf. Heb 13:6), just as in John's Gospel the Holy Spirit is portrayed as our "helper" (John 14:16, 26; 15:26).

⁹² Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), 192.

⁹³ Fretheim, *Creation Untamed*, 28-9.

⁹⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997 [1990]), 248. Similarly, see Angelo Cardinal Scola, "A Theological Sketch of Man and Woman," in his *The Nuptial Mystery*, trans. Michelle K. Borrás (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005 [1998-2000]), 7-8; idem, "Sexual Difference and the Meaning of the 'Unity of the Two'," in *Nuptial Mystery*, 22-24. It must be added that one must be very careful here. Nuanced language is important if we are to not fall into serious problems. When Grenz connects human sexuality with incompleteness and the drive to community, he is not saying this about "sexual activity" but rather about our sexuality as a constitutive element our embodiment as humans – *all humans*. This distinction must be clearly made lest some take this type of statement to mean that those who are celibate or those with intersex/DSD phenomena are either inherently less *imago Dei* or perpetually "incomplete." On the importance of making these sorts of distinctions see Megan DeFranza, "Sex and the Image of God: Dangers in Evangelical and Roman Catholic Theologies of the Body," paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting (November 2010); idem, "Intersex and Imago."

Note: Scola's "nuptial theology" is deeply rooted in the "theology of the body" developed by the late Pope John Paul II in a series of addresses between 1979 and 1984. See Pope John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1977). Under this influence, a range of Catholic theologians in recent years have explored the implications of humanity being created as "male and female," and the theological meaning of the male-female complementarity within marriage from Genesis 2 onward. On the "nuptial theology" movement in the Catholic Church, see Fergus Kerr, "Catholic Theology," *Expository Times* 122/8 (2011) 367-70. Speaking personally: while I find many important biblical and theological insights within this nuptial theology movement, there are other tendencies within the movement, including ones tied directly to Roman Catholic theological distinctives, that I find both unpersuasive and unhelpful. Other have rightly pointed out the danger of over-romanticizing marriage and marital sexuality. See e.g., David Cloutier, "Heaven is a Place on Earth? Analyzing the Popularity of Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body," in *Sexuality and the U.S. Catholic Church: Crisis and Renewal*, eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill, John Garvey, and T. Frank Kennedy (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 18-21, 29; William Mattison, "'When They Rise from the Dead, They Neither Marry Nor are Given in Marriage': Marriage and Sexuality, Eschatology, and the Nuptial Meaning of the Body in Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body," in Cahill, et al., eds., *Sexuality and the U.S. Catholic Church*, 33-34, 41-43.

⁹⁵ **On Bruce Ware’s Interpretation of the Image of God and Male-Female**

Complementarity in the Genesis 2 Creation Account: It is common to find scholars arguing that Genesis 2 assumes a hierarchical view of the male-female relationship wherein the male is placed in a dominant position. Typically, scholars on the left who interpret Gen 2 this way criticize it as an unavoidably patriarchal text; see e.g., Jerome Gilman, “Gender and Sexuality in the Garden of Eden,” *Theology and Sexuality* 12 (2006), 319-36. Conversely, conservative scholars who conclude this way typically argue that Gen 2 provides scriptural warrant for a hierarchical – or “complementarian” – structure for the marriage relationship. A clear example of this type of hierarchical/complementarian appropriation of Gen 2 can be found in Bruce A. Ware, “Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7/1 (Spring 2002), 14-23. In the course of arguing his case, Ware makes some controversial claims concerning the implications of Genesis 2 for the question of the relation of male and female to the image of God. These claims require comment here. On one hand, Ware clearly wants to claim “the complete equality of female with male as being bearers of the image of God” (p. 23, n. 16). In this, Ware (and most other contemporary complementarians) distance themselves from the long history within the church of explaining things like male headship teachings within scripture by appealing to the natural inferiority of women. This, of course, is a good thing. However, it leaves Ware having to explain what it is about men vs. women that leaves one sex always in the leadership role and the other always in the submission role – a necessary state of affairs arrived at from his interpretation of a couple of Pauline passages (e.g., I Tim 2; I Cor 11). Here, he turns to Genesis 2 for answers. He notes two things: (1) Adam is created first, Eve second; and (2) Adam is created from the ground; Eve from Adam’s side. Here Ware finds his answer, which has profound ramifications for all subsequent females’ relation to the image of God: “. . . the male was made image of God first, in an unmediated fashion, as God formed him from the dust of the ground, while the woman was made image of God second, in a mediated fashion, as God chose, not more earth, but the very rib of Adam by which he would create the woman fully and equally the image of God [T]here is a God-intended temporal priority bestowed upon the man as the original image of God, through whom the woman, as the image of God formed from the male, comes to be” (p. 18). Ware moves from these observations concerning “when” and “how” the man and woman were each created in Gen 2 to a profound conclusion regarding their respective relations to the image of God: “At least this much is clear: as God chose to create her, the woman was not formed to be the human that she is *apart from* the man but *only through* the man. Does it not stand to reason, then, that her humanity, including her being the image of God, occurs as God forms her from the man as the ‘glory of the man’?” (p. 20, emphasis in text). And so, Ware concludes: “. . . it seems also true that male-headship is a part of the very constitution of the woman being created in the image of God. Man is a human being made in the image of God first; woman becomes a human being bearing the image of God only through the man. While both are fully and equally the image of God, there is a built-in priority given to the male that reflects God’s design of male-headship in the created order” (20-21). In his recent systematic theology, Gerald Bray concludes in similar fashion. See Bray, *God is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 316-18. Ware goes on to draw five implications

from this reading of Genesis 2, including, of course, a generalized teaching of male headship in the contexts of church and marriage – and, interestingly enough, even in the context of singles relating to each other: “within male-female relationships among singles, there should be a deference offered to men by the women of the group, which acknowledges the woman’s reception of her human nature in the image of God through the man,” although, Ware adds, this deference of single women to single men “stops short of a full and general submission of women to men” (p. 22), though just where such a line is or, more generally, how any of this should actually work within the context of a mixed gender group of single friends he does not say.

In any case, there are serious – even dangerous – problems with Ware’s approach to the creation of man and woman in Genesis 2, both exegetically and theologically. For example, from the text of Genesis 2 itself (i.e., exegetically) how would one ever arrive at the conclusion that whatever creature is created *first*, in terms of temporal sequence, should have a natural authority over one created *second*? To the contrary, if one wanted to argue for a necessary relation between temporal sequencing of creation and authority/rulership, the only clear precedent in the text is that the one created “second” (e.g., humanity) should rule over the one created “first” (animals) (Gen 1:26-28; cf. Gen 2:19-20, if one interprets Adam’s naming of the animals as implying authority over them). I assume Ware would not take seriously anyone who would make a claim for female headship over males based on the textually prior (Gen 1) animal-human precedent of “the second shall rule over the first.” (Or, as *Genesis Rabbah* 19:4 articulates the principle: “Whatever was created after its companion has power over it”; an observation that leads the Jewish feminist commentator Judith Antonelli [*In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1995), 6] to conclude that woman has “a higher spiritual nature” than man.) But that’s just the point. These kinds of arguments are exegetically dangerous to make.

Next, Ware’s claim that Adam was created in an “unmediated” fashion while Eve was created in a “mediated” fashion is not just irrelevant – it’s wrong. God does not simply “speak” Adam into existence – an action that, had it happened, could sensibly qualify as Adam having been created in an “unmediated” fashion. (Though, even here, just what the significance of this would be is not at all clear with regard to priority or authority; i.e., if one is going to press the details of the Genesis creation narrative for metaphysical truths in the way Ware wants to, then according to the descriptions in Gen 1, it could be argued that God more directly spoke the birds and fish into existence, while, in the creation of (both male and female) humans, God chose to use prior material (earth and “rib” respectively according to Gen 2), which arguably means that animals were created in a less mediated fashion, while both male and female humans were created in an indisputably “mediated” (i.e., using the term as Ware does) fashion. I doubt Ware would be impressed with anyone using this sort of exegetical observation to argue for animal dominion over humans. But what about this precedent: In Gen 2:7, God forms the man (*adam* = human) out of the ground (*adamah*). But, although Adam was “taken out” of the ground (2:7), he was put in a place of dominion and rulership over the very earth from which he was taken (1:28). Based on this textual precedent, should we not say that God’s creational design pattern is that whenever he takes something from an existing reality and makes a second thing from it, that second thing has creational priority and

rulership authority over that from which it was taken? Doesn't the pattern of Adam's creation from and dominion over the earth/ground lead us to expect Eve's creation from and dominion over Adam? Apparently not. But again, that's just the point. Ware's attempts to find exegetically based reasons in Gen 2 for men's generalized headship over women are subverted by the very text of Genesis 1-2 itself. And all of this leaves his theologically dangerous conclusion of a "mediated" (i.e., less connected to God, compared to Adam's "unmediated" status), derivative and male-dependent status of "image of God" for women without any anchor whatsoever in the actual text of Genesis. (For further considerations on the implications of the Genesis creation accounts for the question of male-female hierarchy, see Davidson, "Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning," 13-19.)

So why does Ware even attempt such an exegetical feat? Solely, it seems, based upon statements made by Paul within his situationally-occasioned letters written in response to specific relational and ecclesiastical problems in the early church. This is not the place to enter into the debate regarding interpretation of Pauline passages on men and women in church and marriage. But suffice to say that many see something else going on in Paul's statements in I Tim 2 and I Cor 11 than terse conclusions emerging from a fully-orbed Pauline systematic theology of male and female. That Paul would use arguments appealing to Adam and Eve in support of situation-specific problems/arguments in his first-century churches seems to fit with a broad pattern of how Second Temple Jews made use of Adam-based arguments. As John R. Levison has demonstrated, Second Temple approaches to Adam were characterized by diversity, which itself was fueled by the fact that particular perspectives on/arguments about Adam were shaped to a significant degree by the authors own historical situations and philosophical/theological "*Tendenz*." See Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 159-61.

⁹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone (GN 2, 23a)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32 (1970), 532-42. André LaCocque points out that the Hebrew term for "bone" here (*'esem*) can also mean "absolute identity," and that the phrase of which it is a component functions as "a formula of kinship." André LaCocque *The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2006), 121.

⁹⁷ Davidson, "Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning," 21.

⁹⁸ LaCocque, *Trial of Innocence*, 121 (emphasis added). LaCocque's observation on this verse stands apart from his original androgyne thesis.

⁹⁹ It should be noted that a number of interpreters through history have imagined the first state of oneness (i.e., the single human being designated *ha adam*, that is, *adam* with the article) as signifying an original androgynous human being. The androgynous interpretation was offered by a number of rabbinic commentators (e.g., R. Jeremiah b. Elazar; R. Samuel b. Nachmani; cf. *Zohar*, I:22b, 47a), apparently in an attempt to harmonize the details of the two Genesis creation accounts. For discussion on rabbinic interpreters and the appeal to an original androgyne, see Burton L. Visotzky, "Genesis in Rabbinic Interpretation," in Evans, Lohr, and Petersen, eds., *Book of Genesis*, 587; Shai

Cherry, *Torah through Time: Understanding Bible Commentary from the Rabbinic Period to Modern Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2007), 49-51. For examples of contemporary writers who hold either to an androgynous or a sexually undifferentiated perspective, see Antonelli, *In the Image of God*, 4-5; Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 112; Richard Batey, "The *MIA SARX* Union of Christ and the Church," *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966-1967), 270-81; LaCocque, *Trial of Innocence*, 114-23; Nelson, *Embodiment*, 97-103; Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 79-81. However, as attractive as this may be on one level, it seems difficult to sustain this view on several counts, exegetical and otherwise. See Ash, *Marriage*, 274-6; Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-creation, Re-creation*, 68; Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 23-4; Hess, "Splitting the Adam," 14-15; Robert S. Kawashima, "A Revisionist Reading Revisited: On the Creation of Adam and Then Eve," *Vetus Testamentum* 56 (2006), 46-57; Roland Martinson, "Androgyny and Beyond," *Word and World* 5 (1985), 370-9. The androgynous interpretation was rendered seemingly plausible when interpreted later in history against a Hellenistic, particularly Platonic, background, a lens that may have been fostered by the LXX. As William Loader observes: "Where Gen 1:27 was interpreted as a statement about heavenly realities in a Platonic sense, the union, including the sexual union, of 2:24 would be understood as restoring an original unity, perhaps in the sense that in marriage the heavenly archetype of humankind embodying male and female was truly reflected." William Loader, *The Septuagint, Sexuality, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 54-55. Some see an egalitarian impulse as inherent within the vision of androgyny; e.g., James Nelson (*Embodiment*, 101) writes: "The social ideology of androgyny is egalitarian." However, as Phyllis Bird ("Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh," 529, n. 22) reminds us (and as certain forms of ancient Gnostic theology concretely demonstrate) an original androgyne theory can be just as sexist and patriarchal as any other model. On the history of the androgyne concept and its allure within the modern Romantic movement, see Sara Friedrichsmeyer, *The Androgyne in Early German Romanticism: Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and the Metaphysics of Love* (New York: Lang, 1983). The androgyne ideal has continued to attract some with feminist concerns in more recent times. See Vetterling-Braggins, ed., "Femininity," "Masculinity," and "Androgyny," pt. IV.

¹⁰⁰ Understanding the depth of the covenantal "one flesh" relationship is not easy in our highly individualistic culture where we tend to think of ourselves, first and foremost, as autonomous individuals. For insight into the ancient "corporate" understanding of humanity that lies behind the one-flesh concept, see Sang-Won (Aaron) Son, *Corporate Elements in Pauline Anthropology: A Study of Selected Terms, Idioms, and Concepts in Light of Paul's Usage and Background* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001), esp. ch. 5; idem, "Implications of Paul's 'One Flesh' Concept for His Understanding of the Nature of Man," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11 (2001), 107-22.

¹⁰¹ Again, this is not simply read exegetically off the text of Genesis as it stands alone, but rather as one has first moved to the center of Christian theological universe (and the true image of God) – Jesus Christ – and Christ's spousal relationship to the people of God

(e.g., Eph 5:21-33). From this theological vantage point one can observe that “the pathway between humankind as male and female and the *imago Dei* leads inevitably through the church as the prolepsis of the new humanity”; Stanley J. Grenz, “The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Theology of the *Imago Dei* in the Postmodern Context,” in Lints, Horton, and Talbot, eds., *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, 89. For Grenz’s insightful reflections on this matter, see *Social God*, ch. 7; idem, *Sexual Ethics*, 44-51; idem, “Social God,” 70-92 (esp. 86-89); idem, “Is God Sexual?,” 37-41. Other scholars who have noted the powerful *theological* implications of the Genesis 1 connection between the *imago Dei* and male-female sexual differentiation include Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3*, trans. John C. Fletcher (New York: Macmillan, 1959 [1937]), 38-39; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 194-95; von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, passim; Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 284-86; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 250-52 (who notes that the “symbolism of woman’s creation from the man’s rib [Gen 2:21-22] reflects the character of sameness and difference,” p. 251); Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 12-23. Few have pursued this connection more thoroughly than von Balthasar. For helpful surveys of his views here, see Anton Strukelj, “Man and Woman under God: The Dignity of the Human Being according to Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Communio* 20 (1993), 377-88; Pesarchick, *Trinitarian Foundation of Human Sexuality*. On the theological importance of the male-female differentiation for the expression of the “one flesh” marriage covenant, see C. Martini, *On the Body: A Contemporary Theology of the Human Person*, trans. R. Giammanco Frongia (New York: Crossroad, 2001 [2000]), 47-53; C. Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (New York: Clark, 2007). See also the related reflections in Scola, *Nuptial Mystery*, esp. “Human Sexuality and the *Imago Dei*,” 32-52. It should be clearly stated here that the claims being made here do not imply the *sexualization* of God. Thus, J. Harold Ellens (*Sex in the Bible*, 15, 16) goes too far when he reads Gen 1:26-27 to say that “God is sexual The Bible tells us that the characteristics of God’s nature reflected in us are [primarily] . . . our gender, our sexuality, our maleness and femaleness.” Megan DeFranza (*Intersex and Imago*,” 237) reminds us of at least one implication of such a move: “When the social becomes the sexual, when sexuality is seen as the basis for all relations—the basic form of bonding, the ground of all human loves—it becomes difficult to uphold traditional Christian sexual ethics. When God’s relationality is sexualized it can be used as justification for sexualities of many stripes.”

¹⁰² Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985 [1952]), 117.

¹⁰³ This sort of concept undergirds the “Trinitarian model of marriage” proposed by J. and J. Balswick, *A Model of Marriage: Covenant, Grace, Empowerment, and Intimacy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), ch. 2. And yet while this is true, it is noteworthy that this passage in Genesis 2 – unlike that of Genesis 1 – does not even mention fruitfulness through child-bearing. Rather, as David Carr (*Erotic Word*, 33)

notes, “Instead, Genesis 2 emphasizes that these first two human beings are intimately bound together by an erotic, bodily connection.”

¹⁰⁴ Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 344. See also Scola, “Sexual Difference,” 25-26.

¹⁰⁵ In a recent article, Eugene Rogers argues for the appropriateness of same-sex marriage. One of his claims is that same-sex couples, like opposite-sex couples, “can image the faithfulness of God.” Eugene F. Rogers, “Same-sex Complementarity: A Theology of Marriage,” *Christian Century* 128/10 (May 17, 2011), 26. Similarly, Jacob Caldwell has argued that – given the primary integrating motif of “God’s covenantal faithfulness” in scripture and theology (p. 73-4), and given an appropriately theological interpretation of scripture – the proper Christian response to faithful homosexual unions is to bless and support them. Jacob M. Caldwell, “The Viability of Christian Same-Sex Unions: Why Scripturally Normed Faith Communities Must Support Homosexual Relationships,” *Theology and Sexuality* 16 (2010), 59-76. Similarly, see David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 299-303 (esp. 300).

In response, we can expand Roger’s insight and claim that *every* human relationship can – and should – “image the faithfulness of God.” That is the calling of all human relationships. And so, of course same-sex relationships can image God. But the question is *how* any particular relationship is designed to do that. More particular to our concerns in this paper, the question is what role *sexual intimacy/union* is to play in any particular human relationship as it images the Triune God. While many human covenant relationships can image God in their own particular way (e.g., covenant friendship, parent-child, ecclesial community, etc.), according to the biblical tradition it is only within a male-female marriage covenant relationship that sexual intimacy/union is to be shared as the sign of that very particular covenant (on which, see below). Neither Rogers’s nor Caldwell’s article ever engages the biblical tradition on sexuality in any detail. And although they both appeal to covenant relationship and/or notions associated with it (e.g., faithfulness), neither of them engage the biblical-theological tradition that associates sexual intimacy exclusively with the sign of the male-female marriage covenant.

¹⁰⁶ Walter Kasper, *Theology of Christian Marriage* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 27. Of course, Kasper, as a Roman Catholic theologian, understands these things in a sacramental framework. But one need not be a sacramentalist to appreciate the covenantal implications of his insights. On Kasper’s basic point, see also German Martinez, “Marriage as Worship: A Theological Analogy,” *Worship* 62 (1988), 334-5.

¹⁰⁷ On which, see R. Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10; Hosea 1-3; Jeremiah 2-3)* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1999); E. Adler, “The Background for the Metaphor of Covenant as Marriage in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD dissertation, University of Californian, Berkeley, 1990); F. C. Fensham, “The Marriage Metaphor in Hosea for the Covenant Relationship between the Lord and his People (Hos. 1:2-9),” *Journal of Northwest*

Semitic Languages 12 (1984), 71-78; I. K. Rallis, "Nuptial Imagery in the Book of Hosea: Israel as the Bride of Yahweh," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 34 (1990), 197-219; H. Ringgren, "The Marriage Motif in Israelite Religion," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of F. M. Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 421-28; and most recently Michael Tait, *Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom, in Mark 2:18-22: Mark's Christology Upgraded* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical, 2010), chs. 4-5.

¹⁰⁸ On this tragic theme, see R. Ortlund, Jr., *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

¹⁰⁹ On the "Jesus-as-groom; church-as-bride" theme in the NT, see Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti, *An Exegetical Study of the Nuptial Symbolism in Matthew 9:15: Jesus of Nazareth, the Bridegroom Who is Present and will Depart* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2006); W. Huntley, "Christ the Bridegroom: A Biblical Image" (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1964); J. McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and especially Tait, *Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom*, chs. 7-8..

¹¹⁰ On betrothal in the ancient world, see Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (1987), 243-45; Aldina da Silva, "The Conditions of Women in Mesopotamian and Biblical Literature," in Gerald Caron, et al., *Women also Journeyed with Him: Feminist perspectives on the Bible*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 52-58; Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 69-81, 163-68. For a description of the ancient Jewish marriage process, culled from available written sources, see Fedrigotti, *Exegetical Study of Nuptial Symbolism*, 303-18. Fedrigotti (pp. 298-99) claims that Jesus' ministry should not be seen as analogous to "mere betrothal" since the wedding is envisioned as present in the Matthean text. But this begs the question as to whether the early church analogized Jesus' earthly ministry to the betrothal celebration or the (later) wedding celebration. I suggest it should be seen as the former. This would explain, among other things, why Paul views Christians as "betrothed" to Jesus (II Cor 11:2-3), and why the bride is seen as waiting for the "return" of the groom (i.e., from the betrothal separation) throughout the NT (e.g., Rev 22:17). On betrothal more widely, see George P. Monger, "Betrothal," in *Marriage Customs of the World: From Henna to Honeymoons* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 28-30.

¹¹¹ On which, see Donald A. McIlraith, "'For the Fine Linen is the Righteous Deeds of the Saints': Works and Wife in Revelation 19:8." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999) 512-29; idem, *The Reciprocal Love between Christ and the Church in the Apocalypse* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1989).

¹¹² Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

¹¹³ E.g., William Doherty, “Resisting Consumer Marriage,” in *Take Back Your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World that Pulls Us Apart* (New York: Guilford, 2003), ch. 2

¹¹⁴ As championed in e.g., Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). For a critique of Giddens from a Christian perspective, see Jenny Taylor, *A Wild Constraint: The Case for Chastity* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

¹¹⁵ Pamela Paul, *The Starter Marriage and the Future of Matrimony* (New York: Villard, 2002); Karen Jerabek, et al., *The Mini Marriage: 5 Bite Sized Memoirs of Young Divorce* (n.p.: CreateSpace, 2010).

¹¹⁶ Rogers’ primary argument in his article “Same-sex Complementarity” is that the Christ-as-groom/ church-as-bride imagery is a typological “icon or symbol” that can be instantiated in, but need not be reduced to, a male-female marriage covenant (p. 26). Thus, he concludes: “Ephesians does not require heterosexual complementarity, even if it uses gendered language” – i.e., for Rogers “gendered language” does not require “gendered representation” (p. 28). But this is not an obvious conclusion from the text of Ephesians 5, and so is, at most, a thesis to be tested. One test would be to see if the biblical text anywhere embraces this novel interpretation. The only potentially substantive passage Rogers can point to is Galatians 3:28 – “in Christ there is neither male nor female, . . .” which Rogers interprets as denying “strong forms of the complementarity theory, according to which a woman remains incomplete without a man or a man incomplete without a woman. That theory, taken to its logical conclusion, effectively denies the Christ in whom all things are ‘summed up’ (Eph. 1:10)” (p. 29). While one could take issue with Rogers’ conclusions on the meaning of this passage, even if one grants his basic exegesis of Galatians 3:28, this hardly serves as a textual basis for same-sex marriage. His exegesis of this passages points to a ‘sufficiency of Christ’ argument. True enough! Any use of a male-female complementarity theory to claim that a man or a woman is in any way “incomplete” unless they are “complemented” by the other sex in a marriage relationship is problematic on a number of grounds. And Rogers is certainly correct that all Christians – including those with same-sex orientations – are called to grow in “sanctification” within the context of relationship that provides an “ascetic discipline, a particular way of practicing love of neighbor” (p. 27). The assumption that Rogers never questions is that this relationship must be that of “marriage.” One of the tragedies of our contemporary Western world is the general loss of categories for deep, meaningful covenant relationships beyond that of marriage. In our relationally/covenantally anemic context, it is understandable why Rogers can only imagine marriage as fulfilling such a role. But, covenant relationships rooted in friendship-love, affection-love, and other-oriented, self-sacrificial *agape*-love can bind together men with men and women with women – and even men with women in ways other than marriage – that provide committed covenantal contexts for deep intimacy, mutual love and spiritual-relational growth. The category of relationship that some are now calling “romantic [but non-sexual] friendships” offers an interesting case in point. Lillian Faderman, for example, has explored the concept of such romantic friendships –

or “Boston marriages” – between women. See Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1998 [1981]); idem, “Nineteenth-century Boston Marriage as a Possible Lesson for Today,” in *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships among Contemporary Lesbians*, eds. Esther D. Rothblum and Kathleen A. Brebony (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 19-42. See also Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (1975), 1-29. Others, such as Donald Yacovone, have explored similarly deep, intimate, emotionally and physically expressive – while non-sexual – friendships between men, prior to their loss in our cultural in the early 20th century. See Yacovone, “‘Surpassing the Love of Women’: Victorian Manhood and the Language of Fraternal Love,” in *A Shared Experience: Men, Women, and the History of Gender*, eds. Laura McCall and Donald Yacovone (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 195-221; idem, “Abolitionists and the ‘Language of Fraternal Love,’” in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, eds. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 85-95. See also Karen V. Hansen, “‘Our Eyes Behold Each Other’: Masculinity and Intimate Friendship in Antebellum New England,” in *Men’s Friendships*, ed. Peter M. Nardi (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1992), 35-58; Jeffrey Richards, “‘Passing the Love of Women’: Manly Love and Victorian Society,” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, eds. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (New York: St. Martin’s, 1987), 92-122; E. Anthony Rotundo, “Romantic Friendships: Male Intimacy and Middle-Class Youth in the Northern United States, 1800-1900,” *Journal of Social History* 23 (1989), 1-25.

A related assumption that Rogers never critically analyzes – let alone effectively supports – is that romantic/sexual-love is an appropriate expression of covenantal love within a same-sex relationship. He has not reckoned with the biblical data on the nature of sexual intimacy as the unique “sign” of the male-female marriage covenant (on which, see immediately below). This is one (though not the only) significant point at which the biblical tradition – and the theology of human sexual intimacy within this paper – challenges Rogers’ theology of same-sex marriage.

¹¹⁷ And so, viewed in its appropriate covenantal context, the simplest performative formula for the creation of a marriage relationship can be summarized as: mutual public vows (i.e., spoken within the context of community/witnesses) plus consummation through sexual union = marriage covenant. Arguably, the two-part marriage process of the ancient Jewish world – betrothal plus wedding celebration – mirrors this fact. At the betrothal ceremony, a mutual consent/oath was expressed which created a covenant. However, the couple was not considered fully married until the subsequent wedding celebration which, in essence, can be understood as providing “the general atmosphere of rejoicing for the consummation of the marriage,” i.e., the first performance of sexual union, the covenantal sign. McIlraith, “For the Fine Linen is the Righteous Deeds of the Saints,” 524.

¹¹⁸ Fedrigotti, *Exegetical Study of the Nuptial Symbolism*, 309.

¹¹⁹ Oscar D. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony* (London: Rivington, Percival, 1895), 78.

¹²⁰ Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *The Mystery of Love and Marriage: A Study in the Theology of Sexual Relation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), 45. See also Korbinian Ritzer, “Secular Law and the Western Church’s Concept of Marriage,” in *The Future of Marriage as an Institution*, ed. Franz Böckle (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 67-82; German Martinez, “Marriage: Historical Developments and Future Alternatives,” *American Benedictine Review* 37/4 (1986), 370-95.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 46. This pattern of the church assimilating its vision of marriage (both in theory and practice) to surrounding cultural sensibilities – including their matrimonial institutions and legalities – has continued to this day, with tragic consequences for everything from the state of Christian marriages to Christian theologies of sexuality. Once the church enters into this assimilationist model, it loses its ability to witness to a truly counter-cultural, distinctly Kingdom vision of covenantal marriage and human sexual expression. The question of how to recover a biblically grounded, covenantally based vision and practice of marriage and sexual expression must be on the agenda of the contemporary church in order for it to fulfill its calling to witness to a uniquely Kingdom way of being in the world. And the context of this recovery is NOT the legal/governmental arena of whatever nation the church happens to reside in, but rather within the covenantal-relational arena that constitutes the reality of the Christian communities themselves.

¹²² E.g., Bernard F. Batto, “The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987), 195-96; Carla Kloos, “The Flood on Speaking Terms with God,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982), 639-42.

¹²³ This observation was made long ago by medieval rabbinic commentators, including Chizkuni and Ramban (Nachmanides). See e.g., Ramban, *Commentary on the Torah: Genesis*, trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo, 1971), 136-38. On the “bent” bow, see Kloos, “The Flood,” 639.

¹²⁴ For an extended exegetical argument in this direction, see Tim Hegg, “Circumcision as a Sign: The Theological Significance,” paper originally presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, Northwest Regional Meeting (April 21, 1990), 18 pp, <http://www.torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/CircumcisionETS.pdf>

¹²⁵ Among the most helpful studies of the biblical context for seeing sexual union as the sign of the male-female marriage covenant are Bailey, *Mystery of Love and Marriage*; G. Hugenberger, *Marriage as Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 240-79. Among other contemporary authors writing on sexuality who have recognized the *sign* aspect of sexual intimacy, see Dawn, *Sexual Character*, 56; L. McMinn, *Sexuality and Holy Longing: Embracing Intimacy in a*

Broken World (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 130. See also Arnold, *Plea for Purity*, 37. For explicit covenantal approaches to human sexuality, see Judith K. Balswick and Jack O. Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality: An Integrated Christian Approach*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008 [1999]), 78-82; J. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 2003). Relevant here also is John F. Kippley, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant: A Basis for Marriage*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005 [1991]). Kippley presents a case for the claim that “[s]exual intercourse is intended by God to be at least implicitly a renewal of the marriage covenant” (p. 7). However, his Roman Catholic conviction against contraception runs throughout the book, and, in my opinion, adds a complicating and controversial thesis that serves to cloud what could otherwise have been a clear and compelling argument for the ‘sexual union as covenant renewal’ thesis. I believe that part of the problem with Kippley’s (and other traditional Roman Catholic’s) argument is that he confuses and conflates a “covenantal” with a “procreational” model of sexuality in marriage. The two, however, are – and I would argue should be – separable. From the Genesis creation accounts onward, the Bible includes – but at the same time points beyond – a merely procreative purpose for marriage. E.g., Phyllis Bird (“Genesis I-III as a Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality,” 38) argues that, with regard to Gen 2, procreative function is subordinated to male-female relationality and passion: “The attraction of the sexes [and, I would add, the marriage covenant relationship] is the author’s primary interest, the sexual drive whose consummation is conceived as a re-union.” Related to this, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge, 1996), 112-13, 199-207. She perceptively notes: “[T]he premodern [and traditional Roman Catholic] sexual ethic was social but often impersonal with regard to the individual fulfillment of the spouses; the modern sexual ethic is personal but individualist” (p. 113). Eugene Hillman has argued that the Roman Catholic over-emphasis on the procreative purpose of marriage is largely derived from ancient Roman law. Eugene Hillman, “The Development of Christian Marriage Structures,” in *The Future of Marriage as an Institution*, ed. Franz Böckle (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 31. See also W. M. Lawson, “Roman Law: A Source of Canonical Marriage Legislation,” *Resonance* 4 (Spring 1967), 9. For a discussion of the procreative and covenantal models of sexuality that shows them to be distinct and separable, see Simon, *Bringing Sex into Focus*, 30-32. In this book, Simon explores six models or “lenses” by which to understand human sexuality from a Christian perspective, and she rightly locates the *covenantal* model as the centerpiece, around which the others are arranged as supplements (p. 20).

¹²⁶ Regarding the sign aspect of sexual union within the male-female marriage covenant, this study will focus on the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, it is worth noting that a remarkably wide range of cultures have seen sexual union as absolutely crucial to the consummation of the marriage covenant. In fact, for a number of cultures the act of sexual union required witnesses for the marriage to be considered valid by the community. See Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 3 vols., reprint ed. (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1971 [1921]), II:436-37 (while Westermarck’s

work is dated in a number of respects – not least of which is the ubiquitous tone of modern Western ethnocentrism – his study is still valuable for its wide range of data).

¹²⁷ For a comprehensive and insightful study of human sexuality in the OT, see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*.

¹²⁸ It should be noted that at various points throughout the interpretive history of Genesis 2, some within both ancient Jewish and Christian contexts have avoided seeing sexual consummation within this passage. But the reasons for this are less exegetical than they are theological – and the theological speculation behind it is highly questionable. As Gary Anderson has pointed out, one chief reason that some ancient interpreters have concluded this way is that they understood the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2 to “function as a metaphor for the world-to-come.” And if their vision of the eschaton precluded sexual relations, then this idealization could be retrojected back into the Garden situation of Genesis. See Anderson, “Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989), 121-48 (here p. 121).

¹²⁹ On the symbolic importance of blood within covenant ceremonies see H. Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Kirkwood, MO: Impact, 1975 [1893]). On the practice of displaying the blood-stained sheets to verify virginity within Middle Eastern culture, see D. F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989), 174; Raphael Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 66-70; Abraham Stahl, *Family and Child-rearing in Oriental Jewry: Sources, References, Comparisons* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Akadamon, 1993), 123-27. For reports of the importance of communal witness of the blood-stained sheet as proof of virginity within various cultural settings, both past and present, see K. Brown, *The Past in Question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 112; H. Campbell, *Mexican Memoir: A Personal Account of Anthropology and Radical Politics in Oaxaca* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2001) 20; K. Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 19; P. Mantegazza and J. Bruce, *Sexual Relations of Mankind* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003), 57. As Hanne Blank (*Virgin: The Untouched History* [(New York: Bloomsbury, 2007], 111-13) has pointed out, however, this physical experience cannot be universalized to all women. A fact that later rabbis seem to have realized; see T. Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 98-99.

¹³⁰ The take-away point here, of course, is *not* that sexual coercion is the pathway to a legitimate marriage relationship! Rather the point is that Tamar recognized sexual union as an integral part of the creation of a marriage covenant – and one that could not be taken lightly.

¹³¹ Thus, regarding I Cor 6:15-17, Doug Baker (*Covenant and Community*, 103) writes: “Even ‘casual sex’ forms a bond between the participants that Paul describes in clearly

covenantal terms, paralleling it with the covenant that unites us to Christ Whether we feel bound to each other or not, whether we realize it or not, our lives are bound up in the lives of our covenant partners (wives and husbands) and even of our sexual partners”

Mention should be made here of one way of misreading this fact about the covenantal sign nature of sexual union. In an article entitled “There’s No Such Thing as Premarital Sex” (*Re:generation* 8/2 [Winter 2003], 20-21), Daniel Harrell correctly recognizes the one-flesh making capacity of sexual intercourse: “The one action, intercourse, makes the two people one flesh” (p. 21). Yes, absolutely! This is clearly Paul’s claim in I Cor 6;16. However, from this Harrell leaps to a second conclusion: “There is no two-step process of vows plus the consummation of those vows. Considered this way, premarital sex makes no more sense than a premarital wedding” (p. 21). I agree with his final comment here – it is true that once you understand the one-flesh making and covenant signing capacity of sexual union, then premarital sex makes as much sense as a premarital wedding. But the problem I see with Harrell’s logic is found in his statement: “There is no two-step process of vows plus the consummation of those vows.” To the contrary, there absolutely is – at least there is from the perspective of covenant logic! This is why the Judeo-Christian tradition – and not only this tradition – has most commonly seen marriage as a two-part process: (1) the public exchange of covenant vows in the presence of a community of witnesses, and (2) a private “signing” of the publically enacted covenant through sexual union. What Harrell fails to notice is that a *one-flesh* relationship does not necessarily equate to a *covenant* relationship (and, of course, vice versa). This is clear from his statement: “Does any sort of consensual sex, or worse, nonconsensual sex, constitute marriage? It would seem so” (p. 21). But this is not technically true. It is possible for a man and woman to become ‘one flesh’ through sexual union, without ever entering into a publically vowed marriage covenant. Conversely, it is possible for a couple to publically vow a marriage covenant without ever signing (i.e., ‘consummating’) it through sexual union. In either case, one has something like *half of a one-flesh marriage covenant*. As strange as it might seem, it is logically possible to vow to a covenant without ever ‘signing’, or, conversely, to enact the sign of a covenant without ever having made the attendant covenant vows in the first place – possible yes, but not advisable. Making this adjustment may leave Harrell a little less comfortable with sexual union apart from publicly enacted marriage vows. For different reasons, Paul Ramsey was led to conclude that “preceremonial sexual relations” were not really a problem, since the two “parties alone make marriage,” and thus if they decided together that they were functionally married already, then “this bond, their marriage, was present by their own making preceremonially.” Paul Ramsey, “A Christian Approach to the Question of Sexual Relations Outside of Marriage,” *Journal of Religion* 45 (1965), 112. Given the church’s eventually wide-spread rejection of “secret marriages,” Ramsey’s appeal to the them seems ill advised (p. 112). More recently, Todd Salzman and Michael Lawler (*Sexual Ethics: A Theological Introduction* [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012]), writing from a theologically progressive Roman Catholic perspective and in light of the new cultural trend toward pre-marital cohabitation, have suggested a return to an apparently not uncommon pre-Tridentine sequence of betrothal, sexual intercourse, ceremonial wedding (p. 134).

However (and although he explicitly appeals to the concept of covenant in this article), Ramsey has neglected the fundamentally *social nature* of covenant relationship, and thus the import of mutually shared public vows witnessed in a communal context (i.e., a covenant initiation ceremony) for the creation of a covenant. The proposal of Salzman and Lawler presents a similar problem – if not theoretically, at least practically. Salzman and Lawler acknowledge that sexual intercourse should be reserved for “a *stable and lasting relationship* between two people” (pp. 138-9, emphasis in text). They acknowledge that this type of stable, lasting, publically recognized relationship “has traditionally been called marriage” (p. 139). They are also clear that in their new – or as they frame it, a return to an old (i.e., pre-Tridentine) – model, betrothal must precede sexual intercourse, i.e., they are very clear that their proposal for pre-marital, cohabitational sex applies only to “*nuptial cohabitation*, cohabitation premised by the intention to marry. Nothing we say refers to non-nuptial cohabitation” (p. 134, emphasis in text). And finally, they are also clear that the “betrothal” that precedes nuptial cohabitation and sexual intercourse is to include “appropriate ritual to ensure community involvement” (p. 134). In other words, they are talking about a return to a traditional form of betrothal that includes a *ritualized communal/public declaration of intent to marry*, and not merely the more contemporary replacement for betrothal that we today call “engagement.” For, as Salzman and Lawler correctly observe, in more recent times “betrothal lost its public character and became an internal family affair called *engagement*” (p. 133). And so, under the force of their own logic, one is led to conclude that unless and until we have abandoned the relatively informal, individualistically inclined contemporary practice of engagement, and have replaced it with a robust practice of communally witnessed and publically ritualized betrothal, their suggestion that cohabitational sex is a legitimate option is, practically speaking, a moot point. And, of course, even if this cultural shift were made, the question still arises (on purely common sense grounds) as to the logic of sexually “signing” a covenant that one has yet to make – especially when the covenant sign in question involves the notoriously fickle elements of romantic attraction and sexual desire. Stanley Hauerwas (“Sex in Public,” 493, n. 15) offers words of wisdom related to this matter that should not be taken lightly by Kingdom people: “we should not trust our declaration of love unless we are willing to commit ourselves publically. For there is surely no area where we are more liable to self-deception than in those contexts where love is mixed with sexual desire. Of course, there is nothing wrong with love and sexual desire except that we may often confuse the two.”

¹³² Rob Bell, *Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 136-37. Similarly, Mike Mason, reflecting on the implications of Paul’s words in I Cor 6:16, writes: “So apparently it is not the marriage vows alone, but more specifically the act of intercourse which brings about this extraordinary union.” Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage: Meditations on the Miracle* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1985), 159. Lewis Smedes’ (*Sex for Christians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 130) reflections lead him in this direction as well, when he notes that genital sex outside of marriage is problematic “because it violates the inner reality of the act; it is wrong because unmarried people thereby engage in a life-unifying act without a life-unifying intent Intercourse signs and seals—and maybe even

delivers—a life-union; and life-union means marriage.” The cross-cultural recognition of the signing/sealing role of sexual intercourse for marriage is noted by George Monger (“Bed, Marriage,” in *Marriage Customs of the World*, 23): “In all cultures, consummation of the marriage is the final part of the ritual and constitutes a sealing of the contract.”

¹³³ Baker, *Covenant and Community*, 100.

¹³⁴ A number of insights in this section are drawn from the helpful discussion on this matter in Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, ch. 5.

¹³⁵ While Gen 1-2 does not explicitly mention monogamy per se, it clearly was interpreted as implying monogamy not only by Jesus (Mk 10:8-12) and his early followers, but also by the Qumran community (11QTemple 57:5b-19; CD 4:20-5:6). I.e., as Craig Evans (“Genesis in the New Testament,” 481) notes: “lying behind [Jesus’] rejection of divorce is a rejection of polygamy.” It is worth noting that of the roughly 3,000 men mentioned in the OT, only 33 of them explicitly are said to be involved in polygamy. When marriage is mentioned, the vast majority of men in the OT are said to have a “wife” (in the singular).

¹³⁶ Goldingay notes that the OT’s “descriptions of polygamous relationships can be read as deliberately drawing attention to the trouble they involve.” John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 3: *Israel’s Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 380; see also Evans, “Genesis in the New Testament,” 474.

¹³⁷ For discussion, see E. Neufeld, *Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1944), 118-19. Incidentally, there is no reason to think that the Levirate law of the OT promotes polygamy. See Ron du Preez, “Does Levirate Law Promote Polygamy?,” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs, MI: Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum of Andrews University, 1997), 273-89.

¹³⁸ For an extended argument for this type of translation, see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 193-98.

¹³⁹ For a discussion of the background to Jesus’ teaching on divorce and its implications for monogamy and polygamy, see Evans, “Genesis in the New Testament,” 470-81; David Instone Brewer, “Jesus’ Old Testament Basis for Monogamy,” in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North*, ed. Steve Moyise (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 75-105.

¹⁴⁰ David Daube notes Rabbinic opinion that the OT allowance for polygamy was a divine concession to human hard-heartedness. David Daube, “Concessions to Sinfulness in Jewish Law,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 10 (1959), 6. On the common practices of polygamy and concubinage within the wider ancient Near Eastern world, see Neufeld, *Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws*, 130-32.

¹⁴¹ For discussion, see Ahearne-Kroll, “Genesis in Mark’s Gospel,” 30-34; Jeannine K. Brown, “Genesis in Matthew’s Gospel,” in Menken and Moyise, eds., *Genesis in the New Testament*, 44-46.

¹⁴² See Wright’s insightful essay, “Case Study: Monogamy,” in his *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 174-200 (here pp. 191-2, emphasis in text).

¹⁴³ See Clark, *Reading Renunciation*; Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 216-19.

¹⁴⁴ An idea most likely influenced by his former Manichaeism. See Elizabeth A. Clark, “Vitiated Seeds and Holy Vessels: Augustine’s Manichean Past,” in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 367-401. For a survey of the wider influence of Augustine’s former Manichaeism upon his later Christian theology, see Paul Rhodes Eddy, “Can a Leopard Change Its Spots? Augustine and the Crypto-Manichaeism Question,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 (2009), 316-46.

¹⁴⁵ Mason, *Mystery of Marriage*, 156-7. This, I assume, is primarily a theologically driven statement. However, as noted earlier, Randall Garr’s (*In His Own Image and Likeness*, 167-69) study of Gen 1:26-27 gives impressive exegetical support for a conceptual connection between God’s “likeness” and the human procreative function – and thus the “male and female” of Gen 1:27.

¹⁴⁶ While neglected in some contemporary studies, the Song of Songs gives evidence that its celebration of romance and sexuality is connected to a wedding and marriage covenant. See Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, ch. 14; idem, “Theology of Sexuality in the Song of Songs: Return to Eden,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 27 (1989), 1-19; Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, III, 358-9. For a powerfully beautifully description of the intimate nature of the one flesh union within the marriage covenant, see Mason, *Mystery of Marriage*, 159-61.

¹⁴⁷ Christopher West, “Telling Lies with the Body,” available at <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Catholic/2004/08/Telling-Lies-With-The-Body.aspx> (accessed 9-15-11). Similarly, Kippley (*Sex and the Marriage Covenant*, 19) refers to “non-marital” – that is, non-covenantal – sex as “simply dishonest sex, a lie.” This is true due to the fact that sex is the divinely designed sign by which the marriage covenant is to be renewed, and so without a prior marriage covenant, “there is simply no covenant to renew.” Relatedly, Gallagher, Maloney, Rousseau, and Wilczak (*Embodied in Love: Sacramental Spirituality and Sexual Intimacy* [New York: Crossroad, 1983], 13) write: “To posit such a symbol [i.e., sexual union] of total self-giving with many partners, in a promiscuous manner, would be to act out a lie that seemingly bespeaks self-sacrificing love, without at the same time carrying through with a permanent commitment.”

In a recent book, Michael F. Duffy (Professor of Theological Studies, Hanover College, Indiana) asks the question: “Does merely having sex with someone make promises to him or her?” (*Making Sense of Sex: Responsible Decision Making for Young Singles* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011], 68). In the ensuing discussion, the suggestion is made that responsible sex involves “a promise that the sexual actions that

are about to be engaged in will not be harmful to either of the partners, and that the goal for each person is to be caring and loving to the other person” (p. 68). But Duffy never sets this question within the context of covenant relationship, and thus never considers whether choosing to engage in the act of sex is, by design, a non-verbal promise of far more than merely not harming and trying to be caring toward each other during the next few minutes of sexual intimacy. From a covenantal perspective, choosing to engage in sexual intimacy is a “sign” of the mutual inauguration of a marriage covenant.

¹⁴⁸ Ellison, *Making Love Just*, 126-8; see also 34-5.

In his book, *Arguing about Sex: The Rhetoric of Christian Sexual Morality* (Albany: SUNY, 1995), Joseph Monti calls for a “coherent” Christian sexual ethic that “is both faithful and contemporary” (p. 1). He goes on to argue that, while a good case can still be made that heterosexual, monogamous marriage should function as the norm of sexual behavior within a Christian context, this does not mean that sex between unmarried and/or homosexual couples is necessarily wrong. He writes: “Sexual behavior among unmarried Christians does not directly entail an obligation to uphold the Church’s norm of [heterosexual] marriage Rather these relationships indirectly participate in the norm by learning to live by the values, virtues, and goods disclosed by marriage and developing their characters in their light” (p. 242). He makes a similar case for the norming value of heterosexual marriage for homosexual relationships (pp. 247-53). Monti identifies these norming marital values as three: “*love, fidelity and creativity*” (p. 229; see pp. 229-39 for discussion). Such primary values also entail “constancy, honesty, and singularity” (p. 232) and thus “monogamy” (p. 233). And so, in Monti’s view, unmarried and homosexual sexual behavior is legitimated to the degree that it reflects these values associated with heterosexual marriage at its best. For Monti, heterosexual marriage is detachable from the values it sacramentally norms, and thus non-marital sex is legitimated to the degree that it shares in these values apart from marriage. Thus, in essence, Monti treats the male-female marriage covenant as something of a relatively disposable sacramental husk (i.e., disposable by unmarried and homosexual couples) that contains/points to the seeds of what is really important and necessary for every Christian sexual relationship – the values of love, fidelity, and creativity. There are, of course, a number of theological angles from which one can critique Monti’s proposal. One could, for example, ask just what force the values of “love” (i.e., other-oriented, self-sacrificial, agape-love), “fidelity,” and “constancy” have within a sexual relationship once they are disconnected from the formal bonds of mutual covenant promises enacted in the presence of the ecclesial community-as-witness – which, of course, is precisely what marriage is! But for the purposes of this study, Monti’s proposal serves as another in a long line of recent attempts to revise Christian sexual ethics in a “contemporary” manner while, entirely missing the inherent role of covenant sign that sexual intimacy/union plays in the biblical tradition, and the implications for sexual ethics that follow from this fact. Monti’s well-meaning attempt to update Christian sexual ethics in order to render them meaningful and useful for our contemporary context is admirable. And his commitment to maintaining a connection between sexual union and the values of love, fidelity, etc. is commendable. However, he misses the explicitly covenant-producing nature of sexual union itself, and the fact that the male-female marriage covenant it is designed to co-

produce and ongoingly sign is not merely a negotiable/disposable husk, but rather the single appropriate context of such a one-flesh relationship.

¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, as Jared Diamond has demonstrated, the generally unique pattern of relationally-oriented human sexual processes and behavior raises serious questions about its biological/reproductive efficiency. Specifically, unlike most other species, the fact that human sexuality involves concealed ovulation (i.e., concealed both from the male and from the ovulating female herself – apart from modern methods of detection), unceasing female sexual receptivity, and a proclivity for relational/recreational sex appears to be evolutionarily disadvantageous. Biologically speaking, there are good reasons for NOT doing sex as humans do – i.e., sperm production is costly for males in terms of energy; frequent, non-reproductive sex takes time that could be devoted to finding food; couples locked in face-to-face sexual embrace risk being surprised and killed by a predator, etc. Diamond proposes a purely biological solution for these anomalous human sexual phenomena, namely that they address the relatively/comparatively unique level of long-term helplessness of the human infant, and thus the female’s need to entice a male to stay around and help/protect her and the child. See Diamond, “Wrong Time for Love: The Evolution of Recreational Sex,” in *Why is Sex Fun? The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (New York: Basic, 1997), ch. 4. However, looking past a pure, biologically reductionistic interpretation to a covenant-centered theological analysis of the matter offers further support of the covenantal-relational design for human sexual expression.

¹⁵⁰ Relevant here is the recent research on the neuro-chemical aspects of bonding and trust involved in sexual intimacy, on which see below.

¹⁵¹ In calling for *agape*-love to be placed at the center of covenant relationship, this does not suggest ignoring feeling and emotion in the relationship. For a helpful study on the importance of emotion within the theological vision of the NT, see Matthew A. Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006).

¹⁵² Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection*, 49.

¹⁵³ The memorable words of G. K. Chesterton concerning sex are worth considering here: “[T]he effect of treating sex as only one innocent natural thing was that every other innocent natural thing became soaked and sodden with sex. For sex cannot be admitted to a mere equality among elementary emotions or experiences like eating and sleeping. The moment sex ceases to be a servant it becomes a tyrant The modern talk about sex being free like any other sense, about the body being beautiful like any tree or flower, is either a description of the Garden of Eden or a piece of thoroughly bad psychology, of which the world grew weary two thousand years ago.” Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008 [1924]), 17.

¹⁵⁴ Just to take one area: the almost endless variety of ways that our human sexual desires can be misdirected and distorted from their divinely intended orientation is absolutely stunning, and the range of manifestations far outstrips anything we find in the supposedly

“natural” world of animal sexual behavior. In the academic research literature, these sexual phenomena are frequently classified under the psychological category of *paraphilias*. To offer a range of specific examples, people have reported being sexually oriented toward/predominantly aroused by: (1) multiple partners/group sex (polyamory), (2) children (pedophilia) – including infants (infantophilia) and toddlers (nepiophilia), (3) family members (incest), (4) human corpses (necrophilia/thanatophilia), (5) inflicting and/or receiving pain and humiliation (sodomasochism), (6) the act of assaulting/raping a non-consenting person (biastophilia/raptophilia), (7) statues and mannequins (agalmatophilia), (8) stuffed animals (plushophilia), (9) high caloric food consumption and obesity (e.g., feederism); (10) a wide variety of animals (zoosexuality/zoophilia/bestiality) – including, in one form, being crawled upon and bitten by small insects (formicophilia), (11) inflicting pain on animals (zoosadism), (12) trees (dendrophilia), (13) a wide range of inanimate objects (objectophilia), (14) asphyxiation or strangulation (asphyxiophilia), (15) imagining/fantasizing one's self as an amputee (apotemnophilia, though the term is now disputed by those who connect it with body integrity identity disorder [BIID], which, some claim, is itself rarely sexually motivated), (16) cannibalism (vorarephilia), (17) the murder of a fellow human (lust murder/ erotophonophilia), (18) believing/fantasizing that one is about to be killed during the sexual encounter (autassassinophilia); and various bodily excretions, including (19) urine (urolagnia), (20) feces (coprophilia), and (21) vomit (emetophilia). The list literally goes on and on, as those who research the range of human paraphilias have documented. The classic modern study is Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct; A Medico-Forensic Study*, trans. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Bell, 1965 [1886]). More recently, many of the paraphilias have been catalogued in Brenda Love, *Encyclopedia of Unusual Sex Practices* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade, 1992); Katharine Gates, *Deviant Desires: Incredibly Strange Sex* (New York: Juno, 2000).

¹⁵⁵ Dawn, *Sexual Character*, 37-8.

¹⁵⁶ Arnold, *Plea for Purity*, 158-9.

¹⁵⁷ Hauerwas, “Sex in Public,” 483, 496.

¹⁵⁸ Lisa Cahill (*Between the Sexes*) properly reminds us about the centrality and importance of the *communal dimension* of a Christian vision/ethics of sexuality. Along the way she exposes the ways in which the values associated with Western individualism have been allowed to undercut the church’s distinctive communal calling as the “covenant people” of God (p. 60). She writes (pp. 61, 140, 141):

The communal criterion of the moral life that Paul’s perspective on membership in the body of Christ offers is consistent with the normative view of sexuality which can be based upon Genesis 1-3. These Genesis chapters reveal and affirm the communal significance of sexual differentiation, complementarity, and partnership. Sexuality is portrayed there as the precondition of humanity’s support of the order of creation through the procreation of the species, and also as

the sine qua non of the partnership of man and woman in fulfilling the Lord's commands

The discrepancy between the traditional, more biblical view of sexual morality, and the present Western one becomes more intelligible when the social and philosophical settings of each are cast in relief; every sexual ethics presupposes a social vision of some sort, which accounts, at least in part, for the coloring sexuality receives. A dominant stream of Western moral philosophy since the Enlightenment stresses the rationality, freedom, and autonomy of the individual; it is exemplified in the post-Lockean liberalism that has been so influential in North American mores and political life. In the liberal view, the autonomous adult exists to fulfill independently his or her own interests and needs, and is limited in attempts to do so only by the parallel and sometimes competing rights of others to do likewise Liberalism tends to support the moral, not merely legal, legitimacy of any liaisons [sic], sexual or otherwise, so long as they do not harm others. An emphasis neglected by liberalism is the communal nature of the person

And so Cahill reminds us, contrary to the impulse of liberal Christian sexual ethics today, that “fixation of attention on the outer limits of applications and departures is not a perspective on sexuality congruent with the biblical one; biblical authors are above all concerned with the shape of the covenant community, and, regarding sexuality, with how relations between the sexes express the authenticity of faith” (p. 148). Cahill offers further valuable reflections on the insidious nature of the anti-Kingdom, anti-communal values associated with Western (post)modern liberalism throughout her more recent book, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*. For additional insightful reflections on the importance of community for the proper expression of human sexuality – and the relative loss of a robust notion of community in our culture today – see Wendell Barry, “Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community,” in *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community: Eight Essays* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 117-53.

¹⁵⁹ Dawn, *Sexual Character*, 25.

¹⁶⁰ Jean Vanier, *Man and Woman God Made Them* (New York: Paulist, 2008 [1984]), 102.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 103, 105-6, 107. Caroline Simon (*Bringing Sex into Focus*, 160-1) concurs: “As stumbling as communities are, we need communities to survive and thrive – especially if we are on a moral quest. American Christianity in the twenty-first century too often treats the Christian life as a solo endeavor. Nowhere is this more true than in our quest for sexual integrity Acknowledging chastity as an ideal and making sexual integrity our corporate quest can give us the courage to be frank and the grace to be compassionate.”

¹⁶² Michael L. Budde, *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances, and the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 3. Similarly, John Polkinghorne (“Corporate Christ,” 108) writes: “Human incorporation into Christ is there [i.e., in the NT] portrayed as much more intensively constitutive of who we are intended to be, transcending all lesser distinctions of status, gender, or culture.”

¹⁶³ On the dangers of grounding our identities in our sexual desires, rather than in Jesus Christ, see Williams Paris, *End of Sexual Identity*.

¹⁶⁴ The movement from scripture and theology to contemporary Christian (sexual) ethics is anything but an uncontested enterprise. At this point, I will simply signal my own methodological convictions on this matter by stating that I find Richard Hays' approach to this question, in his *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, to be both a properly oriented and an extremely helpful guide.

¹⁶⁵ Kippley (*Sex and the Marriage Covenant*, 7) states it this way: “. . . the ultimate reason for the objective evil of all sexual sins is the same. They all fail, in one way or another, to be a sign of the committed and caring love pledged at marriage; they fail to be a renewal of the marriage covenant.” Many are familiar with the explicit NT teachings on extra-marital sex and homosexuality. It should be noted that some scholars argue that Jesus also explicitly taught against pederasty/pedophilia in Mark 9:42. See Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition*, 20-24.

¹⁶⁶ **On a Distinctively Christian Approach to Criteria for Sexual Ethics:** Within the early church, the idea of the “law (torah) of Christ” centered around the *agape* command and the example and person of Jesus himself. See Graham Stanton, “The Law of Christ: A Neglected Theological Gem?,” in *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology*, ed. David F. Ford and Graham Stanton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 169-84. While I believe that Stanton over-states the place of the entire “law of Moses” in early Christian conceptions of the “law of Christ” (no doubt motivated, in part, by post-holocaust Christian sensitivities to ‘replacement theologies,’ etc.), his study nicely captures the centrality of the love command and the person of Jesus. **For example, as _____ has documented, there is no evidence prior to the mid-third century, that the Pentateuch (in contrast to the Psalms and the OT prophets) was used in the public reading of scripture within the early Christian gatherings. See _____.**

Related to all of this, the concept of a distinctively Christian virtue/character ethic is important here, and is more frequently being appealed to as an appropriate model for the church as it seeks to live as a counter-cultural witness to the ways and character of Jesus. Among those who appeal to a Christian virtue/character ethic, focused upon Christian character development as fundamental for an appropriately Christian approach to sexual ethics, see Dawn, *Sexual Character*; Hauerwas, “Sex in Public”; Simon, *Bringing Sex into Focus*; Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*. For an introduction to virtue ethics from a Christian perspective, see Michael W. Austin and Douglas Geivett, eds., *Being Good: Christian Virtues for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Joseph J. Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997).

A word of warning here: Within a host of contemporary studies on the liberal side of the theological spectrum, the virtues of “love” and “justice” function as ubiquitous – and usually under-analyzed – criteria for theologies/ethics of sexuality. With a quick nod in their direction, “love” and/or “justice” are commonly treated as sufficient – and sufficiently clear – indicators of whether one is engaging in appropriate or inappropriate,

moral or immoral, expressions of sexuality. See e.g., Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 169, cf. 228, 233 (“love and justice”); Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 142 (“gentleness, unity, love and justice”); Ellens, *Sex in the Bible*, 149 (“love”); Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (“just love” as her book title); Ellison, *Erotic Justice*, 2, 28-9; 117 (“justice and love”; “erotic justice,” “justice-love”); Ellison, *Making Love Just*, 32-4 (“just love,” “justice-love”); Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 127, 235 (“just and loving”). Other suggested sexual moral criteria from the theologically liberal side of things include: “shalom” and whatever promotes “fullness of being” (Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 228, 233); any sexual activity that is life enhancing (John Shelby Spong, *Living in sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988], 210); sexual activity that does not violate John Stuart Mill’s “harm principle” (Clayton Sullivan, *Rescuing Sex from the Christians* [New York: Continuum, 2006], 41); “appropriate vulnerability” (Karen Lebacqz, “Appropriate Vulnerability: A Sexual Ethic for Singles,” in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, 2nd ed., ed. Marvin M. Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010 (1994)], 272-77); and “pleasure” and “mutuality” (Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure*, 114-6). What do we say in response to this sort of approach to Christian sexual ethics criteria? “Love and justice” are certainly important biblical themes, and hardly ones anyone should want to argue with. However, are they enough? At least in regard to how they are commonly used in texts such as the ones listed above, my response is: No, they aren’t. The problems are several; two are especially worthy of consideration. First, while the biblical texts appeal to love and justice, when it comes to sexual expression other biblical concepts are equally important – and perhaps even more so, given their higher statistical connection with discussions of sexuality in scripture. To take one example: sanctification and holiness – i.e., set-apartness – is commonly offered in the NT as a primary criteria for guiding one’s sexual expression within the church (e.g., I Thess 4:3-8; I Pet 4:1-5). Second, when it comes to “love and justice” as criteria for Christian sexual morality, the content they are given and the use made of them reveals that they are generally fueled not by a distinctly biblical matrix, but rather by the common-sense social values of the post-Enlightenment, liberal Western academy. That is to say, most liberal Christian appeals to love and justice as criteria for sexual morality have nothing distinctively biblical or “Christian” about them. Briefly put, these terms have come to function as shorthand for something like a new (generally unquestioned, let alone robustly defended) common sense, ‘natural law’ ethic of the individualistically oriented, (post)modern liberal Western tradition. No one has made this point with greater clarity than Stanley Hauerwas. In his book, *After Christendom: How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), he explores this issue in the second chapter: “The Politics of Justice: Why Justice is a Bad Idea for Christians” (pp. 45-68). Hauerwas’s thoughts on this matter are worth quoting at length (from pp. 46, 47, 56, 58, 60, 68):

To raise any question about this general stance on the part of so many Christians is to appear to align yourself with the establishment against the disestablished and is taken by many as *prima facie* evidence of mean-spiritedness. After all, how can

you be against justice without being for injustice? . . . Yet it is my contention that the current emphasis on justice and rights as the primary norms guiding the social witness of Christians is in fact a mistake General appeals to justice too often result in contradictory social strategies that offer little evidence of the integrity of Christian witness on such matters [T]here simply is no generally accepted Christian theory of justice. It does little good, moreover, to invoke love as a substitute for justice. Love is equally vague, particularly in terms of its concrete social implications The current emphasis on justice among Christians springs not so much from an effort to locate the Christian contribution to wider society as it does from Christians' attempt to find a way to be societal actors without that action being colored by Christian presupposition. In short, the emphasis on justice functions as the contemporary equivalent of a natural law ethic Christian love motivates Christians to join with non-Christians in the search for justice in an imperfect world. The problem with such reasoning, however, is the assumption that we share enough to know what justice might mean In the interest of working for justice, Christians allow their imaginations to be captured by concepts of justice determined by presuppositions of liberal societies, and as a result, contribute to the development of societies that make substantive accounts of justice less likely. Out of an understandable desire to be politically and socially relevant, we lose the critical ability to stand against the limits of our social orders. *We forget that the first thing as Christians we have to hold before any society is not justice but God* As Christians we will speak more truthfully to our society and be of greater service by refusing to continue the illusion that the larger social order knows what it is talking about when it calls for justice [emphasis added].

For resources that can begin to help Christians explore and eventually articulate a distinctly biblical, and therefore Christian, conception of justice, see N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 213-21; James E. Gilman, "Justice as a Christian Virtue," in *Fidelity of Heart: An Ethic of Christian Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 102-31. For a Christian philosophical reflection on the mutually complementary nature of love and justice (a complementarity that has not always been recognized within the Christian tradition), see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

¹⁶⁷ On the prevalence – and social impoverishment – of “rights” based discourse in America more generally, see Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

¹⁶⁸ Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection*, 52.

¹⁶⁹ In the words of Linda Belleville, a truly biblical sexual ethic is, by nature, “a rights-surrendering ethic”; *Sex, Lies and the Truth: Developing a Christian Ethic in a Post-Christian Society* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 110. Unfortunately, as many have noted, the contemporary evangelical church in North America has come to neglect the

NT themes of sacrifice, suffering, and radical obedience, replacing them instead with such culture-friendly motifs as “happiness,” personal freedom, and self-fulfillment. James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 91-101. Also The Barna Group, “Faith has Limited Effect on Most People’s Behavior” (May 24, 2004) available at: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/188-faith-has-a-limited-effect-on-most-peoples-behavior>. See also Audrey Barrick, “Study Compares Christian and non-Christian Lifestyles” available at <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/american.study.reveals.indulgent.lifestyle.christians.no.different/9439.htm>.

¹⁷⁰ J. Edward Walters, review of Naomi Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness, Review of Biblical Literature* (2012), p. 2 (www.bookreviews.org). A similar point is made by Peter Kreeft, *The God Who Loves You* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004 [1988]), 181. Peter Brown observes that, “lacking the clear ritual boundaries provided in Judaism by circumcision and dietary laws,” the early Christians “tended to make their exceptional sexual discipline bear the full burden of expressing the difference between themselves and the pagan world.” Peter Brown, “Late Antiquity,” in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 1: *From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. P. Ariès and G. Duby (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 263. According to Brown, this counter-cultural approach to sexuality was actually a sign of something more profound: namely the quest for the type of single-mindedness and purity of heart that characterizes a community whose highest goal is living within the will of God. See Brown, *Body and Society*, 34-39, 70-71.

¹⁷¹ This counter-cultural, Kingdom way of being in the world will also include re-assessing our view of celibacy and being unmarried (i.e., so-called “singleness”), two themes that many Christians have come to see as inherently negative due to the perception of contemporary Western culture—including the church. In the eyes of the Apostle Paul, there is a beauty in pursuing a life of unmarried freedom (I Cor 7:32-35), and it is directly tied to the fact that such a life allows for a more focused “devotion” to our eternal spouse, Jesus Christ (I Cor 7:35; cf. II Cor 11:2-3). In this important sense, for a Christian to be unmarried is not “singleness” at all, but rather an alternative path of betrothed covenant relationship with Jesus the Groom, in the company of other brothers and sisters within the family of God. In speaking of “singleness” and celibacy, Alan Verhey (“The Holy Bible and Sanctified Sexuality: An Evangelical Approach to Scripture and Sexual Ethics,” *Interpretation* 49 [1995], 44) observes that unmarried followers of Jesus signal “that the ages have turned, that human fulfillment does not depend upon sexual fulfillment, and that until the power of sin lays down its arms and admits defeat, there is restraint against the disorders still threatening human relationships in the world of our sexuality.” For a helpful reflection on singleness and celibacy, see Christine A. Colón and Bonnie E. Field, *Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must be Reinvented in Today’s Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009); Hauerwas, “Sex in Public,” 497-9; and (in sermon form) Greg Boyd, “Solo Mojo” at <http://whchurch.org/sermons-media/sermon/solo-mojo>.

¹⁷² The NT theme of imitating Jesus – including suffering with Christ – is an element of the Jesus-pattern of Kingdom life that is often neglected among both the contemporary American church and the scholarly community, and which is often seen as absolute nonsense in the wider contemporary Western culture where a practical hedonism largely rules the day. Candida Moss (*The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2010], 22) names and exposes the “*Imitatio* anxiety” among contemporary scholars of Christianity, fueled by, among other things, “the unnerving idea that [suffering and] martyrdom is not an optional extra in the Christian experience.” See also L. Ann Jervis, *At the Heart of the Gospel: Suffering in the Earliest Christian Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Martin William Mittelstadt, *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts: Implications for a Pentecostal Pneumatology* (New York: Clark, 2004); Craig Hovey, *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today’s Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008). As Wheaton College communications professor Christine Gardner (“The Rhetoric of Chastity,” *Christianity Today* [November 2011] 41) observes, contemporary American sexual abstinence campaigns for Christian youth “largely avoid talk of sexuality as sacrifice or suffering. But of course it’s not easy to talk about sacrifice and suffering to young people who are raised in a sexualized culture. On the other hand, perhaps this is where the evangelical church is selling out too fast. Language of sacrifice and suffering can be transformative to those who know that sex sells everything from cars to deodorant and, now, abstinence. It’s a new kind of asceticism for a generation that has it all That language of sacrifice and suffering for the purpose of worship to God, and understanding our sexuality as a gift of God, is key.” For her further thoughts on these matters, see Christine J. Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁷³ Helpful sources on this important topic include: For insight into the ancient “corporate” understanding of humanity/the church, see Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*; Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Academie/Zondervan, 1990); Polkinghorne, “Corporate Christ”; Daniel G. Powers, *Salvation through Participation: An Examination of the Notion of the Believer’s Corporate Unity with Christ in Early Christian Soteriology* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001); Son, *Corporate Elements in Pauline Anthropology*; Perry Leon Stepp, *The Believer’s Participation in the Death of Christ: “Corporate Identification” and a Study of Romans 6:1-14* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1996). For an interesting reflection on the ramifications of divorce upon the children of the family, one that takes seriously the social/corporate nature of personal identity, see Andrew Root, “Fading from the Family Portrait,” *Christianity Today* (July/August 2012), 70-3.

¹⁷⁴ Naomi Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 84.

¹⁷⁵ Reeves, *Spirituality According to Paul*, 142-3. On Paul’s view of the corporate ramifications of sexuality and individual sin for the church, see pp. 128-45. Hauerwas

(“Sex in Public,” 489) perceptively notes that “the romantic assumption that sexual expression is a ‘private’ matter in fact masks a profound commitment to the understanding of society and self sponsored by political liberalism. Thus, human relations are increasingly understood in contractual terms and the ideal self becomes the person capable of understanding everything and capable of being hurt by nothing.” Similarly, Lisa Cahill reminds us that until recently, “the primary framework in the Christian tradition for the evaluation of sexual acts and relations has been a communal one Biblical resources bear out this general perspective.” In the contemporary Western context, a very different criterion dominates. As Cahill notes, our political climate of post-Lockean liberalism “stresses the rationality, freedom and autonomy of the individual Liberalism tends to support the moral, not merely legal, legitimacy of any liaisons, sexual or otherwise, between consenting adults, so long as they do not harm others. An emphasis neglected by liberalism is the communal nature of the person” She concludes: “The horizon against which *all* moral activity is to be evaluated is the communal life as body of Christ in the world.” Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 139-41, 152 (emphasis in text). On this point, see also idem, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 137-9, 150-2.

¹⁷⁶ M. Kosfeld, M. Heinrichs, et al., “Oxytocin Increases Trust in Humans,” *Nature* 435 (2005), 673-76; S. Kuchinskas, *The Chemistry of Connection: How the Oxytocin Response Can Help You Find Trust, Intimacy, and Love* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2009); Joe S. McIlhane and Freda McKissic Bush, *Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Kids* (Chicago: Northfield, 2008). On the wider connections between the neuropeptides oxytocin and/or vasopressin and sociality, see C. S. Carter, “Neuroendocrine Perspectives on Social Attachment and Love,” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 23 (1998) 779-818; Cozolino, *Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, especially ch. 8; J. Debiec, “Peptides of Love and Fear: Vasopressin and Oxytocin Modulate the Integration of Information in the Amygdala,” *Bioessays* 27 (2005), 869-73; Beate Ditzen, Marcel Schaer, et al., “Intranasal Oxytocin Increases Positive Communication and Reduces Cortisol Levels During Couple Conflict,” *Biological Psychiatry* 65/9 (May 1, 2009) 728-31; M. Heinrichs and G. Domes, “Neuropeptides and Social Behavior: Effects of Oxytocin and Vasopressin in Humans,” in *Advances in Vasopressin and Oxytocin: From Genes to Behaviour to Disease*, eds. Inga D. Neumann and Rainer Landgraf (Boston: Elsevier, 2008) 337-50; T. R. Insel and L. J. Young, “The Neurobiology of Attachment,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 2 (2001) 129-36; K. Uvnas-Moberg, “Oxytocin May Mediate the Benefits of Positive Social Interaction and Emotions,” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 23 (1998) 819-35; Jack van Honk, “Neuroendocrine Manipulation of the Sexually Dimorphic Human Social Brain,” in *Methods in Social Neuroscience*, eds. Eddie Harmon-Jones and Jennifer S. Beer (New York: Guilford, 2009), 45-69.

¹⁷⁷ Robert T. Michael, John H. Gagnon, Edward O. Laumann, and Gina. Kolata, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 131. To quote from the companion volume to this study: “While we had no particular prior conceptions about the

likely outcome of our questions about this matter, the respondents offer a remarkably strong case for the efficacy of sexual exclusivity in the context of a formal marriage as most closely associated with a satisfying and pleasurable sex life.” Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 375. It is also worth noting that studies consistently find a correlation between higher sexual frequency/satisfaction and marital stability. See e.g., J. N. Edwards and A. Booth, “Sexuality, Marriage, and Well-being: The Middle Years,” in *Sexuality Across the Life Course*, ed. A. S. Rossi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 233-59; J. Oggins, J. Veroff, and D. Leber, “Perceptions of Marital Interaction among Black and White Newlyweds,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65 (1993), 495-511; J. Veroff, E. Douvan, and S. Hatchett, *Marital Instability: A Social and Behavioral Study of the Early Years* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995); H. Yeh, F. O. Lorenz, K. A. S. Wickrama, R. Conger, and G. Elder, “Relationships among Sexual Satisfaction, Marital Quality, and Marital Instability at Midlife,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 20 (2006), 329-43; S. Yabiku and C. T. Gager, “Sexual Frequency and the Stability of Marital and Cohabiting Unions,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71 (2009), 983-1000.

¹⁷⁸ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 311-12.