

MYSTICAL MARRIAGE AS TEMPLE SERVICE IN EPHESIANS

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Introduction

In his epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul makes extensive use of temple, body, and bridal imagery to develop a high Christology and rich ecclesiology—a focus evident in his opening prayer, as he blesses God the Father for having “blessed [the Church] in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places . . .” (Eph 1:3). The Messiah has come to reveal God’s deepest mystery, formerly hidden but now manifest, to reveal the richness of his grace, power, blessings, and love toward those made alive “in Christ.” This is for the ultimate purpose of gathering together all creation in him, to the praise of God’s glory. The epistle’s key nuptial passage (Eph 5:22–33) compares the union of Christ and the Church with the one-flesh union of man and woman, where the bridegroom is called to offer himself up sacrificially for the sake of his beloved.¹ This marriage between Christ and the Church is described in cultic and sacrificial language: Christ loved the Church, his bride, through a total self-sacrifice of love that provides atonement, forgiveness, and purification and makes reparation for sin, calls to conversion, and restores communion with God. Christ also sanctifies and cleanses the Church “with the washing of water by the word”—an allusion to baptism and possibly to a prenuptial bridal bath. He also nourishes and cherishes the Church, which is called “his own flesh” and “his body” in a reference to the Eden narrative of Genesis 2. For Paul, as Eve was originally one with Adam before she was taken out of his side, so the preexistent Church was originally one with Christ, “of his flesh and of his bones,” before she was “taken out of his side.”

The purpose of this essay is to examine the nuptial imagery of Ephesians in light of its cultic and sacrificial allusions to the temple service. Following a brief overview of the central themes of the epistle, we will proceed by way of a verse-by-verse commentary on Ephesians 5:22–33.

¹ On the centrality of nuptial symbolism in Ephesians, J. Paul Sampley writes: “for the author of Ephesians, the marriage relationship is transparent to God’s purposes on a larger scale. . . . No other relationship within the family so fully mirrors God’s purposes in the universe” (*And the Two Shall Become One Flesh: A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21–33*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 16 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971], 149).

Central Themes in Ephesians

Throughout the epistle, Paul delineates a sharp contrast between the former way of life of Christians and the riches and blessings of the glorious Church redeemed by Christ. The striking dualism between sin and sanctity, between alienation and reconciliation, and between darkness and light is evident in the table below. Note how Christ is consistently the source and active agent of every promise, blessing, gift, and virtue bestowed upon the Church:

The World / Former Life of Christians	The Church
Dead in trespasses and sins (2:1)	Christ made you alive (2:5)
Walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air (2:2)	Sitting together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (2:6)
Children of wrath (2:3)	Recipients of God's mercy and grace in Christ (2:4, 7–8)
Sons of disobedience, caught in the lusts of the flesh (2:3)	Created in Christ for good works (2:10)
Aliens and strangers far off, without hope and without God (2:12)	Brought near by the blood of Christ (2:13)
Separation and enmity between Jews and gentiles (2:14–16)	Christ created one new man from the two, now reconciled and at peace (2:14–18)
Strangers and foreigners (2:19)	Fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God; God's building and holy temple—with Christ as cornerstone (2:19–22)
Christ's mystery is hidden (3:3–5, 9)	The mystery and wisdom of God now revealed by the Spirit to the Church, in Christ (3:3, 10)
Children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (4:14)	Speaking the truth in love, growing up as a body in all things into Christ the head (4:15–16)

“Old man” walks in futility of mind, with understanding darkened, alienated from God’s life, ignorant, blind, lewd, greedy (4:17–19)	“Learning Christ” and putting on the new man is to be created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (4:22–24)
Lying, stealing, speaking evil, bitterness and anger (4:25–31)	Laboring, speaking edifying words, being kind, tenderhearted and forgiving as God in Christ (4:25–32)
Fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, coarse jesting (5:3–7)	A pure bride, holy and without blemish, walking in self-giving love as Christ did, giving thanks (5:1–2, 27)
Darkness (5:8–13)	Light in the Lord (5:8–13)
Unwise, drunk with wine (5:15–17)	Wise, filled with the Spirit, singing and giving thanks to God in the name of Jesus (5:15–20)
Human-pleasers, given to wrath and threats (6:4–9)	Obedient with goodwill and bondservants to Christ (6:1–9)

If Christ is the cause of the radical transformation of the formerly alienated, blind, and dead children of wrath into God’s holy temple and pure bride, the instrument through which he effects this metamorphosis is *the Church*. Paul mixes his metaphors in describing the Church as:

- a predestined, eternal, and heavenly community (1:3–6; 2:6)
- the revelation of the mystery and wisdom of God (1:8–9; 3:9–10)
- the community of the redeemed by Christ’s grace (1:7; 2:8)
- holy (ἅγιος) (1:1, 4, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:18; 4:12; 5:3)
- God’s adopted family and household, reconciled and united in love (1:5; 2:13–19; 3:14–15)
- created “to the praise of his glorious grace” (1:6, 12, 14)
- the body of Christ (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16, 25; 5:23, 30)
- recipient of God’s rich inheritance and power; partaker of his promises (1:11–14, 18–19; 2:7; 3:6)
- a building growing into a “holy temple in the Lord” and the “dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (2:20–22)
- Christ’s fullness (1:23; 4:13)
- the new, holy, perfect man (4:13, 24)
- Christ’s bride (5:22–33)
- God’s army (6:10–20)

The common thread connecting these metaphors is the Old Testament concept of *qedushah* (קִדּוּשׁ)—holiness. Its New Testament counterpart, *hagios* (ἅγιος), meaning “saint” or “holy,” and its corresponding verb, *hagiazō* (ἁγιάζω), meaning “sanctify,” appears at least sixteen times in the epistle. The terms describe God’s transcendent essence and the state of being set apart and consecrated for a special purpose. A “holy” Church, then, is the community of the elect set apart for consecrated service to God—“to the praise of his glorious grace.” The Church’s *qedushah*, along with its attendant promises and blessings, is not of her own making but is a gift of grace from her Maker and Redeemer (Eph 2:5–9), just as the *qedushah* of the tabernacle (and temple) derived from and depended upon God’s presence within it (see Exod 25:8 and 29:43–45). Israel’s *qedushah* was rooted in God’s covenantal bond of love with her, initiated in the redemption from Egypt, sealed at Sinai through his gratuitous adoption, and guaranteed through generous promises of rich blessings (see Exod 19:6 and Deut 7:6–9).

Similarly, the Church’s *qedushah* is dependent upon Christ’s election and covenantal bond with her (Eph 1:4–5; 2:6–7), rooted in his all-surpassing love (Eph 1:4; 3:17–19; 5:1–2, 25), accomplished in the act of redemption through his blood (Eph 1:7), sealed through his adoption of her members and their integration into God’s family (Eph 1:5; 2:13–19; 3:15) and promising them incomparable heavenly blessings (Eph 1:3, 11). The moral virtue of the Church and of her members—“to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph 4:1)—is not a prerequisite for election and adoption, but rather the fruit of the Church’s union with the Messiah. The Church thus participates in God’s *qedushah* only “in Christ,” by partaking in his own life and being joined to him as the members of a body are joined to the head. If in Christ “the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9),² then the Church, as Christ’s fullness (Eph 1:23), has access to the same divine fullness. Just as the temple “contained” the *Shekhinah*—the living presence of God—the Church as God’s temple and body of Christ is the mediator of God’s presence and love in the world.

The two themes of *qedushah* and *love* imply a third one—*unity*.³ Unity is expressed regarding the cosmos, where all things are to be gathered together into one in Christ (Eph 1:10), but especially regarding the Church, described

² On the close relationship between the theology of Colossians and that of Ephesians, see T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), xxiii–xxiv; Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 20–25; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), xlvii–lvi.

³ On the unity of the Church in Ephesians, see Pierre Benoit, “L’Unité de l’Église selon l’Épître aux Éphésiens,” in *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus* 1961, *Analecta Biblica* 17 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), 1:57–77.

by the metaphor of the body and members united to Christ the head (Eph 4:4–6, 11–16; see also 1 Cor 12:12–30). Unity also pertains to Jews and gentiles: by breaking down “the middle wall of partition,” Jesus has put to death the enmity between them and granted them “access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:14–18). Most commentators think that the “middle wall of partition” means the wall that separated the court of Israel from the court of the gentiles in the temple and prevented the latter’s access to full communion with God.⁴ This discussion on the unity of Jew and gentile, reconciled to God “in one body through the cross” (Eph 2:16) in and through the Church, leads to another mixing of metaphors as Paul declares that gentile Christians are:

19 . . . no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows [*auxei*] into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:19–22)

Paul is describing a building that is curiously *growing* into a holy temple. Now buildings and temples are normally built; plants, living bodies, and people grow; but buildings and temples do not usually grow. The use of *auxei* here shows that while Paul is describing the Church as temple, he is simultaneously thinking of the Church as body (mentioned in Eph 1:23 and 2:16 and extensively developed in chapter 4).⁵ Unity is thus expressed using both temple language (Jews and gentiles have common access to the Father in the spiritual temple of the Church) and body language (all believers are members of the same body whose head is Christ). Yet unity finds its fullest and strongest expression in the language of love—of which it is the natural fruit—and especially in the metaphor of the “one flesh” union in marriage. Marriage groups together the aforementioned themes: consecration of the Church/temple/bride for the purpose of sanctification, rooted in a permanent covenantal bond of love and fully expressed in humble self-sacrifice. We now turn to the central text in Ephesians that develops this nuptial mystery.

⁴ See Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1–3* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 283–87; Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 61; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 141; Best, *Ephesians*, 253–57.

⁵ See 1 Cor 6:12–20.

One Flesh: Ephesians 5:22–33

Ephesians 5:22–33 describes the relationship between husband and wife as a relationship to be modeled on the love of Christ for the Church.⁶ This is not a simple allegorical exhortation, as if Paul were providing husbands with the example of Christ's love for the Church as an ideal model to imitate as they struggle with the challenges of married life. Paul presents the union between Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, and the Church, his bride, as "the standard and *prototype* for the writer's instructions about human marriage" and "the *archetype* for human marriage, the 'one flesh' relationship between husband and wife."⁷ In other words, the relationship between earthly and heavenly love is not only metaphorical or allegorical: it is *metaphysical*. Using Chavasse's words, the writer "is arguing from the Heavenly Marriage to human marriages, not vice versa; he is seeing the human in the light of the heavenly, and therefore will have the human model itself on the heavenly."⁸

The pericope opens with a description of the hierarchy of subordination, where the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church—and somehow "savior of the body." This hierarchy is not one of domination but of sacrificial love: man is to exercise his headship as Christ did when he "loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). The purpose of his self-gift is the sanctification and purification of his Church/bride. Cultic language is employed in the description of the glorious Church "not having spot or wrinkle" and called to be "holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). This spotless condition, unrealistic to expect of any community made of fallible humans, points to an eschatological hope for the perfection of the Church/bride. She is even identified with her husband's own body and flesh, to be nourished and cherished as Christ nourishes and cherishes the Church. This leads up to the citation of Genesis 2:24, expressing the "great mystery" of the one-flesh union between man and woman, which in fact speaks of Christ and the Church. Since they are truly one, Paul's exhortation that the husband "love his own wife as himself" becomes almost self-evident.

⁶ For studies on Eph 5:22–33, see Franz Mussner, *Christus das All und die Kirche* (Trier: Paulus, 1955), 147–60; Jules Cambier, "Le Grand Mystère concernant le Christ et son Église: Eph 5:22–33," *Biblica* 47 (1966): 43–90, 223–42; I. A. Muirhead, "The Bride of Christ," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (1952): 175–87; Sampley, *One Flesh*; Stephen F. Miletic, "One Flesh": Eph 5:22–24, 5:31: *Marriage and the New Creation*, *Analecta Biblica* 115 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1988).

⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 352 and 362 (my emphasis).

⁸ Claude Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ: An Inquiry into the Nuptial Element in Early Christianity* (London: Faber, 1940), 77. See Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4–6* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 622.

Authority and Submission, Love and Sacrifice (Eph 5:22–25)

22 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. (Eph 5:22–24)

The pericope begins with the topic of the wife's subordination to her husband as a reflection of the Church's subordination to Christ.⁹ The subordination of wives to their husbands in verses 22–24 may be an implicit echo of the original subordination that became the fate of Eve after her fall: ". . . your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16). The hierarchical relationship described in Ephesians, however, is not one of oppression or domination, but an imperative to sacrificial love. The man bears the greater responsibility in his vocation to love his wife as selflessly as Christ loved the Church:

Husbands, love [*agapate* (ἀγαπᾶτε)] your wives, as Christ loved [*ēgapēsen* (ἠγάπησεν)] the Church and gave himself up for her. (Eph 5:25)

The exhortation to self-sacrifice for the sake of the beloved in imitation of Christ in verse 25 is at the heart of the Gospel's message. In Ephesians, the noun *agapē*, the adjective *agapētos*, and the verb *agapaō* occur no less than nineteen times, describing either Christ's unsurpassable love for the Church or the love by which Christians are called to love him and each other in return, in *imitatio Christi*.¹⁰ Ephesians 5:25 returns to the line of thought initiated in 5:1–2, where the Ephesians are called to be "imitators of God, as beloved children" and to "walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (NKJV). Christ's self-gift for the Church takes the distinct look and smell of temple sacrifices with the expressions "offering and sacrifice" (*prosphora kai thusia*; see the LXX of Ps 39:6) and "sweet-smelling aroma" (*osmē euōdias*; see the LXX of Exod 29:18 and Ezek 20:41). Similar sacrificial language is used to

⁹ The image of Christ as head and Church as body is a recurring theme in Ephesians: in 1:22–23 Christ is described as the "head over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all." Eph 4:12–16 describes how his body is edified through the synergy of its members' loving service to one another. By "speaking the truth in love," believers may "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ . . ." In this way, they effect the unity of the body and cause it to grow, "[upbuilding] itself in love." By joining the Church, Christians become a part of the same living organism, akin to the cells in a body (see 1 Cor 12:12–27; Rom 12:4–5).

¹⁰ See Eph 1:4, 6, 15; 2:4; 3:17, 19; 4:2, 15–16; 5:1–2, 25, 28, 33; 6:23–24.

describe the gifts that the Philippians sent to Paul, called “a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice [*osmēn euōdias, thusian dektēn*], well pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18). The same expression is also alluded to in 2 Corinthians 2:14–16 to denote all Christians: “we are to God the aroma [*euōdia*] of Christ.” Elsewhere, Paul’s sacrificial labor of love is described as the outpouring of a drink offering, using unmistakably liturgical language: “I am being poured out as a drink offering [*spendomai*] on the sacrifice and service [*thusia kai leitourgia*] of your faith” (Phil 2:17, NKJV). The same expression is used in 2 Timothy 4:6 in the context of the author’s impending death, figuratively described as a libation upon the altar: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering [*spendomai*], and the time of my departure is at hand” (NKJV). The language of temple sacrifice thus characterizes Paul’s understanding of *agapē* in action: Christ provides the model (Eph 5:2) to be imitated by his followers, whose gifts (Phil 4:18), works and sufferings (Phil 2:17), his very person (2 Cor 2:14), and death (2 Tim 4:6) are portrayed as offerings presented to God and pleasing to him. This is the extent of the calling to husbands, to sacrificially love their wives “as Christ loved the Church.”

Excursus: Sacrifice as Means to Communion

The Symbolism of Sacrifice

A consideration of the Temple sacrifices will help us better understand the Pauline application of liturgical and sacrificial language to the love between Christ and his disciples. Rabbi Joshua Berman provides valuable insight on the connections between covenant, love, and sacrifice within the context of the temple service. He explains that sacrifice was viewed in the ancient world as a bilateral process whereby the owner of the animal to be sacrificed had to “renounce his ownership of the animal so that the gods could receive the animal in his place.”¹¹ These two aspects (renunciation and substitution) were taken up in the biblical notion of sacrifice in the sanctuary, along with the idea that a sacrifice is *kadosh* (קֹדֶשׁ)—sanctified, dedicated and set apart for God. An animal dedicated for sacrifice is therefore designated as *heqdesh*—made holy.¹² Sacrifice meant abnegation, renunciation, and forfeiture for the owner. When an animal was brought into the temple, the owner renounced his claim over it and could no longer use it for his personal benefit. The smoke and smell of the burnt animal, rising to heaven from the altar, was received by YHWH as pleasing to him, a “sweet savor to the Lord.” Yet the main connotation of sacrifice—*qorban* (קָרְבָּן)—goes beyond the ideas of renunciation, gift, and

¹¹ Joshua Berman, *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), 115 (his emphasis).

¹² Berman, *The Temple*, 116.

acceptance. The root of the word *qorban* is קרב, which means “close.” A *qorban* is “that which has been brought close” to God, and offering a sacrifice (*lehaqrib qorban*) means literally “to bring the sacrifice close.” The ultimate purpose of the *qorbanot* is therefore to draw God’s people close and bring them into communion with him.

Sacrifices are also symbols of repentance whereby the gap between God and man caused by sin is bridged by the animals’ atoning deaths and the shedding of their blood. Sin is incompatible with God’s presence,¹³ and its consequence is death.¹⁴ By offering sacrifices, man overcomes the alienation and attendant death sentence that sin has brought upon him. This occurs by transferring not only one’s sins but also one’s own identity onto the animal to be sacrificed, done through the act of *semikbah*—laying hands and “leaning” on the animal’s head. It is a symbolic act of investiture. The animal becomes representative of its owner, and the offering of the sacrifice is “an execution in effigy” with a rehabilitative purpose: “As he stands before God in the Temple and witnesses his own execution by proxy for sins he committed, the owner of the offering is meant to reach a new awareness of his obligations to God so that his breach will not be repeated.”¹⁵ The rites of the *qorbanot* are *punitive measures* that the owner should view as carried out on his own body. By burning and obliterating the animal, he “eradicates the element of his sinful persona that exhibited animalism rather than humanity.”¹⁶ The slaughter of the animal, the shedding and sprinkling of its blood, and the annihilation of its body in the flames was no doubt a stark pedagogical experience that was *purgative* and *cathartic*, deepening the owner’s conversion and strengthening his resolve not to sin again.

The different sacrifices carried various meanings. Three of them express penitence. The *sin-offering* (*khattat* [חַטָּאת]) represents a purifying of the spiri-

¹³ See Deut 31:17–18; Ps 32:1–5; Isa 59:1–2; Ezek 23:18.

¹⁴ See Gen 2:7; 3:19; 6:5–7; Exod 31:14–15; 32:33–34; Lev 20.

¹⁵ Berman, *The Temple*, 118–19. Nachmanides, in his commentary on Lev 1:9, sheds light on the identification of the sinner with the sacrificed animal: “[The owner] should burn the innards and the kidneys [of the offering] in fire because they are the instruments of thought and desire in the human being. He should burn the legs since they correspond to the hands and feet of a person, which do all his work. He should sprinkle the blood upon the altar, which is analogous to the blood in his body. All these acts are performed in order that when they are done, a person should realize that he has sinned against God with his body and his soul, and that ‘his’ blood should really be spilled and ‘his’ body burned, were it not for the loving-kindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life, and that the chief limbs of the offering should be in place of the chief parts of his body” (*Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Charles B. Chavel [Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1974], 3:21, quoted in Berman).

¹⁶ Berman, *The Temple*, 120.

tual defilement engendered by sin.¹⁷ The *guilt-offering* (*asham* [אֲשָׁם]) signifies indemnity, reparation payment, repairing damage, and making restitution. The *whole burnt offering* (*olah* [עֹלָה]) denotes a complete dedication to God.¹⁸ The blood sprinkled on and around the altar is also significant. Since the blood symbolizes the soul (see Lev 17:11), the animal's blood represents both the owner's blood and his soul. The sprinkling of the blood thus symbolizes "not the forfeiture of the owner's life, but the rededication of his soul in concert with the rest of his being" to God.¹⁹ Sacrifices were also covenantal gestures that rededicated the covenant between God and his people. The covenant at Sinai was sealed by the shedding and sprinkling of blood (Exod 24:3–8), signifying the mutual commitment between the two parties.

This discussion helps us understand how "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her." When Paul depicts Christ as the sacrifice of the New Covenant, he is recapitulating in him the roles of the temple sacrifices: Christ purchased his bride with his own blood (Eph 1:7; 2:13)²⁰ to atone for her sins, make reparation and restitution for them, purify and sanctify her, and prove his complete dedication and love to her. Yet his sacrifice was also necessary for the sake of union and communion with his bride. This is best understood in light of the *sacrifice of communion* with God: the *peace-offering*, the *zebakh* (זֶבַח). This was a covenantal feast and shared meal centered on the consumption of meat (see 1 Sam 28:24 and 1 Kgs 1:9 and 19:21). The meal ritualized the formation of a bond between two parties or celebrated its ongoing renewal, and it was accompanied by the presentation of bread and wine.²¹

¹⁷ The word *lekhatteh* (לְחַטֵּה) means "to purify" in the Torah (see Lev 8:15; 14:49; Num 19:9). Nachmanides (on Lev 4:2) is instructive regarding the purifying role of the *khattat*: "The reason for the offerings for the erring soul is that all sins produce a particular 'stain' upon the soul and constitute a blemish thereon, and the soul is only worthy to be received by the countenance of its Creator when it is pure of all sin. It is for this reason that the erring soul brings an offering, through which it becomes worthy of approaching 'unto God who gave it'" (quoted in Berman, *The Temple*, 121–22).

¹⁸ Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac as an *olah* as the ultimate sign of his devotion to the service of God, whom he trusted and loved to the point of being willing to offer up "[his] son, [his] only-begotten son Isaac, whom [he loved]" (Gen 22:2). Abraham proved his love by the greatness and totality of his sacrifice.

¹⁹ Berman, *The Temple*, 125.

²⁰ See 1 Cor 7:23; 1 Pet 1:18–19.

²¹ Here, too, Berman is enlightening: "The Temple . . . is the focal point for the commemoration of the *berit*—the covenant between God and the Jewish people. . . . As the Jewish people continually rededicate themselves to their Covenantal Partner, they bring *zevachim* to the covenantal center to symbolize through celebratory feasts the rejuvenation of the bond between them. Classically, a true feast included wine. With this in mind, the analogy of *korban* as feast is further buttressed by the requirement that the offering of every *korban* include the presentation of loaves and wine (Numbers 15:1–14)" (*The Temple*, 130).

The *zebakh* recalled the original bond made between God and Israel at Sinai, where Moses mediated the ordinances of the Torah (Exod 24:3), the people vowed their obedience (vv. 3 and 7), burnt-offerings and peace-offerings were offered (v. 5), the covenant was sealed by the sprinkling of blood (vv. 6 and 8), and Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the elders went up on the mountain, where they “beheld God, and they ate and drank” (v. 9). This covenant ceremony was followed by the coming of the glory of the Lord in the cloud (vv. 15–18). The close intimacy between God and Israel at Sinai was thus enacted by the sacrifice of *olot* (signifying complete dedication between the two parties) and the offering and eating of *zebakhim* (signifying intimate communion between them). The *zebakh* is thus an experience in which “man, literally, and God, figuratively, partake of the same feast.”²² The offering of *zebakhim* also included the presentation of loaves and wine. The bread of the presence in the sanctuary further attests to the idea that communion with God is attained by “eating with Him” and that eating is the most hallowed form of worship.²³

In short, the *qorbanot* are sanctified and dedicated gifts to God, expiatory symbols (especially the sin and guilt offerings) symbolizing punishment, providing atonement and forgiveness, purifying sin and making reparation for it, and calling to conversion. They are also symbols of covenantal feasting (burnt and peace offerings) whose ultimate purpose is to draw man close to God, bringing the human into the presence of the divine and into intimate communion with him. Keeping this symbolism in mind helps us better grasp the implications of the husband’s call to love his wife “as Christ loved the Church” by sacrificially giving himself for her as “an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”

On Love and Death

There is also a relationship between sacrifice and love in that the self-renunciation and death inherent in every animal sacrifice symbolizes the owner’s total self-gift to his maker. The Mishnah comments on the injunction of the Shema to love God with one’s entire being (Deut 6:5):

A person must praise [God] for bad things just as for good things, as it is said “And you must love God with all your heart, soul, and might.” “With all your heart”—with your two inclinations, the good inclination and the evil incli-

²² Berman, *The Temple*, 130. The psalmist attests that the forming of the covenant between God and Israel was accomplished by offering and partaking of a *zebakh*: “Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice [*zebakh*]!” (Ps 50:5).

²³ On the bread of the presence, see Berman, *The Temple*, 136–38.

nation; "soul"—even when God takes your soul from you;
 "might"—your property. (m. Ber. 9:5)

The Mishnah's exhortation to love God with both one's good and evil inclinations implies the sublimation of both base instincts to divine ends, whereby the inner division of the two impulses is brought in line in a whole-hearted devotion to God. The duty of loving God with all of one's soul, in turn, means "even if he takes your soul." Love of God is a total commitment, even unto death.²⁴ The commentary on the Shema in the Tosefta and Sifre supplements the Mishnah with a verse often used in martyrological contexts: "for your sake we are slain all the day long; and accounted as sheep for the slaughterer" (Ps 44:22).²⁵ The sages have rightly asked how one can be killed "all the day long." One answer is that "the Holy One, blessed be He, regards the righteous as if they are killed every day."²⁶ This may be seen as a kind of martyrdom "in installments," whereby the righteous "kills" his evil inclination and evil heart in a constant act of self-mortification and sacrifice of his base desires for God's sake.²⁷

For mystics like Paul, to be "at home in the body" means to be "away from the Lord" (2 Cor 5:6). Here is the motivation for martyrdom: a willing death for God is not only the ultimate sacrifice of love to him but also the quickest way to the consummation of the mystical union with him.²⁸ But if martyrdom is the highest expression of love for God, it remains an occasion that occurs only in exceptional circumstances. When martyrdom is not an option, various forms of ritual simulation and substitution represent the person's death for God in a more digestible way. The biblical sacrifices are the most evident form of ritual substitution by which a person could "practice death."²⁹ Reconciliation and union with God are accomplished through sacrifice because of its cost to the owner. His renunciation of something of

²⁴ Michael Fishbane states: "Heavenly love is activated by human death. Self-sacrifice thus stands at the heart of Being—a sacrament of love for the salvation of God" (*The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994], 126).

²⁵ t. Zera. 6:7; Sifre Deut 32; Mek. Shirata 3. See Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, 6.

²⁶ Rabbi Simeon ben Menasia (quoted in Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, 6).

²⁷ Fishbane summarizes: "Accordingly, if one regards martyrdom as the acceptance of death in extremis for the love of God, . . . killing one's evil *yetzer* [evil inclination] may correspondingly function as the daily exaction of such supreme devotion. Psychological strife thus provides the drama of personal perfection, and slaying the evil inclination is the perpetual combat whereby the devotee offers 'all' his soul to God" (*The Kiss of God*, 8).

²⁸ See Phil 1:21–23. Fishbane cites a prayer for the Day of Atonement by the medieval Rabbi Yehuda Halevi expressing the same idea: "O Lord! . . . when I am far from You—my life is death; and were I to cleave to You—my death would be life" (*The Kiss of God*, 11).

²⁹ On the forms of ritual simulation and substitution of death and their development in Judaism, see Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, 87–124.

great value is symbolic of his own self-denial and death. The essence of sin is a disordered self-love whereby a person places his own desires first, even to the point of disobeying God and forsaking his commandments. Sacrifice reverses this process and counters human egoism by forsaking costly goods and offering them as dedicated gifts to God. The animal is thus a symbolic substitute of the owner's own self-offering to God. The shedding of the animal's blood and consumption of its body in the flames are a substitute for the death that he should have incurred by transgressing God's commandments. Free-will offerings and sacrifices of communion are of even higher value because they are optional gifts, offered to God out of selfless generosity.

Death can seem like "the limit of love on earth"³⁰ and the ultimate enemy of love. The earthly love between two spouses can be suddenly terminated by the death of one of them. Yet love can also "die" while both spouses are still alive. The hardships of life and one's own ambitions and desires can easily conflict with the romance, care, and devotion for the beloved that love requires. A person willing to bear hardships and forsake his own desires for the beloved has demonstrated his/her love in a tangible way. When human love is not sustained by self-sacrifice and self-gift, however, it runs the risk of weakening, waning, and dying. If this happens while spouses are still alive—death has won over love. The former lovers continue to live, but their love has died. Such a love that has fizzled out is more dead than one interrupted by natural death but in which the memory of happy love lives on. On the other hand, love that prevails "till death do us part" is in fact the victory of love over death. When spouses withstand all trials until the end of earthly life, when death is the only thing able to separate them, then death is in fact defeated by its own apparent victory and love has prevailed over it—a "love stronger than death," to use the language of the Song of Songs. This is the love of Christ for the Church (see John 15:13). Jesus demonstrated his love for his bride by dying for her, bearing all suffering until the bitter end. Precisely for this reason, nothing—not even death—can separate the Church from her divine bridegroom.³¹

In Imitatio Christi

This is the type of sacrificial love that Paul calls husbands to imitate for the sake of their brides. It would presumably involve a long and arduous process of "practicing death" in self-denial, self-mortification, and *kenōsis* (self-emptying) in imitation of Christ.³² Ephesians 5:25—calling husbands to love their wives

³⁰ See Barth's discussion on love and death in *Ephesians* 4–6, 684–87.

³¹ See Rom 8:37–39. Fishbane provides the same insight from a Jewish perspective: "Self-sacrifice thus stands in the center of world-restorative actions, actually replacing the ancient Temple as the site of ritual at-one-ment" (*The Kiss of God*, 104).

³² See Phil 2:3–8; Col 3:3–5.

“as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her”—recalls Galatians 2:20, where Paul extols Christ’s love for him and offers his own life in return so that it now belongs to his Lord who “lives in him.” Although no nuptial metaphor is employed here, all its elements are present: the covenantal bond of love, the sacrificial gift of self by the “greater” party and passionate response and self-surrender of the “lesser” party, and the union of flesh and spirit resulting in an exchange of persons in which each offers his life to the other. The imitation of Christ and full identification with him in sacrificial love for the Church is also expressed in Colossians 1:24, where Paul sees himself as an *alter Christus*: by taking part in the Messiah’s afflictions he shares in his redemptive role for the sake of his ecclesial body. If these passages set the bar high as to the sacrificial quality required of the husband’s love for his wife—or of the Christian’s self-gift to Christ for the sake of the Church—all emphatically affirm that such a selfless gift is only possible “with Christ,” “in Christ,” and inasmuch as “Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).³³ Andrew Lincoln notes that the *kathōs* in Ephesians 5:25 (“Husbands, love your wives, just as [*kathōs*] Christ also loved the church”) is not only comparative but also causal: “Christ’s love for the Church not only presents the model but also provides the grounds for the husband’s love for his wife.”³⁴

The use of the verb *agapaō* to denote the love between husband and wife in Ephesians 5:25 is significant. This is practically the only occurrence in the New Testament where *agapaō* includes the sexual union of man and woman.³⁵ While New Testament writers frequently employ the words *agapaō* and *agapē*, they avoid *eraō* and *erōs* (referring to sexual love or desire)—presumably for the sake of emphasizing selfless, sacrificial love in contrast to self-gratifying lust. The high view of the “one-flesh” union in Ephesians, however, categorically rules out any Platonic or Gnostic denigration of the body and of sexual union in marriage.³⁶

³³ The equivalent Johannine idea would be the metaphor of the branches abiding in Jesus the true vine (John 15:5).

³⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 374. See also Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 622: “According to 5:2 Christ’s death is not only the example but also the sacrament (‘sacrifice’) of love which creates the ‘way’ and guides the saints on the way of love which they are to follow.” See also Rom 12:1, where believers are called to offer their bodies as a “living sacrifice” and as a spiritual act of worship to God.

³⁵ Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 621n48 and 715–20.

³⁶ Pope Benedict XVI comments on the relationship between *erōs* and *agapē*, opposing an alleged antithesis between a descending, oblation love (*agapē*) that would be typically Christian, and an ascending, possessive or covetous love (*erōs*) that would be typical of Greek culture: “*Eros* and *agape*—ascending love and descending love—can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if *eros* is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks

In summary, Christ loved the Church with a total love encompassing both the passionate *erōs* of longing for and desiring union with his bride and the unselfish *agapē* of total self-offering for the good of the beloved. This love taps into the symbolism of the temple sacrifices, providing atonement, forgiveness, purification and making reparation, calling to conversion, and restoring communion with God. At the same time, this love is the model, inspiration, and source for the love asked of Christians in return, and most especially of husbands for their wives.

Holy and without Blemish (Eph 5:26–27)

... that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word ... (Eph 5:26)

Ephesians 5:26 tells us that the ultimate purpose of sacrificial love is the sanctification of the beloved bride—the Church. Returning to the subject of *qedushah*, in rabbinic literature the Hebrew term for “sanctify” (*leqaddesh*) expresses the action of betrothal; it means “to espouse a wife.”³⁷ The *hagiazō* of Ephesians 5:26 therefore means not only “set apart” but also “set apart for wife.” Moreover, the Church is sanctified “by the washing of water with the word.” J. Paul Sampley argues that Christ’s marriage to the Church in Ephesians is reminiscent of God’s metaphorical marriage to Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16,³⁸ where the Lord passes by an abandoned Jerusalem weltering in her blood and looks tenderly upon her (Ezek 16:6–7). Finding her at “the time of love,” he declares: “I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, ... and you became mine” (Ezek 16:8). Following this betrothal, the Lord bathes his new bride with water, washes off the blood, and anoints her with oil (Ezek 16:9). This washing likely signifies a prenuptial bridal bath by which the husband purifies his newly acquired bride through a solemn oath. In this light, the “washing of water” of Ephesians may well be an allusion to a prenuptial

the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to ‘be there for’ the other. The element of *agape* thus enters into this love, for otherwise *eros* is impoverished and even loses its own nature. On the other hand, man cannot live by oblation, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. John 7:37–38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. John 19:34)” (Encyclical Letter on Christian Love *Deus Caritas Est* [December 25, 2005], §7).

³⁷ Sampley, *One Flesh*, 42–43, 129. See also K. G. Kuhn, “The Concept of Holiness in Rabbinic Judaism,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, *Alpha–Gamma*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:98. See b. Qidd. 2a.

³⁸ See Sampley, *One Flesh*, 38–49.

bridal bath in preparation for the bride's union with the bridegroom.³⁹ The idea of sanctification through the washing of water as a metaphor for salvation also occurs in 1 Corinthians 6:11.⁴⁰ Most commentators agree that these passages are references to water baptism,⁴¹ the "bridal bath" that precedes the believer's entrance into the bridal chamber to meet the bridegroom.

When did Christ sanctify and cleanse the Church? This would have occurred either when he "gave himself up for her" or at the moment of the "washing of water"—that is, either at Christ's death or at the believer's baptism. Paul probably refers to both events—the Messiah's universal act of redemptive death and its individual application to the baptized believer—since these are often related in Pauline theology (with baptism explicitly connected to Christ's death).⁴² Baptism thus becomes the moment when the sanctification and cleansing attained by Christ's death are actualized and appropriated by individual Christians:⁴³

that he might present the Church to himself in splendor
[*endoxon*], without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that
she might be holy [*hagia*] and without blemish [*amōmos*].
(Eph 5:27)

The splendor and beauty of the Church also mirrors the beauty of the bride in Ezekiel's nuptial symbolism. In Ezekiel 16:10–14, the Lord lovingly bestows glorious beauty upon Jerusalem, who then becomes renowned among the nations. Likewise, in Ephesians 5, the Church is perfect and "glorious" or "in splendor." In addition, verse 27 echoes other Pauline verses that reflect his concern for the purity of the Church, further revealing the interrelationship between nuptial and temple motifs.⁴⁴ Christ will present the Church to himself "in splendor" (*endoxos*), that is, "resplendent" or "glorious." The Greek

³⁹ For supporters of the prenuptial bath allusion in Eph 5:26, see Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 168–69; O. Casel, "Die Taufe als Brautbad der Kirche," *Jahrbuch für Liturgie und Wissenschaft* 5 (1925): 144–47; James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM, 1970), 162–63; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 387.

⁴⁰ See also Acts 22:16 and Heb 10:22.

⁴¹ See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 375; Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 168–69. Barth questions the association of Eph 5:26 with baptism (*Ephesians* 4–6, 691–99). Links have also been identified between this verse and the ritual washing at Qumran (see 1QS III, 4, 8–10; 1QH XI, 10–12).

⁴² See Rom 6:3ff.; 1 Cor 1:13; Col 2:12; Heb 10:119–22; 1 John 1:7, 9. See also Best, *Ephesians*, 542.

⁴³ See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 375: "If Christ's death is the point in history at which his love was demonstrated, baptism is the point at which the Church experiences Christ's continuing purifying love for her as his bride."

⁴⁴ See 2 Cor 11:2–3 and Col 1:22.

word *endoxos*, which derives from *doxa*, points to the theme of God's glory, which is *kabod* in Hebrew. First revealed at Sinai in the form of a majestic cloud and consuming fire, radiating on Moses's face, filling the tabernacle and temple, the glory of the *Shekhinah* is reinterpreted in the Johannine tradition as the *logos* dwelling in the tabernacle of Jesus's body, incarnated in his flesh, temporarily veiled by his humanity but revealed in his glorified body after the resurrection. For Paul, the *doxa* is the crowning promise of the New Covenant: Christians are transformed "from glory to glory" into the likeness of the Lord, even if they must temporarily carry this treasure in the "earthen vessels" of their frail humanity, prone to suffering and death in imitation of their master (2 Cor 3:7–4:15). In light of the history of the *doxa* among God's people, it becomes easier to grasp why Paul calls the Church "glorious." This points to the final transformation into divine glory, the unsurpassable *doxa* that will radiate from God through Christ, in the Holy Spirit into his splendid bride, the Church.⁴⁵

The Church is also "without spot or wrinkle" that she might be "holy and without blemish [*hagia kai amōmos*]." The Church's beauty may well allude to the beauty of the bride in the Song of Songs.⁴⁶ In both Song of Songs 4:7 ("You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you") and Ephesians 5:27, a positive statement of the bride's beauty is followed by a privative one noting the absence of blemish (*mum* [מום] in Hebrew and *mōmos* [μῶμος] in Greek) in her perfection. Purity was prescribed and demanded of brides in the Torah (see Deut 24:1). This purity, both required of and bestowed on the bride by her divine bridegroom, is inherited by the Church in Ephesians.⁴⁷

In addition, the expression *hagia kai amōmos* points to the cultic and ritual purity required of priests and sacrifices. Leviticus 21:17–23 specifies that any priest with a blemish (*mum*) is unfit for divine service. Likewise, any animal with any blemish (*mum*) is unacceptable for sacrifice.⁴⁸ The Hebrew word *mum* (LXX *mōmos*) in the Old Testament normally means a physical

⁴⁵ Barth illustrates this well: "Just as the brilliant sky around the sun reveals the presence and power of the sun, radiates light, creates brightness, and invites admiration, so the glory of God creates glorification and calls for it" (*Ephesians* 4–6, 681).

⁴⁶ See Song 1:8; 1:15; 2:10–14; 4:1, 7; 5:9; 6:1; 7:7; 5:2, 6:9. See also Sampley, *One Flesh*, 45–46.

⁴⁷ See Sampley, *One Flesh*, 70: "Thus, the purity prescribed for brides in ancient Israel's Torah became part of the YHWH-Israel *hieros gamos* [sacred marriage]. The author of Ephesians inherited this and developed it in application to the church as Christ's bride." Sampley also notes that the purity requirements originally reserved for priests were extended to the entire community by the Qumran sect in a way that is "quite analogous to the purity expected on the part of all members of the church in Ephesians" (72–73).

⁴⁸ Lev 22:17–25; Num 19:2; Deut 15:21; 17:1. The Mishnah specifies that "these same blemishes [of animal sacrifices], whether lasting or passing, likewise render [priests] unqualified [to serve in the temple]" (m. Bek. 7:1).

blemish, as in the case of priests and sacrifices, but it can also mean a moral fault.⁴⁹ Often the Greek word *amōmos* is a translation of the Hebrew word *tamim* (complete, undefiled, innocent, perfect), a word describing both the physical perfection of sacrificial animals and the moral perfection of the righteous. Both meanings are found in the New Testament: *amōmos* evokes ritual purity and (especially) moral perfection.⁵⁰ Ephesians 5:27 therefore applies the Old Testament concern for holiness and temple cultic purity to the Messiah's bride, the Church.⁵¹ We also find a clear confluence of priestly and marital purity traditions in m. Ketuboth 7:7: "All defects which disqualify priests, disqualify women also [for marriage]."⁵² The priestly and sacrificial quality of the Church's purity shows that the sacrificial character of Ephesians 5:1–2 remains present in Paul's mind throughout our pericope, and the mystical bride of Christ is held to the same standard of purity as brides, priests, and sacrificial animals. The holiness of the Messiah's bride also emphasizes sexual purity (see Eph 5:3–6, 12)—recalling Paul's similar concerns about sexual immorality in 1 and 2 Corinthians and the destructive effect that such behavior has on the body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit.⁵³

The expression *hagios kai amōmos* (holy and blameless) also appears in Ephesians 1:4, where individual members of the church are "chosen in him" and called to be *hagious kai amomous*. In Ephesians 5:27, the expression refers to the collective, mystical bride. The holiness and purity of the Church can be attained only through the holiness and purity of its individual members. Conversely, the holiness of the members subsists only in union with the body of Christ, whose holiness derives from its head. Ephesians 5:27 illustrates with nuptial language the doctrine of "salvation by grace" (see Eph 2:5, 8–10) whereby good works are not the prerequisite for salvation but rather its fruit.

The perfect holiness of the Church has prompted commentators to ask *when* precisely she becomes Christ's bride. Since any Christian community, let alone the Church at large, falls short of the degree of purity and perfection described in Ephesians 5, some have assumed that it is only in the end, at Christ's Parousia, that the Church becomes the bride. Her perfection, then, is not a present status but rather her promised eschatological future.⁵⁴ The problem

⁴⁹ For examples of *mum* meaning a moral fault, see Deut 32:5; 2 Sam 14:25; Job 11:15; 31:7; Prov 9:7; Song 4:7; Dan 1:4.

⁵⁰ Eph 1:4; 5:27; Phil 2:15; Col 1:22; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19; Jude 24; Rev 14:5.

⁵¹ See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 361.

⁵² See Sampley, *One Flesh*, 71.

⁵³ In 1 Thess 4:3, the sanctification of the brethren is also primarily equated with abstaining from sexual immorality.

⁵⁴ Muirhead writes: "It is only in the End that the Church becomes the Bride" ("The Bride of Christ," 184). See also Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 628, 669, and 678. Lincoln disagrees and sees the Ephesian Church already married to Christ (*Ephesians*, 377).

with this view is that in Ephesians 5:32 the “one flesh” union is applied to the present relationship between Christ and the Church. Unlike 2 Corinthians 11:2, where the “chaste virgin” is still awaiting union with her beloved, the Church here is apparently already married to him. Yet the eschatological expectation is not wholly absent: Christ is still sanctifying and cleansing her “*that he might present her to himself a glorious church*”—implying that this presentation has not yet taken place. The tension between the two passages is a good example of the Church living “between the times,” having received the deposit of the Spirit and the divine presence as betrothed bride, yet still longing in expectation of the full consummation of the marital union.

Christ and the Church: One Body, One Flesh (Eph 5:28–30)

28 Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, 30 because we are members of his body [of his flesh and of his bones]. (Eph 5:28–30)

The wife is now identified with the husband’s own body or flesh—in other words, with himself. The exhortation to the husband to love his wife “as himself,” repeated in verse 33, alludes to Leviticus 19:18: “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”⁵⁵ Paul may have known an early form of the rabbinic tradition that applies Leviticus 19 to marriage, praising the man “who loves his wife as himself and honors her more than himself.”⁵⁶ With the mention of the body, Paul’s metaphor takes on another dimension. Until now, the husband was exhorted to love his wife with the selfless *agapē* love of Christ for the Church. Here the dimension of *eros* and bodily love comes into play. The man is to love his wife because she is really a part of him. As the quotation from Genesis makes clear, it is in the intimacy of the sexual union that the wife becomes the husband’s “own body” and “own flesh.” The two images of the Church as bride and as body are explicitly combined, along with the sacrificial allusions discussed above. Christ loves his bride, the Church, because she is his own body.⁵⁷ Recalling Paul’s identification of the body with the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) and his theology of the eucharistic body of Christ whose partaking signifies intimate communion with him (1 Cor 10:14–17), our pericope reveals a rich array of interrelated metaphors.

⁵⁵ See also Lev 19:34.

⁵⁶ b. Yebam. 62b. See Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 633.

⁵⁷ As stated in the immediate context (Eph 5:23, 30), in other passages in Ephesians (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16, 25), and in the rest of the Pauline corpus (Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 6:15; 10:17; 12:12–27; Col 1:18, 24; 2:19).

The eucharistic allusion continues in verses 29–30, which describe Christ's constant provision for his body as he "nourishes" and "cherishes" his ecclesial bride. Although the "nourishing" and "cherishing" can be interpreted in several ways,⁵⁸ the most likely interpretation is the eucharistic one.⁵⁹ Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 10:14–17 that partaking of the consecrated bread and sharing in the cup of blessing is the communion (*koinōnia*) of the body and blood of Christ, and thus a one-flesh union (see John 6:56) that is the source of the Church's unity. The Church is also his body taken out of him. The Messiah nourishes and cherishes his bride by giving her his eucharistic body, the *koinōnia* of his flesh and blood that commemorates his paschal self-offering for her, bestows his life upon her, and is the means by which he abides in her and her in him.

Verse 30 adds that Christ nourishes the Church because "we are members of his body, [of his flesh and of his bones]."⁶⁰ The understanding of the Church as Christ's "flesh and bones"—as Eve was "bone of [Adam's] bones and flesh of [his] flesh"—is a strong allusion to the Church's role as "New Eve."⁶¹ The Eve–Church metaphor attests to the apostle's belief in the preexistence of the Church, "in him [Christ] . . . before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4): as Eve was originally one with Adam before she was taken out of his side,

⁵⁸ Barth lists four possibilities as to how Christ "nourishes" and "cherishes" the Church. The expression could describe: (a) a father's or mother's care for their children similar to the Lord's caring for Jerusalem in Ezek 16:1–14; (b) a formula of Jewish marriage contracts stating the obligations of a husband toward his wife; (c) a cosmological account describing the heavenly Father's care for the cosmos; and (d) Christ providing sustenance to the Church with the Eucharist (*Ephesians* 4–6, 635).

⁵⁹ The eucharistic interpretation of Eph 5:28b–29 was adopted by Jerome, who claims to quote directly from Origen's commentary on Ephesians: "The soul loves, nourishes, and cherishes that Flesh which will see the salvation of God, educating it with disciplines, fattening it with the heavenly bread, and supplying it with the blood of Christ to drink so that, renewed and with the look of health, it can follow its husband with free course and be unencumbered by weakness or burden" (Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 238, 280). On the eucharistic allusions of Eph 5:29, see also Mussner, *Christus das All und die Kirche*, 154.

⁶⁰ The second part of the verse, recalling Adam's exclamation of marvel when he saw Eve for the first time (Gen 2:23), appears in a majority of manuscripts, but is missing in several important ones. Although the longer variant is generally considered a later addition, that it is quoted as early as Irenaeus and is the majority text indicates that it stems from an early and important tradition (see Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 172; Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 637; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 351).

⁶¹ If the Eve–Church association is less obvious and frequent than the Adam–Christ typology (see Rom 5:12–19; 1 Cor 15:22, 45–49; Eph 4:22–24; 5:31–32), three major passages testify that the idea existed already in Paul's days (1 Cor 11:8–12; 2 Cor 11:2–3; Eph 5:30). The idea of the Church as New Eve was later developed by Irenaeus' recapitulation theory (*Adversus haereses* 3.22.2–3) and elaborated by Augustine (*Jo. ev. tr.* 120.2). See Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 722–23.

so the Church was originally one with Christ, “of his flesh and of his bones,” before she was “taken out of his side.”⁶² The creation of Eve is therefore “the prototype or antitype of the universal church’s origin.” As Markus Barth says, “Ephesians 5 then proclaims not only the joining of Christ to his bride, the church, but also the creation of the church out of Christ’s side, viz. of his ‘flesh and bones.’”⁶³ The Church, the New Eve, has not only been redeemed by the New Adam; she has been *created* out of him—as Eve was formed from Adam’s side.⁶⁴

A Great Mystery (Ephesians 5:31–33)

31 “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church; 33 however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In quoting Genesis 2:24, Paul has retained the expression “for this reason” (*anti toutou*) from the original verse. For *which* reason, then, would Christ “leave his father and mother” and be joined to his wife, the Church, to become one flesh with her? The antecedent of *anti toutou* is likely that of the original context in Genesis: because woman was taken out of man and is “bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh” — “for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”⁶⁵ The ground for the one-flesh union is the original unity between the bridegroom and bride.⁶⁶ Eve was part of Adam’s body: they were one before she was taken out of him. Their

⁶² Compare John 19:34, where the water and blood flowing out of Jesus’s side are understood as a symbol of the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist and thus the “birth of the Church.”

⁶³ Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 722–23.

⁶⁴ On the Church as New Eve, Steve Bedale writes: “Here we have an explicit analogy between the headship of Christ in relation to the Church, and the headship of husband over wife, of Adam and Eve, in the order of nature. Headship in either case implies not merely authority, but a certain relationship in the order of being. Eve derives her being from Adam: the Church derives her being from Christ, who is the ‘beginning’ of the new creation, ‘the head’ from whom ‘the whole body . . . increases.’ In a word, the Church is the *Second Eve*, spouse of the *Second Adam*, ‘bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.’ Thus Christ, loving the Church, ‘loves his own body’” (“The Theology of the Church,” in *Studies in Ephesians* [London: Mowbray, 1956], 72). See also André-Marie Dubarle, “Les fondements bibliques du titre marital de Nouvelle Ève,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 39 (1951): 49–64, at 52–56.

⁶⁵ Emphasis added

⁶⁶ See Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 637–38, 722.

one-flesh union is therefore not a new event but a *re-union*. The application of this metaphor to Christ and the Church means that they too were originally one; this original unity, followed by the separation by which the Church was “taken out” of Christ, is the root of the mutual desire for union. Thus Adam’s joyous recognition of Eve as a part of himself, as “bone of [his] bones and flesh of [his] flesh” is implicitly echoed in Christ beholding his ecclesial bride who was also a part of him from the very beginning. Some commentators have seen in the Church’s origin “of his flesh and of his bones” the ground for an Incarnation theology whereby the Church is an “extended incarnation of Christ.” Chavasse has written that as “Eve was the continuation and projection of Adam’s body, . . . so the church, her antitype, is the continuation of Christ’s incarnation.”⁶⁷ And Richard Batey: “Christians are imitators of Christ (Eph 5:1–2), but they are more than this. They are the historic continuation of his personality (σῶμα [body]).”⁶⁸ The Church, intimately united with her divine bridegroom, continues to mediate his presence and salvation in the world.⁶⁹

The use of the word *mystērion* in Ephesians 5:32 within the context of the Genesis quotation has been hotly debated in the history of the verse’s interpretation. Translated as *sacramentum* in the Vulgate, it has been traditionally understood by Catholic theologians as the classic proof text establishing marriage as one of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ and conveying the grace earned by his suffering and death. According to this interpretation, marriage between man and woman is the permanent reenactment of the communion of love between God and man in Christ and the sacralization of what had been, until then, a mere societal institution. It is “quasi an epiphany of the covenant between Christ and the church” that “not only symbolizes but recreates the union of Christ and the church.”⁷⁰ Even though this interpretation of *mystērion* is rejected by a majority of scholars today,⁷¹ one must grant that it does not merely stem from a proof-text reading of the word *sacramentum* but can be reasonably sustained from the nuptial and sacrificial context of Ephesians 5. Another interpretation would have *mystērion* be the equivalent of the English “mystery,” denoting the miraculous or mystical essence of either the man–woman one-flesh union, or the union of Christ with the Church,

⁶⁷ Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ*, 70 (cited in Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 723).

⁶⁸ Richard Batey, “The μία σὰρξ [one flesh] Union of Christ and the Church,” *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966–1967): 270–81.

⁶⁹ Matt 19:4–5 (and parallel Mark 10:6–8), where Jesus refers to the original unity of man and woman (Gen 1:27 and 2:24) in his teaching on marriage and divorce, likely provides the background for Paul’s idea of the indissolubility of the marriage between Christ and the Church, modeled on the union of Adam and Eve.

⁷⁰ See H. Schmauch, *Katholische Dogmatik*, vol. IV.1 (Munich: Hueber, 1952), 622; L. Johnson, “The Mystery of Marriage,” *Scripture* 11 (1959): 1–6; Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 746.

⁷¹ See Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 744–49.

or the relationship between both pairs.⁷² Other occurrences of *mystērion* in Ephesians (1:9; 3:3–4, 9; 6:19) indeed refer to the once hidden purpose of God now revealed in Christ and seem to confirm this interpretation. A third possibility would have *mystērion* indicate that the quotation from Genesis in Ephesians 5:31 is to be understood in an allegorical, typological, and mystical way. This is the type of interpretation that Paul gives of Genesis 2:24 before he returns to its literal sense in verse 33.⁷³

Following his mystical Christological flight, the Apostle returns to the literal meaning of Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians 5:33. Having brought to light the deep meaning of Christ's love for the Church and how their mystical union forms the prototype for human nuptial love, he returns to a final exhortation to conjugal love, with a repeated allusion to Leviticus 19:18.

Summary and Conclusion

The Epistle to the Ephesians paints a rich picture of the Church as Body of Christ, as “holy Temple in the Lord” and as the Messiah's mystical bride. Since Christ chose the elect “in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4), the Church is preexistent, even mystically preceding Adam and Eve. The eternal union of Christ and the Church was the “cosmic blueprint” for Adam's “one-flesh” union with Eve, and it is also the perfect model to be imitated in every human marriage (Eph 5:31–32). The marriage between Christ and the Church is rooted in his self-sacrifice at the Cross and shedding of his blood (Eph 1:7; 2:16; 5:25), which demonstrated “the width and length and depth and height” of his love for his bride (Eph 3:18). The marriage is also portrayed as a temple service (Eph 5:2) that sanctifies her through the “nuptial bath” of baptism (Eph 5:26–27) and “nourishes and cherishes” her as his own flesh (Eph 5:29)—likely pointing to the Eucharist. Christ's followers are called to imitate this sacrificial love, and particularly husbands in loving their wives (Eph 5:28). Although the exalted Christ now dwells in heaven, the union between him and the Church is viewed as a present relationship. Yet the eschatological dimension of the marriage also remains present as the Church awaits the completion of the bridegroom's work of sanctification, “that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27).

⁷² See Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, 642.

⁷³ Lincoln suggests that this typological exegesis rests on a correspondence between creation (see Gen 2:24) and redemption (Christ and the Church) (*Ephesians*, 382).

