

Jesus and Paul on the Meaning and Purpose of Human Sexuality

PAUL GONDREAU
Providence College
Providence, RI

WE LIVE in a weirdly schizophrenic culture when it comes to sex and marriage. Recently, I witnessed a wedding celebration of a second-generation Chinese American man and a first-generation German American woman. They opted for a dual-styled wedding ceremony, the one “Western” and the other traditional Chinese. The Western-styled ceremony, held in a hotel-like ballroom, was first. Utterly secular with no mention of God and no appeal whatsoever to religious imagery, this ceremony blurred boundaries by offering moments of inappropriate humor (the groom, for instance, entered to the theme song of *2001 Space Odyssey* playing on the speaker system) and by having a martial arts instructor act as the officiator. In a word, the Western ceremony bore little resemblance to anything approaching what one could term “traditional.”

Indeed, it openly flouted tradition. Instead of bridesmaids and groomsmen, for instance, there were “bridespeople” and “groomspeople,” as both wedding parties were composed of men and women alike. And why not? I asked myself. Declaring the male and female roles in a marriage to be interchangeable, and therefore meaningless, with biological sex having no essential bearing on the role of bride and bridegroom, our secular culture as a result has blown up all the rich and ancient nuptial symbolism that is expressive of the sexual complementarity of the spouses.

Traditionally, of course, a wedding would mark the celebration of a man and a woman who stood before God and society to vow a life of love and fidelity to each other, a newly conjoined life with profound bearing on their lives, on all who know them, and on society as a whole, not least

of which because of the offspring their union was naturally designed to produce. The role of the wedding parties, whereby male groomsmen would flank the male bridegroom, while female bridesmaids would stand alongside the female bride, serves to magnify and enrich the symbolic significance of the complementary joining of man and woman.

Today, however, such symbolic significance must be deemed retrograde, a binary straitjacket that unfairly excludes alternative forms of sexual union and sexual identity. Bridesmaids must thus give way to bridespeople, and groomsmen to groomspeople. In the particular instance of this wedding, one of the “groomspeople” was a woman, dressed in a tuxedo, who was herself in a lesbian “marriage.” It would not have been a shock, at least to me, if Rod Sterling had suddenly appeared as the officiator, announcing that we had entered the nuptial Twilight Zone, or, short of that, the world of nuptial nominalism.

The Chinese ceremony, on the other hand, offered an abrupt about-face. This latter was a lesson in how to observe tradition down to the finest ceremonial detail and with due regard for the most symbolic and venerable of rituals. The centerpiece was the tea ceremony, which consists of the bride and bridegroom, dressed in traditional Chinese attire, serving tea to the elders in their family. They serve the tea on their knees, except to the elders who are younger than the parents of the bride and/or bridegroom, in which case they serve the tea standing up. According to Chinese custom, the couple is not considered married until this tea ceremony is completed.

I found myself moved at how powerfully this tea ceremony ritual testifies to the hierarchical structure of the family, and to the fact that marriage, because ordered to the continuation of the family line, marks the direct concern of generations past and generations present and future. As Western secular society adopts evermore a view of marriage as exclusively for the mutual benefit of the spouses, Chinese custom testifies to the larger truth: marriage marks a union that is much larger than the spouses themselves, since it is also for the benefit of children, of progeny. Ordered not simply to the private good of the partners, marriage is ordered ultimately to the good of human society itself. So much so that Chinese culture sees not the exchange of vows as the moment in which the nuptial union is realized, but a touching ceremonial gesture of a nascent generation, in the persons of the bride and bridegroom, paying its honor and respects to the older venerable and foundational generation, the generation of fathers and mothers, of grandfathers and grandmothers, of uncles and aunts.

The difference between the two juxtaposed ceremonies—the dismissive disregard for tradition in the one, the careful observation and veneration of ancient, cultural tradition in the other—was striking. I snickered to

myself as I considered the irony of how fashionable it is to respect and heed with utmost care Chinese traditions that are expressive of a strictly binary view of marriage, yet at the same time to scorn and spurn an institution like the Catholic Church (the bride was raised Catholic) for holding to traditions and symbolic rituals that are expressive of the same binary, hetero-normative view of marriage. What accounts for such a double standard? I wondered. Simply that the one is “non-Western,” and therefore in line with the orthodoxy of political correctness, an orthodoxy that champions the virtues of so-called cultural “diversity” (read: anything deemed non-Western)?

Still further questions arise, deeper questions that drive us closer to the purpose of this essay. What does God think of all this? Does a wedding ceremony belong in a church or at least in some kind of sacred space, or is it acceptable to reduce a wedding ceremony to an utterly secular event by removing all references to God? Does God favor the effort at throwing off the shackles of hetero-normative traditions and rituals in our wedding ceremonies, all in the name of equality, acceptance, and inclusion? Continuing in this line of inquiry, we might ask whether God would agree with something like the LGBTQ hashtags #loveislove or #lovewins (the latter used to celebrate victories on the same-sex marriage front), as many LGBTQ proponents, appealing to the tenet that God *is* love, suppose he would. And what does God think of the ever-growing number of confessional communities, many of whom invoke the God of the Bible or who call themselves Christian, that bless same-sex unions, even at times considering them marriage?

The recent wave in clerical sex-abuse scandals to hit the Catholic Church has only intensified the pressing nature of these questions. Indeed, that the fact that news of these scandals broke at the very time the Church was honoring the fiftieth anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* has placed in relief the controversial nature of Catholic moral teaching on the meaning and direction of human sexuality. Disobedient practice against *Humanae Vitae*, now laid bare for the whole world to see, has seeped into all levels of the Church, not merely in the laity but in the clergy as well. Little wonder countless priests and bishops, oftentimes insisting that the Church should “stay out of the bedroom,” looked the other way as *Humanae Vitae* was derided, mocked, transgressed, cast aside.

To search for the answer to the question of what God thinks of sex, I propose in this essay to take another look at the Bible. God, it so turns out, *has*, through the words of the Sacred Page, discharged his mind and will on the meaning and purpose of human sexuality. The God of the Bible does very much insert himself “in the bedroom.” God’s will for human

sexuality is also known through the natural law, of course, that is, through the objective moral law that is inscribed in the very fabric of our humanity, as the Church's common tradition has long held (see *Humanae Vitae* for one example). But as I have written on that topic elsewhere, I shall restrict myself in this essay to the biblical witness, and in particular to the teaching of the New Testament.¹ To this end, this essay complements, albeit to a quite modest degree, the work of Pope St. John Paul II, whose celebrated "theology of the body" also sought to place in relief the biblical vision of human sexuality, though by focusing nearly exclusively on the Genesis creation narrative.²

In sum, the New Testament provides us with two principal, integrally related lines of response to the question of what God intends for our sexuality, the one from Jesus the Lord himself, and the other from St. Paul. In the first, we find Jesus employing foundational principles in his addressing the issue of divorce and remarriage and of lustful desires ("adultery of the heart"). In the second, we find Paul building upon these principles in order to provide a fuller vision of human sexuality. The two lines of response thus form one continuous, organic whole. In what follows, I shall look first at the teaching of Jesus, and then pass to Paul, who shall receive the bulk of our attention.

Jesus's Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage

Pressed by his enemies to pronounce on the Torah's permission for divorce, Jesus famously responds:

¹ See my two essays, "The 'Inseparable Connection' between Procreation and Unitive Love (*Humanae Vitae*, §12) and Thomistic Hylemorphic Anthropology," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 6, no. 4 (2008): 731–64, and "The Natural Law Ordering of Human Sexuality to (Heterosexual) Marriage: Towards a Thomistic Philosophy of the Body," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 8, no. 3 (2010): 553–92. See also my "Defending the Truth of the Human Person: *Humanae Vitae* on the Meaning and Purpose of Human Sexuality," in *Inseparable: Five Perspectives on Sex, Life, and Love in Defense of Humanae Vitae* (San Diego, CA: Catholic Answers Press, 2018), and "The Natural Ordering to Marriage as Foundation and Norm for Sacramental Marriage," *The Thomist* 77 (2013): 41–69.

² See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. and ed. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006). This work, of course, compiles just over five years of weekly catechetical addresses on the meaning and purpose of human sexuality as the Genesis creation account presents it, beginning on September 5, 1979, and ending on November 28, 1984. For a penetrating analysis of the Thomistic foundation of this "theology of the body," see Thomas Petri, O.P., *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body: The Thomistic Foundations of John Paul II's Anthropology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016).

For your hardness of heart he [Moses] wrote you this commandment [permitting divorce]. But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female” [Gen 1:27]. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one” [Gen 2:24]. So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:4–12; see also Matt 5:31–32 and 19:4–6)

Packing considerable meaning, this teaching admits of several foundational principles relating to the meaning and purpose of human sexuality. I shall enumerate four.

*Intended Order of God’s Creation and the Nuptial
Meaning of Our Sexuality*

First, Jesus recapitulates the teaching of Genesis (which the law of Moses had compromised, to some degree at least), and thereby endorses its enduring validity. And little surprise, given that in Genesis we learn of the meaning of our sexuality as it issues from the creative handiwork of God. When asked about marriage, Jesus defers to the Genesis account of the intended order of nature. Put more directly, Jesus here unmistakably, if implicitly, appeals to a law that precedes the Torah and which holds authority over the Torah. This law, because it traces back to our first parents, originates with and remains imbedded in human nature itself. It is, of course, the objective moral law (natural law). We shall say more of “biblical” natural law shortly below when we get to St. Paul.

As for the enduring meaning of our sexuality that the Genesis creation account offers and which Jesus endorses, we can offer the following compendious sketch. According to the first creation account, our sexuality has by God’s design a male–female (dimorphic) structure, with procreation as its intended end: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’” (Gen 1:28). Then, in the second creation account, we find that God, seeing that it is “not good that the man should be alone,” fashions the woman to serve as someone the man can “cleave to” and “become one flesh” with (Gen 2:18–25). In other words, in addition to its procreative ordering, human sexuality enjoys a *per se* ordering to a complementary, love-making

union, a union of companionship. Because this latter ordering is proper to us as rational beings, as persons, we call it “personalist” or “unitive.” Further, as the pivotal terms “man” and “woman,” correlating with “male” and “female” in Gen 1:27, unmistakably intimate, the personalist or unitive ordering is as equally owing to our sexually dimorphic design as to the procreative, since we are persons constituted not by free-floating disembodied spirits, but by spirits (or souls) substantially joined to bodies. Without sexual complementarity, without the male–female structure of our sexuality, there is no true oneness of flesh. Oneness of flesh signifies, in other words, oneness of the whole person, body and soul. Unitive love, as Genesis presents it, cannot be abstracted from the bodily complementarity of “male” and “female.”

Based on the two creation accounts, then, the biblical witness presents human sexuality as a gift from God to provide us with a means both for propagating the human race and for attaining oneness in the deepest bonds of human love or friendship (companionship). God thus endowed us with a sexed nature for the express purpose of marriage (the union of man and woman), since only marriage unites the joint goods of procreation and unitive love. Sex, in the biblical view, is inherently nuptial in meaning. As John Paul II observes, the biblical creation narratives lead to “the discovery of the ‘spousal’ meaning of the body in the mystery of creation.”³ So, yes, Genesis affirms a hetero-normative view of human sexuality, insofar as it establishes marriage as the normative good of our sexuality.⁴

To put this negatively, the body is meant for no other form of sexual intimacy than that between husband and wife, in an embrace of procreative-unitive love. If sex outside of marriage was everywhere to be found in the ancient pagan world, the Hebrew Scriptures, in its very opening pages, holds otherwise. On its account, God created our sexuality in view of a union that is both procreative and unitive in nature. (The Torah, especially Lev 18–20, and the prophetic writings make explicit the condemnation of sex outside marriage in all its forms, both natural and unnatural.)

By deferring to Genesis 1–2 in his pronouncing on divorce, Jesus upholds all of this. Jesus holds to the morality of conjugal love that is

³ John Paul II, General Audience of January 9, 1980 (*Man and Woman He Created Them*, 184).

⁴ The German biblical scholar Rudolf Schnackenburg puts it this way: “The early Church took its stand, as Jesus had done, on the account of creation, in which it saw the primordial will of God. The text of Gen. 2:24 ‘they will be two in one flesh’ was the foundation of the early Christian ethics of marriage” (*The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, trans. J. Holland-Smith and W. J. O’Hara [New York: Herder and Herder, 1965], 249).

embedded in the Genesis creation account. It is reasonable to assume, then, that in his mind, what renders a sexual act good and holy is the measure by which it respects the unitive and procreative orderings of the marital act. Any sexual act falling short of this will fail to attain what God intends for human sexual practice.

The Indissoluble Nature of Marriage

The second foundational principle of this teaching, bold for a culture that prized divorce (whether Jewish or pagan), is the indissoluble nature of marriage. The permanence of the marriage bond expressly precludes the possibility of remarriage after divorce: “He said to them, ‘For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery’” (Matt 19:8–9). If this teaching is “enough to elevate the early Christian ethics of marriage far above the level of those of Judaism and paganism,” as the biblical scholar Rudolf Schnackenburg puts it, it at the same time allies closely with a teaching that the prophetic tradition and Second Temple Judaism had increasingly sounded: “‘For I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel’” (Mal 2:16).⁵

To say that marriage is indissoluble means we cannot pretend something that is truly one is in fact two. To acknowledge the permissibility of divorce is to acknowledge the fracturing of a merely apparent—but not real—union. Indeed, it is deeply telling how nuptial vows today, even in the purely civil arena, promise permanence (“until death do us part”) and do not admit of “back-out” clauses (along the lines, say, and to put it in terms of contemporary idiom, of “I promise to be true to you, until things don’t work out,” or “until things get difficult,” or “until my feelings change,” and the list goes on). As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) put it: “[Marriage] is not an experiment. [It] is not a commercial contract, but a surrender of myself to another person [i.e., a covenant]. Only in the form of a love that is entire and unreserved is the self-giving of one person to another commensurate with the essence of man.”⁶

⁵ “The fact of indissolubility alone was enough to elevate the early Christian ethics of marriage far above the level of those of Judaism and paganism” (Schnackenburg, *Moral Teaching*, 250).

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time, a Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002).

Marriage Is a Sacred and Holy Institution

Third, if Genesis makes clear that marriage marks a sacred, divinely sanctioned institution, Jesus drives this further when he asserts: “What God has joined together . . .” Jesus expressly favors, in other words, a most elevated understanding of marriage, a view of marriage as a sacred and holy union, and not merely a natural one. Going beyond the natural law, Jesus’s view of marriage attains to the divine. St. Paul, as we shall see, will take this one step further and affirm that marriage marks a sacrament (see Eph 5:32). So whereas the Old Testament hints at the holiness of marriage and of its defining act (as when, for instance, it speaks of the husband’s “going into” his wife [see Deut 22:13] in terms that call to mind the High Priest’s “going into” God’s “holy place” [see Ex 28:29]), the New Testament, through the words of Jesus (and Paul), makes this unambiguous.

The Fundamental Equality of Husband and Wife

Fourth, since the Mosaic permission for divorce was tantamount to the Jewish male right to divorce, by revoking this right Jesus was affirming the fundamental equality of husband and wife in the marriage covenant. Generally speaking, only Jewish men had the right to divorce. Basing itself on Deuteronomy 24:1–2, the Talmud, for instance, states that only the husband can initiate a divorce, and that this can be for any reason, including the spoiling of his dinner, or for no reason—an ancient form of “no-fault” divorce. Jewish law thus relegated women to secondary status, namely, to the property of their husbands. In rescinding this male right, Jesus makes clear that women are not to be so regarded or treated. Not at the disposal of their husbands’ mere whim or wish, wives enjoy the security of full rights and responsibilities that come with any true partnership.

In brief, marriage implies equality between husband and wife. The Genesis creation account, of course, unmistakably signals as much when Adam declares Eve to be “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). In Jesus’s mind, then, recovering “the beginning of creation” means not only affirming the indissoluble nature of marriage (“and the two shall become one”), but also the fundamental equality of the marriage partners (“bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”).

The equality of the spouses means marriage signifies friendship (an equivalent term for unitive love), since friendship always presupposes equality, as the pagan philosopher Aristotle well observed.⁷ For St. Thomas Aquinas, marriage sits at the very summit of human friendship, in that

⁷ See, for instance, Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics* 8.8. 1159b.

marital love holds the rank not only of *aequalis amicitia*, “friendship of equality,” but of *maxima amicitia*, “highest friendship.”⁸ Only a biblically-minded theologian, noting that God’s first response to Adam’s social nature and need for friendship is to create not another man but a woman, could call marriage *maxima amicitia*. Nothing satisfies the human need for friendship more than the love of man and woman in marriage.

To sum up, then, we can say that, consonant with the witness of Genesis, Jesus presents a high—extremely high—estimation of marriage. He sees marriage as marking a beautiful reality that God himself has directly fashioned in view of human happiness—the happiness that comes with the life-long loving and exclusive union of one man and one woman (the sole form of marriage).

Jesus on Adultery of the Heart

Jesus delivers his other pronouncement on the moral meaning and direction of human sexuality when he addresses the issue of lustful desires, in quite arresting terms:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt 5:27–28)

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] III, ch. 123. In this passage, Aquinas makes clear that marriage implies *aequalis amicitia* and *maxima amicitia* because it constitutes an “indivisible union of souls” (*indivisibili coniunctione animorum*), or a “domestic society of loving personal communion” (*domesticae conversationis consortium*), which enjoys the “sweet bond” (*suavem societatem*) of sexual procreative union. In other words, marriage attains to the level of *maxima amicitia* because it unites the two essential dimensions of human sexuality, procreative and unitive. Aquinas’s qualification of marriage as *aequalis amicitia* and *maxima amicitia* is all the more significant in light of the fact that, as Charles J. Reid observes, canonists and lawyers since the twelfth century had stressed “the sense of obligation [*debitum*; rather than friendship] that bound [married] parties together” (*Power over the Body, Equality in the Family: Rights and Domestic Relations in Medieval Canon Law* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004], 105). At the same time, Reid does explain how “women and men were recognized [in twelfth- and thirteenth-century theology] as spiritual equals, who benefited equally from Christ’s salvific acts. Men and women alike and in equal measure have gained eternal life through Christ’s death and resurrection” (99). For more on male and female equality in Aquinas, see Michael Nolan, “The Aristotelian Background to Aquinas’s Denial that ‘Woman is a Defective Male,’” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 21–69.

As with his teaching on remarriage after divorce, this teaching contains core moral principles that bear significantly on the moral meaning and purpose of human sexuality. I shall enumerate four.

Jesus Is the Center of the Moral Life

First, by amending the sixth commandment (“You shall not commit adultery”) on his own authority (“But I say to you”), Jesus shows that he “understands himself to be the Torah” (represented in this case by the sixth commandment), to quote Pope Benedict XVI.⁹ That this occurs in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7)—“the *magna carta* of Gospel morality,” as John Paul II calls the Sermon (here he follows the opinion of many Fathers and Doctors of the Church, most notably Augustine and Thomas Aquinas)—only amplifies this message.¹⁰ Other statements from Jesus that imply the same would include his proclaiming himself to be “lord of the Sabbath” (Matt 12:8), whereby Jesus places himself above the third commandment (“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”). (An equivalent way of rendering “lord of the Sabbath” would be “lord of the Torah.”) Or when he asserts, “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt 10:37), whereby Jesus ranks himself above the fourth commandment (“Honor your father and mother”).

By anchoring his moral teaching in his own Person, and this before a Jewish audience that viewed moral action as anchored principally in God’s Torah, Jesus places himself at the center of the moral life. Followers of Jesus must adhere to him in the way Jews adhere to the Torah, or, as Benedict puts it, that they form “a new community of disciples founded entirely on him [Jesus].”¹¹ That he telegraphs this message via his condemnation of lustful desires highlights its particular significance in the sexual arena of

⁹ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1, *From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Image, 2007), 110. For support of Benedict’s assertion from the perspective of a Jewish rabbi, whom Benedict cites, see Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 87.

¹⁰ See John Paul II’s encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor*, §15. For Augustine, the Sermon on the Mount marks the “perfect standard of the Christian life . . . [as it offers] all the precepts by which the Christian life is molded.” (*De Sermone Domini in Monte secundum Matthaeum* [*The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount according to Matthew*] 1.1; trans. Denis Cavanagh, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 11 [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1951]). Referring to this passage, Thomas Aquinas adds in *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 108, a. 3: “the Sermon contains the whole process of forming the life of a Christian, whereby man’s interior movements are ordered.”

¹¹ Ratzinger (Benedict), *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1:115.

human life. Jesus himself, in his own Person, is the anchor of the moral life, inclusive of our sexuality. The upshot is clear: living in right relationship with Christ requires morally upright sexual practice.

In brief, the moral teaching of the New Testament turns on the very Person of Christ and on the way we live in relationship with him. We shall examine this principle in greater depth below when we consider how St. Paul makes it the cornerstone of his own moral teaching.

Chastity Safeguards the Meaning and Purpose of Human Sexuality

That Jesus's condemnation of lustful desires appears in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, which again offers what Benedict XVI calls "a comprehensive portrait of the right way to live," signals a second foundational principle for the moral meaning and purpose of human sexuality.¹² Following a pivotal insight provided by St. Paul in Galatians 3:24–25, Thomas Aquinas tags perfection as the defining feature of the Sermon, and thus of New Testament morality, the perfection that comes with attaining the holiness of God: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). Commenting on the Galatians text, Aquinas explains:

Now things may be distinguished . . . as between perfect and imperfect in the same species, for example, a boy and a man, and in this way the divine law is divided into Old and New. Hence the Apostle [in Gal 3:24–25] compares the state of man under the Old Law [or under the Old Testament standard of morality] to that of a child "under a pedagogue," but the state under the New Law [or under the New Testament standard of morality] to that of a full-grown man, who is "no longer under a pedagogue."¹³

Note that some English translations render the Greek term *paidagōgos*—*pedagogus* in the Latin Vulgate that the medieval Scholastics used—not as "pedagogue," but as "disciplinarian," as in the New American Bible, or as "custodian," as in the RSV. Likening this role of "pedagogue" or "disci-

¹² Ratzinger (Benedict), *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1:128.

¹³ *ST* I-II, q. 91, a. 5. Aquinas goes on in the *corpus* to delineate the various ways by which we should understand this "perfection and imperfection." For Aquinas's view on law as ordering us to the moral good (our end) by way of instruction, see his prologue to the treatise on law in the *Summa theologiae* (*ST* I-II, q. 90, prol.). Legislation for the purpose of instruction about the true human good sums up the Thomist doctrine of law.

plinarian” to that of a father issuing commands or “house rules” to his children in echo of Deuteronomy 8:5 (“as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord God disciplines you”), Aquinas continues:

As the father of a family issues different commands to the children and to the adults, so also does the one King, God, in his one kingdom give one law [or moral instruction] to men while they were yet imperfect, and another more perfect law [moral instruction] when, by the preceding law, they had been led to a greater capacity for divine things.¹⁴

Contrary, then, to a Marcion-styled read that would drive a wedge between the Old and New Testaments, Aquinas the Pauline theologian shows how the moral teaching of the two Testaments is fitted to two organically unified stages of moral development, the first to a more child- or adolescent-like (imperfect) stage, and the second to a proper adult-like (perfect) stage. Put simply, salvation history involves a process of moral and spiritual reform. This permits us to look upon the moral teaching of the Old Testament as something suited, say, to those in what we might call “reform school” (and why there is a developing morality even within the Old Testament). The moral teaching of the New Testament is instead suited to those already “reformed” (principally by the grace of Christ, in which, on Aquinas’s account, the New Law of the Gospel consists chiefly).¹⁵ As we hold children to one standard of conduct and adults to another higher standard, so Old Testament morality permits things like polygamy and divorce, whereas New Testament morality does not.

Indeed, in his condemnation of lustful desires, Jesus highlights that in which “perfection” or God-like holiness in sexual practice consists. More than simply adhering to an external list of “dos and don’ts”—*do* respect the fact that God has ordained sex for marriage as a procreative-unitive institution, *do not* act contrary to this—moral perfection means gaining self-mastery over one’s interior life (thoughts and desires), the source of outward action.¹⁶ The person animated by grace strives for mature, interior self-mastery, specifically as regards one’s sexual thoughts and desires.

Appropriating the language of virtue developed in ancient Greek

¹⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 91, a. 5, ad 1; for a fuller treatment of this, see q. 107, a. 1, ad 2.

¹⁵ “The New Law is chiefly the grace itself of the Holy Spirit, which is given to those who believe in Christ” (*ST* I-II, q. 106, a. 1 [see also a. 2]).

¹⁶ For support, see Jacques Dupont, *Marriage et divorce dans l’Évangile* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), 172 and 190.

culture, the Church's common tradition has assigned the term "chastity" to this exercise of self-mastery and balanced regulation of one's sexual urges. If Aquinas is right, as I think he is, in arguing that the Decalogue's proscription of adultery and lust (the sixth and ninth commandments) prompt us to the practice of chastity, then it is especially the case that Jesus enjoins the same in his condemnation of lustful desires (lust is the chief vice opposed to chastity).¹⁷

We can put this more strongly. Since it is one thing to use the language of "covet[ing] your neighbor's wife" (Deut 5:21) to warn against lust, but quite another to resort to the rather jolting language of "adultery of the heart" to accomplish the same, Jesus undeniably seeks to raise the bar. For Aquinas, expressions like this from Jesus, as well as sayings like, "what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles a man" (Matt 15:18), signal how the focus of Gospel morality centers on internal acts, the source of moral action, unlike the Mosaic Law, which tends to focus on external action: "Hence the saying that 'the Old Law restrains the hand, but the New Law controls the mind,'" writes Aquinas, citing Peter Lombard.¹⁸ Further, the purity in heart extolled in the sixth beatitude ("Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" [Matt 5:8]) has traditionally been closely (though not exclusively) associated with sexual purity, that is, with the virtue of chastity, where external sexual practices flow from an interior rectitude, from a "clean heart" (Ps 51:10). Here sensual pleasure is pursued as a means to a higher end. The moral regulation of our sexuality is as much an internal affair as an external one.

The second, and chief, foundational principle embedded in Jesus's condemnation of lustful desires, then, we could put as follows: chastity is the virtue that serves and safeguards the meaning and purpose of human sexuality. By this virtue true sexual freedom is exercised and genuine flourishing in the sexual arena is attained. Joining this with the first principle,

¹⁷ See *ST I-II*, q. 100, a. 11, obj. and ad 3; see also q. 108, a. 3, ad 3, where Aquinas explains: "The moral precepts [of the Old Law] necessarily retained their force under the New Law, because they are of themselves essential to virtue."

¹⁸ "The New Law surpasses the Old Law, since the New Law directs our internal acts. . . . Hence the saying [by Peter Lombard, *Sentences* III, d. 40] that 'the Old Law restrains the hand, but the New Law controls the mind'" (*ST I-II*, q. 91, a. 5). Later, Aquinas adds: "In His doctrine Christ fulfilled the precepts of the (Old) Law . . . by explaining the true sense of the Law. This is clear in the case of murder and adultery, the prohibition of which the Scribes and Pharisees thought referred only to the exterior act: wherefore Our Lord fulfilled the Law by showing that the prohibition extends also to the interior acts of sins." (*ST I-II*, q. 107, a. 2; see also q. 108, a. 3).

we could say that, as regards sexual practice, to live chastely is to live in right relationship with Christ.

Some see in Jesus's stress on internal action the inculcating of a "psychological chastity" or "chastity of soul."¹⁹ But perhaps a better name would be "integrated chastity." By enjoining us to discipline our internal sexual urges and to cease looking upon persons as objects of sexual self-satisfaction, Jesus advances a chastity that pervades or integrates our entire being, a chastity that moves from the inside out, from internal thoughts and desires to external bodily action. Focus on the external act or on legal obligation is insufficient for good moral living.²⁰ The complete shaping of one's moral character requires more. Only by loving the good as befitting the mature adult who does the good for its own sake, in this instance, loving the virtue of chastity for its own sake, will one attain human flourishing in sexual practice.²¹

Marriage as the Normative Good of Human Sexuality

Third, that Jesus tags lustful desires as tantamount to adultery—that "of the heart"—shows that, for him, and over and above the "shock value" that his jolting language may have been meant primarily to convey, nuptiality indeed marks the core meaning of human sexuality. Otherwise, why cast lust as a type of sin against marriage, namely, as a type of adultery? Because human sexuality is ordained for marriage (as a procreative-unitive institution) as to its normative good, all sexual sins, Jesus's teaching here signals, mark an offense against marriage. Sexual sins of whatever sort (lust, remarriage after divorce, contraceptive sex, homoerotic acts, etc.) spurn

¹⁹ See, for instance, Ronald Lawler et al., *Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Summary, Explanation, and Defense* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1985), 26–27.

²⁰ "The [New Testament] . . . follows to a large degree the judgment of [Old Testament] and Israelite preaching and transcends the legalistic practice of later Judaism, which is shown to be inadequate by the word of Jesus"; see Friedrich Hauck and S. Schulz, "πόρνῃ," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 579–95, at 590. See also Servais Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness—God's Way: Living the Beatitudes*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (New York: Society of St. Paul, 1998), 99–100, and 193.

²¹ "The imperfect, who as yet do not possess the habit [*habitus*] of virtue, are directed to perform virtuous acts . . . through the threat of punishment, or the promise of extrinsic rewards, such as honor, riches, and the like. Hence the Old Law, which was given to men who were imperfect, is called the 'law of fear,' since it induces men to observe its commandments by threatening them with penalties. . . . On the other hand, those who possess the habit of virtue are inclined to do virtuous deeds through the love of virtue" (*ST* I-II, q. 107, a. 1, ad 2).

the nuptial meaning of our sexuality. Given Jesus's endorsement of the Old Testament's morality of conjugal love via his appeal to the Genesis creation account, this should not surprise us.

Human Happiness Does Not Circumvent a Life of Moral Rigor

Finally, sounding a strict and harsh tone (more so even than his teaching on remarriage after divorce), this passage highlights a side of Jesus's teaching that currently gets little airplay. Today, the image of Jesus as "non-judgmental" and as a "genial" kind of fellow who soft-pedals on moral choices and lifestyles is dominant. Yet Jesus does not fit so easily into a box. Hardly soft-pedaling on the morality of sexual practices, Jesus not only upholds the moral rigor of the Mosaic Law (itself without parallel in the ancient world); he intensifies and elevates it. He does this both by rescinding the permission for divorce (a concession due to sin) and by extending said rigor to include our internal thoughts and desires. So while Jesus will enjoin his followers in the selfsame Sermon on the Mount to "judge not, so that you may not be judged" (Matt 7:1), this comes just after he has insisted that they not fall into either adultery by remarrying after divorce (Matt 5:32) or adultery of the heart by harboring lustful desires (Matt 5:28). The one who insists that we "judge not" in the very same breath judges certain acts to be evil.

Drawing the capital distinction between persons and moral behavior will help clarify this seeming inconsistency. To condemn or judge the latter does not equate with a condemnation of the former. To be sure, if the harsh-sounding elements of Jesus's moral teaching in the Sermon on the Mount beg for this distinction, we find another episode, this time in John's Gospel, where Jesus resorts to the distinction in even clearer fashion. Asked to pass judgment on a woman caught in adultery, Jesus refuses to condemn the woman, while at the same time instructing her to "sin no more" (John 8:11). In this way, he makes clear his stance on the act itself of adultery. God, in the Person of Jesus, is not indifferent to what we do in our sexual practices, even if he continues to love us unconditionally and to extend his mercy to us as persons. Put more strongly, God desires our happiness, as the Beatitudes make plain ("Blessed, happy, are those who..."), but only as consequent upon a morally upright way of life. The final principle embedded in Jesus's condemnation of lustful desires, then, is that genuine human happiness ensues upon a life of moral rigor; it does not circumvent it.

St. Paul's Vision of the Meaning and Purpose of Human Sexuality

We come to St. Paul. By alerting us to that pivotal Pauline passage which concerns the way the moral teaching of the Old Testament (Old Law) relates to that of the New Testament (New Law), Thomas Aquinas, as we have just seen, opens for us the interpretive key to unlocking the moral teaching not simply of Paul, but of the entire New Testament. More focally, it also unlocks Paul's teaching on the meaning and purpose of human sexuality.

What leads St. Paul to the insight that Christians are called no longer to live like children "under guardians and stewards" (Gal 4:2), but like fully "reformed" mature adults is the centrality of the Person of Christ in the moral life. The Apostle, if we can so put it, puts the thrust of "being holy as God the Father is holy" (see Matt 5:48) in properly relational terms, as Jesus's own teaching implies. St. Paul would have us understand that the baptized believer lives not according to an abstract moral theory or set of ideas, nor to a set of moral imperatives as stipulated by the Torah. Rather, the baptized believer first and foremost lives in a relationship with the Person of Jesus Christ, that is, with God's incarnate Son. By identifying the role of the Torah in the moral life with his own Person (as we saw above) and by proclaiming himself to be "the way" (John 14:6) and "the door" (John 10:9), and by calling us "no longer servants but friends" (John 15:15), Jesus himself invites this relational (Christocentric) approach to the moral life.²²

St. Paul identifies the Person of Christ as the new source of moral action when noting the difference between Christian moral teaching on the one side and Jewish and Greek moral teaching on the other. If Jewish moral teaching places the emphasis on adherence to God's Torah, Greek moral teaching holds up human reason, or natural wisdom, as the principal source of moral action.²³ That the Person of Christ was found guilty by

²² This was a central theme in the pontificate of Benedict XVI, as we see in his public statements: "The happiness you seek, the happiness you have a right to enjoy has a name and a face—Jesus of Nazareth" (Address Welcoming the Young People, World Youth Day, August 18, 2005, Cologne; http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050818_youth-celebration.html); "God [who] has spoken to us [is] not an abstract or hypothetical God, but a real God, a God who exists, who entered history and remains present in history" (General Audience of November 28, 2012, at Vatican Information Service, visnews-en.blogspot.com/2012/11/speaking-about-god-in-our-times.html).

²³ This point is crucial to the sustained argument of Servais Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View*, trans. Michael Sherwin (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 11–17.

and accursed under Jewish law and had the most gruesome and tortuous of Roman executions imposed upon him explains why, in 1 Corinthians 1:23, Paul understands how “scandalous” (to Jews) and “foolish” (to Greeks) it is at first sight to propose such a man as the new center of gravity in the moral life.

On Paul’s account, the implications of this Christocentric relational way of conceiving the moral life are put in the following terms: we must “live to” the Person of Christ (Rom 14:8), “belong to” him (Gal 5:24), and even “put on” this Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, while “mak[ing] no provisions for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:14). Our relationship with the Person of Christ implies a transformation of our moral comportment, inclusive of our sexual practices, in a way that suits the moral maturity of a “reformed” person who acts “no longer as under a pedagogue.”

We shall see in a moment the ample Pauline exhortations making clear what this transformative relationship, this “putting on” of Christ, implies in the sexual arena. But for the moment, we can cite the New Testament scholar N. T. Wright, who, commenting on Paul’s teaching, writes: “Sexual holiness is mandatory, not optional, for followers of Jesus. . . . Sexual holiness isn’t just a ‘rule,’ an arbitrary commandment. It is part of what it means to turn from idols and serve the true and living God. It is part of being a genuine, image-bearing human being . . . [and is] to be built into the Christian DNA from the start.”²⁴

Natural Law in the Moral Teaching of St. Paul (and in the Bible)

Before getting to the key texts, we should point out that St. Paul’s endeavor to center the moral life, inclusive of our sexuality, on our relationship with the Person of Christ does not at the same time reject or downplay human reason as a veritable source of moral action (as the Greek philosophical tradition so honors). On the contrary, reason plays an integral role in the “putting on” of Christ.

It does this principally through the natural law. The Apostle makes this clear at the outset of the Letter to the Romans, where he affirms that the Gentiles, by virtue of “the law . . . written on their hearts,” were able to observe “by nature what the law [of Moses] requires” (Rom 2:14–15). That St. Paul should affirm later in the same epistle that obedience to the moral law, known through the human conscience, does not oppose the effort at “putting on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 13:14) bespeaks the harmony

²⁴ N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 217–18. Wright even insists that the moral meaning of sex marks one of the top three items that St. Paul is most “eager” to expound upon.

between the duty to follow nature and the duty to follow Christ. According to the moral theologian Servais Pinckaers, the Person of Christ and the natural law mark “the two major poles of the moral teaching of St. Paul.”²⁵

The French biblical scholar Ceslas Spicq observes how the role of natural law in St. Paul’s moral teaching is consistent with the New Testament as a whole: “The entire New Testament,” Spicq tells us, “makes use of and presupposes as incontrovertible (the natural law’s) first given; namely, that good is distinct from evil, and that we should do good and avoid evil.”²⁶ For a passage in Jesus, he points to Mark 3:4 (“And he said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?’”). One could also point to Matthew 12:35 (“‘The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil’”), or to Jesus’s appeal to reason and common sense in moral matters, as in Luke 12:57 (“‘And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?’”). For references in St. Paul, Spicq cites Romans 2:9–10 (“There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil . . . but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good”), Romans 16:19 (“I would have you wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil”), and Galatians 6:10 (“let us do good to all men”). “In a sense, nothing is more human,” Spicq concludes, “than New Testament morality. It denounces the same vices and prescribes the same virtues as the Jewish, Greek and Roman moral codes.”²⁷

The biblical scholar Amos N. Wilder extends this further: “We have every right to recognize the equivalent of natural law in the [entire] Bible.”²⁸ Among the many passages he points to for evidence, Genesis

²⁵ Pinckaers, *Morality*, 16.

²⁶ Ceslas Spicq, “La loi naturelle dans Le Nouveau Testament” (appendix 2), in *Théologie morale du Nouveau Testament*, 2 vols. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1965), 1:394–406, at 401 (translation mine). See also his much later *Connaissance et Morale dans la Bible* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985), 50–67 (“La connaissance de la volonté de Dieu par la Loi naturelle, la Tôrâh et la loi positive”), at 56; here Spicq observes (noting an important caveat): “As with any ‘human’ morality, the New Testament reaffirms the first principle of the natural law: do good and avoid evil, though the revulsion of evil and the attachment to good will be made possible only by charity” (translation mine).

²⁷ Spicq, *Théologie morale du Nouveau Testament*, 1:404 (translation mine). For agreement, see C. H. Dodd, “Natural Law in the New Testament,” in *New Testament Studies* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1953), 129–42, at 139.

²⁸ Amos N. Wilder, “Equivalents of Natural Law in the Teaching of Jesus,” *Journal of Religion* 26, no. 2 (1945): 125–35, at 129. See also: Matthew Levering, “God and Natural Law: Reflections on Genesis 22,” *Modern Theology* 24, no. 2 (2008):

1–2 figure prominently. As the scholar Jean-Baptiste Edart confirms, the Genesis creation account “presents a clear vision of the man-woman structure in the act of creation . . . and this divine will or divine law is inscribed in nature.”²⁹ And recall, as seen above, how Jesus himself appeals to Genesis 1–2 in his moral teaching on marriage, and that in so doing he makes an unmistakable, albeit implicit, appeal to the law of nature, to the law that precedes the Torah and which holds authority over the Torah.³⁰

Taking this argument further, Matthew Levering, in his work *Biblical Natural Law*, points out that what we find not only in Genesis but in the entire biblical revelation is a theocentric and teleological account of creation and providence, of God’s ordering wisdom. And to say providential governance or teleological ordering to predetermined ends, particularly in reference to the human being, is to say natural law. We see this when God fashions the human being in view of what Levering terms “goods constitutive of true human flourishing” (such as the union of man and woman in marriage):

The early chapters of Genesis, within a profoundly theocentric context, reveal human beings to be intrinsically teleological, ordered to certain goods constitutive of a flourishing proper to human beings. This aspect of Genesis 1–2 can be overlooked when one views God’s commands as extrinsic rather than intrinsic to the human person. Yet in appealing, with regard to marriage, to “the beginning” (Matt. 19:4, 8), Jesus himself emphasizes the teleological dimension of Genesis 1–2. In Genesis 1–2 God’s commands and actions do not set up extrinsic norms, but rather indicate, in

151–77; Levering, “Knowing What is ‘Natural’: Thomas Aquinas and Luke Timothy Johnson on Romans 1–2,” *Logos* 12, no. 1 (2009): 117–42; Anver M. Emon, Matthew Levering, and David Novak, *Natural Law: A Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Trialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Dodd, “Natural Law in the New Testament,” 135–6; and Cajetan Cuddy, “Thomas Aquinas on the Bible and Morality: The Sacred Scriptures, the Natural Law, and the Hermeneutic of Continuity,” in *Towards a Biblical Thomism: Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology* (Pamplona, ES: Eunsu Press, 2018), 173–97.

²⁹ Innocent Himbaza, Adrien Schenker, and Jean-Baptiste Edart, *The Bible on the Question of Homosexuality*, trans. Benedict Guevin (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 98 (emphasis mine). For agreement, see Dupont, *Mariage et divorce*, 34: “[Divorce] ignores a fundamental law of nature, expressive of the will of the Creator” (translation mine).

³⁰ For support, besides Wilder’s “Equivalents of Natural Law in the Teaching of Jesus,” see Dodd, “Natural Law in the New Testament,” 135–36, and A.-M. Dubarle, *Le péché original dans l’Écriture* (Paris: Édition du Cerf, 1958), 107.

a theocentric fashion, the intrinsic norms that express the goods constitutive of true human flourishing.³¹

Jesus himself, we might add to close these remarks on biblical natural law and as Wilder points out, appeals constantly to God's providential ordering of nature in his use of metaphors and examples: trees, fruits, mustard seeds, foxes, sparrows, ravens, thorns, thistles, weather patterns, lilies, grass, grains of wheat, and so on.³²

A Morality of Conjugal Love

We turn to those texts that allow us to ascertain the Pauline vision of human sexuality. Two texts emerge as especially foundational: 1 Corinthians 7:1–16 and Ephesians 5:21–33. In both we find St. Paul deferring to pre-established authorities as a ground for his own position: in the first, the authority of Jesus “the Lord”; and, in the second, that of Genesis 2. As for the 1 Corinthians passage, St. Paul writes: “To the married I give charge, *not I but the Lord [Jesus]*, that the wife should not separate from her husband . . . and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor 7:10–11). In the second (Ephesians) passage, the Apostle cites directly Genesis 2:24 in his effort to underscore the unitive love of husband and wife: “Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies . . . ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’” (Eph 5:28–31). (Paul of course, in his very appeal to “the Lord,” references indirectly Genesis 1–2 in the 1 Corinthians passage as well, given that Jesus had invoked it in his prohibition of remarriage after divorce.)

The takeaway here is that St. Paul makes his own these two foundational sources, Jesus the Lord and the Genesis creation account, and this sets him “off and running,” as it were, in providing what one biblical scholar affirms is a veritable vision of the meaning and purpose of human sexuality.³³ So if, for instance, Jesus's teaching on marriage and divorce implies that marriage is indissoluble, that it is a holy and sacred union, and that it signifies a friendship of equality, we can affirm the same in St. Paul—and then some (as we shall see).

Paul's appeal to the Genesis creation account in particular, both

³¹ Matthew Levering, *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 60.

³² See Wilder, “Equivalents of Natural Law in the Teaching of Jesus,” 133–34. For agreement, see Spicq, *Théologie morale du Nouveau Testament*, 1:394.

³³ Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 124.

directly and via his invoking Jesus “the Lord,” shows that, for him, there can be no doubt that male–female complementarity, sexual dimorphism, marks a fundamental structure of human nature. Genesis 1–2 set forth the male–female anthropology, expressive of God’s creative design, as normative for human sexual comportment. Put more directly, Genesis 1–2 (in conjunction with natural law) make clear that God has endowed the human family with the gift of sexuality for the joint purposes of procreation and unitive love, and thus for the express purpose of marriage (which alone unites these two orderings). Because this bears on any who share the same sexed design, Paul sees imbedded in the Genesis creation account a universal standard of conduct—“applicable to all people at all times,” to quote Edart.³⁴

Based on the 1 Corinthians and Ephesians passages cited above, then, we can say that at the core of the Pauline vision of human sexuality, that is, at the heart of the effort at “putting on” Christ in the arena of sexual practice, is the principle that marriage acts as the normative good of our sexuality. As with Jesus, St. Paul’s vision of human sexuality could be summed up simply as a morality of conjugal love—though understood in properly relational terms (“belonging to Christ”). For Paul, what renders a sexual act good and holy is the measure by which it respects the unitive and procreative orderings of the marital act. Any sexual act falling short of this will fail to attain what God intends for human sexual practice. Paul’s remarks on sexually immoral behavior, which shall be examined shortly below, make this quite clear.

“A Great Mystery”

There is something more, much more, in the Ephesians passage relative to the Pauline vision of the meaning and direction of human sexuality. In this passage Paul offers a newer understanding of Christian marriage than what one finds either in the Genesis creation account or even in Jesus’s teaching on the indissolubility of marriage (though one could argue it is implicit in the latter). As the Apostle announces it, Christian marriage signifies nothing less than the conjugal union between Christ and the Church: “[Marriage] is a great mystery [*mustērion mega*], and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church” (Eph 5:32). While new, this vision of marriage, we should point out, is at the same time anticipated by the nuptial imagery

³⁴ “The reference to the creation story is the foundation of the universal character of Paul’s judgment [on sexual immorality]. According to him, it is applicable to all people at all times” (Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 124).

that the Old Testament employs to allegorize the soul's union with God (see Song of Songs, Hos 2, Isa 54 and 62, Jer 3, and Ezek 16 and 23).

Rendering *mustērion mega* as *sacramentum magnum*, as does St. Jerome in his Latin Vulgate translation of Ephesians, the Latin tradition has understood Paul's declaration to mean marriage marks a sacrament. (By Jerome's day the Greek Fathers had long since been using the term *mustēria* to designate those Christian rites that the Latin tradition was referring to as *sacramenta*, "sacraments.") This means that marriage, and human sexuality in general, shares in the economy of salvation in the way that is unique to the sacraments.³⁵ Paul's vision of the meaning and purpose of human sexuality should thus be more accurately termed a morality of *redeemed* conjugal love. Here, then, we find ourselves at the summit of Gospel perfection relative to the moral meaning and direction of human sexuality: our sexuality is not merely ordered to marriage; it is ordered to a partaking in our redemption, and thus to a sharing in our eternal glory.

It goes without saying that St. Paul could affirm the goodness and holiness, not to mention indissolubility, of Christian marriage in no stronger terms than by identifying it with the conjugal love of Christ and the Church. If it is impossible to desecrate or tear asunder the conjugal bond between Christ and his Bride the Church, so likewise the conjugal bond of Christian husband and wife.

The Marriage "Debt"

Mindful that married partners "have power/dominion" (*exousiazō*) not over their own bodies but over each other's bodies, St. Paul enjoins his readers in the same First Corinthians passage: "Let the husband render the debt [*opheilēn*] to his wife, and the wife also in like manner to her husband" (1 Cor 7:3–4). Sometimes *opheilēn* is translated in English as "conjugal rights," as in the RSV: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband." Whatever one's preferred translation, at bottom the marriage "debt" signifies that married partners have the moral obligation to grant conjugal intercourse to each other, within the bounds of reason. While it was standard for medieval theologians to include consideration of the marriage debt in their treatment of marriage, scholars today not infrequently snicker at the notion of "debt" for the archaic and legalistic stamp it puts on marriage, and disre-

³⁵ For more on the meaning of marriage as a sacrament, see my essay, "The Redemption and Divinization of Human Sexuality through the Sacrament of Marriage: A Thomistic Approach," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 10, no. 2 (2012): 383–413.

gard it as an excusable “hiccup” in the Pauline corpus.³⁶

However, on this matter we need not see the marriage debt as necessarily out of step with contemporary “personalist” approaches to human sexuality in general and to marriage in particular. This Pauline notion, in fact, fits squarely with the indissoluble nature of marriage, that is, with marriage as a true unity. When, through marriage, a man and a woman bind themselves in life-long love and fidelity to each other, they become united in body and soul (“one flesh”). They become “another self,” to use Aristotle’s language of friendship, in the deepest and most intimate sense of the term. That is, their entire persons, including their bodies and their souls, belong to each other. Each has a claim on the other’s body and soul, so to speak, as on his/her very person (a sense that the words of marital consent that were in use in the thirteenth century—“I take you as mine,” which both bride and bridegroom pronounced—evoked).³⁷ Spouses enjoy a kind of ownership over each other’s bodies.

To speak of “debt” is to speak of what is owed, due, on the basis of fundamental equality in personal dignity, as Aquinas argues when discussing the matter.³⁸ Marriage debt (conjugal rights) in no case means the granting of free license to each spouse, or to expect sex “on demand,” to quote one scholar, as if sexual intimacy with each other could be taken for granted, or as if spouses could treat each other’s bodies as objects, as a kind of plaything for one’s amusement.³⁹ Rather, each spouse is due the total gift of body and soul of the other as another self in the deepest bonds of highest friendship. Granted, the medievals see the rendering of the marriage debt largely as a kind of legal transaction and as an antidote to concupiscence,

³⁶ Aquinas devotes an entire article to the marriage debt (*debitum* in Latin) in *ST* Suppl., q. 64 (this is pulled from *In IV sent.*, d. 32, q. 1). Reid (*Power over the Body*, 105) notes how canonists and lawyers since the twelfth century had stressed “the sense of obligation (*debitum*) that bound [married] parties together.” Raymond of Peñafort, who was himself a thirteenth-century teacher of canon law, gives central treatment to the notion of the marriage debt in his *Summa on Marriage* (see, e.g., title II, nos. 9–11 [trans. Payer, 23–24]). For a modern treatment of it, see John C. Ford and Gerald Kelly, *Contemporary Moral Theology*, vol. 2, *Marriage Questions* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963), 63–74.

³⁷ We know “I take you as mine” were the “customary words” of marital consent in the thirteenth century from the testimony of Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa on Marriage*, title II, no. 2 (trans. Payer, 20).

³⁸ *ST* Suppl., q. 64, a. 5 (taken from *In IV sent.*, d. 32, q. 1, a. 3).

³⁹ The view that the marriage debt implies that sex is to be provided “on demand” comes from Jean Porter, “The Natural Law and Innovative Forms of Marriage: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 30, no. 2 (2010): 79–97, at 87.

or, as St. Thomas explains, as an assuagement of sexual desire.⁴⁰ But this does not mean a more “personalist” take on the marriage debt, whereby it signifies the offering of one’s body and soul in the total gift of self, is absent from such a view.

“Shun *Porneia*”

To reiterate, Paul’s hetero-normative vision of human sexuality implies that any sexual act that falls outside marriage in its procreative and unitive structure falls short of what God intends for our sexuality. As such, it remains at variance with the life that “belongs to” or “puts on” Christ. Sexual conduct which befits our “putting on” Christ demands that we honor marriage as the normative good of our sexuality. The Letter to the Hebrews, whose doctrine, biblical scholars confirm, relates closely to Paul’s, puts it succinctly: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled” (Heb 13:4).

Such defilement takes many forms, but for Paul the catchword that encompasses all of them is *porneia*, as when he exhorts us to “shun *porneia*” (1 Cor 6:18) and to “put to death *porneia*” (Col 3:5). Difficult to translate, *porneia* is best rendered, generally, as sexual immorality or unchaste action (“living according to the flesh,” as Rom 8:12 puts it), or, more precisely, as any sexual act, whether of an extramarital or unnatural sort, that dishonors marriage in its procreative-unitive nature.⁴¹

So when Paul writes to the Christian community in Corinth that “the body is not meant for *porneia*” (1 Cor 6:13), what he means is the body is meant for no other form of sexual intimacy than that between husband and wife, in an embrace of procreative-unitive love. To “shun *porneia*” means to shun those sexual practices that seek pleasure as the ultimate aim, to shun those sexual acts that oppose or divide in any way the procreative and unitive orderings of the marital embrace. Paul enumerates several specific examples of this, as we shall see in a moment.

By exhorting us to shun general unchaste conduct [*porneia*], Paul approximates closely Jesus’s injunction, bound up with his condemnation of “adultery of the heart” (Matt 5:27–28), to exercise internal self-mastery

⁴⁰ *ST Suppl.*, q. 64, a. 1, sc (taken from *In IV sent.*, d. 32, q. 1, a. 1, sc). Aquinas adds in q. 64, a. 9 ad 1 (*In IV Sent.*, d. 32, q. 1, a. 5, q1a. 3, ad 1): “It is ordained by God, on account of the weakness of the flesh [*propter lubricum carnis*], that the debt must always be paid to the one who asks lest he be afforded an occasion of sin.”

⁴¹ For *porneia* signifying general unchaste behavior, see Ceslas Spicq, *Théologie morale du Nouveau Testament*, vol. 2, 555, n. 2. According to Hauck and Schulz (“πόρνη” 6:590), *porneia* signifies “all extra-marital and unnatural intercourse.”

over our sexual urges. He exhorts us to inculcate the virtue of chastity, all in view of heeding the fundamental meaning and purpose of our sexuality.

***Porneia* as an “Abomination of Desolation”**

Turning up the heat in his same first letter to the ancient Corinthian Christians, Paul insists that to engage in *porneia* is to profane our very own bodies, which are living temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:18–19). No doubt St. Paul intends in this connection to link unchaste conduct with the infamous “abomination of desolation” mentioned in 2 Maccabees (Wright postulates that 1–2 Macc loomed large in the mind of Paul).⁴² By this abomination of desolation, the Jewish temple in Jerusalem was profaned through “pagan debauchery,” through “sexual intercourse with (prostitutes) in the sacred precincts,” and through “other indecencies” (see 2 Macc 6:3–7). Whenever we, for our part, descend to the ranks of unchaste action and cross the line of sexual impropriety, Paul wishes us to understand, we desecrate anew our very own bodies. To be sure, not made of stone but of living flesh and blood, and in which dwells, truly, God’s Spirit, our bodies are temples of an exceedingly higher sort. Sexual sins, unchaste actions, are a type of personal abomination of desolation that we repeat over and over. Put a bit differently, since marriage elevates sex to the sacred and holy, any sexual act that falls short of the procreative-uni-tive nature of the marital embrace is not simply evil, it is gravely evil, as it profanes the sacred, the holy, and not merely “the good.” “So glorify God in your body,” Paul concludes (1 Cor 6:20).

Little wonder, then, that Paul, holding the moral duty of abstaining from *porneia* in mind, should exhort us: to “crucif[y] the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24); to “make no provisions for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:14); to “shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Phil 2:15); to “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God . . . [And] not to be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of [our] mind” (Rom 12:1–2).

“Running Headlong with Impunity into Lust, Unbridled and Unrestrained”

Make no mistake. St. Paul’s exhortation to “shun [and] put to death *porneia*” was no small order for the “crooked and perverse [pagan] generation” of his Greco-Roman day (nor, of course, for our own culture, given the “new philosophy of sexuality” that suffuses it, to cite Pope Benedict

⁴² Wright, *Paul*, 32–34.

XVI⁴³). If the ancient Jews “remained aloof from [unnatural sexual] vices,” to quote one ancient Jewish source,⁴⁴ then even more so were the early Christians in their heeding Paul’s call for sexual purity.

Indeed, the Greco-Roman world, operating on the principle that sexual intimacy in any form, whether of a homoerotic or heterosexual sort, was “just as necessary and justifiable as eating and drinking,” as one scholarly authority puts it, was steeped in sexual depravity.⁴⁵ So much so that the Roman poet Horace felt compelled to denounce the “prolific wickedness” of his day for having “defiled the marriage bed and family and home” (*Odes* 3.6). Even the Roman Emperor Augustus, passing the Julian laws supporting the family, intervened in the effort at shoring up the sexual morals of Roman culture. And we know from the erotic frescoes found on the brothel walls of the ancient city of Pompeii that the ancient Romans favored a diverse sort of deviant sexual practices.

Other ancient Christian sources attest to the same. The Christian philosopher Aristides († ca.150) says the Greeks and Romans of his day were given to “base [sexual] practices” and to “monstrous impurity,” while Epiphanius († 403) rebuffs the pagans for their sexual “carousing,” a carousing that St. Jerome († 420) insists was tantamount to “running headlong with impunity into lust, unbridled and unrestrained.”⁴⁶ John

⁴³ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Members of the Roman Curia, December 21, 2012 (*Vatican Information Service*, visnews-en.blogspot.com/2012/12/family-dialogue-new-evangelisation.html). By “new philosophy of sexuality,” Benedict means the view where “sex is no longer [seen as] a given element of nature . . . [but merely as] a social role we choose for ourselves.” Even in 1930, Pope Pius XI denounced the “new and utterly perverse morality” of his day (*Casti Connubii*, Encyclical Letter on Christian Marriage, §3).

⁴⁴ This assertion comes from the *Epistle of Aristeeas*, a Jewish account from the second century BC; the larger passage reads: “Entire countries and cities [in the pagan world] pride themselves because of (their rampant homosexuality). . . . They [further] sully themselves (through incest). . . . As for us [Jews], we have remained aloof from these vices [of homosexual relations and incest]” (*Lettre d’Aristée à Philocrate*, no. 152, trans. A. Pelletier, *Sources chrétiennes* 89 [Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1962], 175; cited in Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 85).

⁴⁵ Hauck and Schulz, “πόρνῆ,” 6:582.

⁴⁶ Aristides, *Apology* 17; Epiphanius, *Panarion* [*Adversus haereses Panarium*] 51.30 (PG, 41: 941); and Jerome, *Epistle* 77, no. 3 (PL 22: 691). The fuller passages from Aristides’s *Apology* (a work that was addressed to the Roman Emperor Hadrian), deserves to be quoted. In bk. 15 we read: “Christians know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and of earth . . . from whom they received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe in hope and expectation of the world which is to come. Wherefore they do not commit adultery nor

Chrysostom († 407) censures the larger pagan culture for its “lasciviousness and unchasteness,” “indecent,” “harlotry,” and “sexual wantonness,” the origin of which he attributes to the devil.⁴⁷

So when St. Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus that they “must no longer live as the Gentiles do” (Eph 4:17), what he holds first and foremost in mind is sexual immorality (*porneia*). If the duty to shun sexual immorality was true of ancient Judaism, and it certainly was (Wright identifies sexual immorality as “one of the major differences between Jewish and pagan lifestyles”), then all the more was it true of ancient Christianity—as it still is today.⁴⁸

Homosexuality

Concrete examples of *porneia* in the Pauline corpus are manifold. In general, they are either of an extramarital or of an unnatural sexual sort. For the first, we find St. Paul censuring premarital sex/fornication (*koitais*), lust/disordered desire (*orexis, epithumia*) or erotic passion (*pathos*), impurity (*akatharsia*), adultery (*moicheia*), orgies (*kōmois*), prostitution (*pornē*), and incest, to name the best-known (see Rom 1:27; 13:13–14; 1 Cor 5:1ff; 1 Cor 6:9, 15, Col 3:5, and 1 Thess 4:3–5).

Romans 1:26–27

As for unnatural sexual practices, homoerotic conduct stands out as the most prominent form of this type of *porneia* enumerated by St. Paul—and certainly the most controversial from a modern standpoint.⁴⁹ The

fornication . . . and (Christian) women, O King [Hadrian], are pure as virgins, and their daughters are modest; and (Christian) men keep themselves from every unlawful union and from all uncleanness, in the hope of a recompense to come in the other world.” Later in bk. 17 he adds: “Now the Greeks, O King [Hadrian], as they follow base practices in intercourse with males, and a mother and a sister and a daughter, impute their monstrous impurity in turn to the Christians. But the Christians are just and good, and the truth is set before their eyes.” Quotations are from the online English translation of D. M. Kay (earlychristianwritings.com/text/aristides-kay.html).

⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, *In epistolam ad Colossenses Homelia 12* [Homily 12 on Colossians, on Col 4:18; PG 62: 585]; English translation in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, ser. 1, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1890), 566–72 (available online at newadvent.org/fathers/230312.htm).

⁴⁸ Wright, *Paul*, 167.

⁴⁹ “In Greek, *porneia* . . . refers implicitly to all of the commandments in Leviticus 18–20, and therefore to homosexual acts [among other specific acts]” (Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 117n65).

Pauline censure of homoerotic practices occurs in three key passages. The first comes in Romans 1:26–27, where St. Paul employs the prepositional phrase “against nature” (*para physin*) to denounce homosexual activity (“men committing shameless acts with men” and “women exchang[ing] natural relations for ones against nature”). From the pen of Paul, the phrase *para physin* is particularly potent, carrying with it the full weight of what the natural law and the male–female anthropology of Genesis 1–2 would accord it. As Edart tells us, the phrase *para physin* relays Paul’s view “that sexual differentiation is willed by the Creator, and that it is a fundamental structure of the human being, a characteristic that is negated in the homosexual act.”⁵⁰

On Aquinas’s reading of this passage, homosexual conduct is especially “deformed” (*deformatitis*), since from it “generation cannot follow.” Performed “not with the proper sex [*non debitum sexum*], as male with male or female with female, as the Apostle says in Rom 1:26–27,” and so failing to observe what is “suitable [*convenit*] for the human species,” it qualifies as a sin *contra naturam* (the Latin equivalent of *para physin*).⁵¹

1 Corinthians 6:9–10

St. Paul delivers his second condemnation of homosexual conduct in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10: “Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral [*pornoi*], nor idolaters, nor adulterers [*moichoi*], nor homosexuals [*malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*] . . . will inherit the kingdom of God.” While the RSV here, along with most translations, collapses the two terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* into the one “homosexuals,” this is for convenience’ sake. Paul

⁵⁰ Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 92; see also 97–98: “The context of Rom. 1:19–23 invites us to see in this nature [to which Paul appeals in vv. 26–27] the order willed by God and seen in his creation. From this perspective, ‘against nature’ can legitimately be understood with reference to Genesis 1...They [homosexual relations] are called ‘against nature’ because they are contrary to the plan of the Creator since they ‘unite’ two people of the same sex.” Joseph A. Fitzmyer agrees: “‘Nature’ expresses for (Paul) the order intended by the Creator, the order that is manifest in God’s creation or, specifically in this case, the order seen in the function of sexual organs themselves, which were ordained for an expression of love between man and woman and for the procreation of children” (*Romans*, Anchor Bible 33 [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 286n26).

⁵¹ *ST II-II*, q. 154, a. 11; here Aquinas expressly lists masturbation (“procuring ejaculation without sexual union for the sake of sexual pleasure”), bestiality (“copulating with a thing not of the same species”), and sodomy as examples of sins *contra naturam*. In *SCG III*, ch. 122, Aquinas defines “sins against nature [*contra naturam*]” as “any emission of semen [from which] generation cannot follow,” and “such would be any emission of semen apart from the natural union of male and female.”

employs these two terms to describe the nature of the male homosexual act in somewhat graphic language. Difficult to translate, *malakos* means “soft” or “effeminate one,” though here it is best rendered as “the man who desires to be penetrated.” *Arsenokoitēs*, a term that Paul seems to be the first to have employed in all of Greek literature, literally means “male bedder” or “male seeder,” that is, one who beds/seeds a male. In other words, by these terms “Paul has simply laid out the active and passive roles in a homosexual act,” to quote Edart (with *arsenokoitēs* obviously corresponding to the active role and *malakos* to the passive role).⁵² As such, homoerotic activity stands in sharp contrast to the nature of that sexual act which alone is expressive of the creative will of God, namely, the procreative-unitive union of man and woman.

There is more to Paul’s use of *arsenokoitēs*. The biblical scholar Adrien Schenker reminds us that, “as a Pharisee and one who is knowledgeable in the Torah, Paul could not ignore the weight of Leviticus 18 and 20.”⁵³ Specifically, Schenker is referring to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, wherein we find homosexual conduct condemned in the severest of terms, as a *tô‘ēbā*: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed a *tô‘ēbā*.” Usually translated as “abomination,” *tô‘ēbā* connotes as well “going badly astray” or “repugnant filth.”⁵⁴ The position of Leviticus, indeed, of the entire Torah itself, on homoerotic practice is thus harsh and uncompromising.⁵⁵

⁵² Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 78; see 74–80 for a comprehensive treatment of the meaning and contextual background of *malakos* and *arsenokoitēs*. See also Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 508; and *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. [BDAG], ed. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 135 (*arsenokoitēs*) and 619 (*malakos*).

⁵³ Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 7.

⁵⁴ For the various meanings of *tô‘ēbā*, see Anthony Esolen, “God Is Not the Author of Confusion,” *Crisis Magazine*, December 21, 2016 (crisismagazine.com/2016/god-not-author-confusion).

⁵⁵ “These passages [from Leviticus on homosexual practice] implicate the entire Pentateuch [or Torah]” (Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 47–48). Besides Lev 18:22 and 20:13, there is also, of course, Gen 19:1–29 (especially v. 5), where homoerotic practice (along with the refusal of hospitality) is counted among the chief sins of Sodom (whence the term Sodomy) and a chief reason for this city’s ensuing destruction. We find an almost identical Sodom story, the infamy of Gibeah, recounted in Judg 19:11–25. On the Sodom and Gibeah stories, Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart (*The Bible on Homosexuality*, 41–42) observe: “The story [of Sodom] highlights the refusal of hospitality. This refusal

So when we come to the Septuagint's Greek renderings of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, the key terms used to describe the homosexual act are *arsenos* ("male") and *koitēn* ("bed" or "sleep"), as in Leviticus 20:13: "Whoever sleeps with a man [*arsenos*] as one sleeps [*koitēn*] with a woman, it is an abomination." Sticking closely to this language of the Septuagint, Paul pens the neologism *arsenokoitēs* as a way of continuing in the line of Leviticus on the gravely immoral nature of homosexual relations.⁵⁶ (The two rabbinic Talmuds do much the same thing when, drawing upon the Hebrew text of Lev 18:22 and 20:13, they use the Hebrew phrase "to sleep with a male," *miškab zākūr*, to signify homosexual conduct.)⁵⁷ Paul's use of *arsenokoitēs*, in other words, draws direct allusion to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, and in so doing gives Christian echo of the Torah's censure of homosexual relations as a *tō'ēbā* (abomination, repugnant filth).

1 Timothy 1:8–10

The third and last Pauline condemnation of homoerotic activity appears in 1 Timothy 1:8–10: "The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for . . . the sexually immoral [*pornoi*] [and] for active homosexuals [*arse-*

is expressed by a violation of the home, the intention of committing an act of a homosexual nature on a stranger, apparently to make him submit. . . . If we want to stop at homosexuality, while keeping in mind the proper intention of these two texts [Gen 19 and Judges 19], we could say that homosexual behavior is part of what constitutes the sins of the inhabitants of Sodom as well as those of the men of Gibeah. It can also be said that the two texts condemn this kind of behavior." This reading stands against attempts by numerous scholars to restrict the reason for Sodom's destruction exclusively to the refusal of hospitality (see, for instance, Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 74n14, who also says it might be homosexual *rape* that is condemned, even though the passage does not contain the Hebrew term for rape). For agreement with Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, see P. Dickson, "Response: Does the Hebrew Bible Have Anything to Say about Homosexuality?" *Old Testament Essays* 15 (2002), 350–67, and Lynne C. Boughton, "Biblical Texts and Homosexuality: A Response to John Boswell," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58 (1992): 141–53, at 143.

⁵⁶ See Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 77. Thus, John Boswell (*Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980], 102) ignores the plain Pauline evidence (and the ensuing patristic witness) when he opines, "Levitical proscriptions were not likely to have much effect on early Christianity."

⁵⁷ For support of the rabbinic usage, Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart cite, from the Babylonian Talmud, b. Sanh. 54a, b. šab. 17b, and b. Sukkah 29a, and from the Jerusalem Talmud, y. Ber. 9:50, 13c (*The Bible on Homosexuality*, 77).

nokoitai].” By offering a repeat use of the term *arsenokoitēs*, Paul hearkens anew to the teaching of the Torah that homosexual relations constitute an “abomination,” a *tô ʿēbā*; they pervert the nature of the sexual act established by God (see Gen 1–2).

Condemning the Sin but Not the Sinner

If the language that St. Paul unloads on those who engage in homosexual relations in the three forgoing passages strikes the modern reader as particularly harsh, if not embarrassingly harsh, we must bear in mind that it is the conduct itself that he condemns, not the persons themselves as persons. Recall the distinction between persons and moral behavior that we noted above in reference to Jesus’s condemnation of adultery of the heart and which is nowhere more pertinent than here. Condemning moral behavior does not equate with condemning persons. Jesus again provides the model for this when he says to the woman caught in adultery, “neither do I condemn you,” while at the same time instructing this woman to “sin no more,” thereby making clear his stance on the conduct itself of adultery (see John 8:11). We must do the same when treating the Pauline position on homosexuality: “It is only homosexual acts and the desires at their origin that are condemned,” Edart observes, “[since o]nly acts and desires to which one fully consents can be qualified as good or evil.”⁵⁸

Nor should we think St. Paul is singling out homosexual conduct for excessively disproportionate censure. To repeat, he comes down severely on all forms of *porneia*, of which homoerotic conduct is simply one (albeit attention-catching) type. As was mentioned above, Paul’s statement, “the body is not meant for *porneia*” (1 Cor 6:13), means the body is meant for no other form of sexual intimacy than that between husband and wife, in an embrace of procreative-unitive love.

The Silence of Jesus on Homosexuality

We may wonder, of course, why Paul should target by name homoerotic conduct when Jesus himself, at least as far as the written record serves, remains silent on the matter. To answer, recall that Paul, in his own words, preached to a “crooked and perverse generation” of pagan Gentiles (Phil 2:15) whose “prolific wickedness” had “defiled the marriage bed and family and home,” to quote again the Roman poet Horace. But given the clear teaching of the Torah, especially Leviticus, on the gravely immoral nature of homosexual conduct, not to mention the Sodom and Gibeah stories (Gen 19:1–29 and Judg 19:11–25) or the teaching of Genesis on

⁵⁸ Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 106.

the male–female complement as normative for sexual love (to which Jesus appeals in his teaching on marriage and divorce), the Jews by Jesus’s day had, according to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, been “set apart from the unnatural sexual practices” that were otherwise prevalent among the pagan Gentiles.⁵⁹ Another Jewish account from the second century BC also testifies that, with regard to unnatural sexual practices, the ancient Jews “remained aloof from these vices.”⁶⁰ Hence, Schenker insists that sexual purity marks “the *distinctive* behavior of the Israelites in the midst of all the nations of the earth” (recall that Wright argues the same).⁶¹

It should not astonish us, then, that Jesus, who was sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24), utters nary a word on homosexual conduct, nor on some of the other sexual immoralities condemned in Leviticus (incest, bestiality). Put simply, it was not an issue for the Jewish audience of his day (“no social visibility” is how Edart characterizes the issue of homosexuality in Jesus’s Jewish milieu⁶²). Seen in this light, Jesus’s silence on the issue should hardly be taken somehow as a tacit departure from Leviticus and Genesis 19 on the gravely immoral nature of homosexual acts, as some (e.g., James Martin, S.J.) would like to suggest.⁶³

Indeed, recall that Jesus departs from the moral rigors of the Torah, at least as regards sexual matters, only in order to intensify and elevate these rigors. He does away with the Mosaic right to divorce because, as he says, it marks a concession to sin (a doing away that left his Jewish interlocutors

⁵⁹ Josephus’s remark comes in *Contra Apionem*, quoted in Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 286. John L. McKenzie adds: “The morality of sex is far more rigorous in Israel than among its neighbors” (“Aspects of Old Testament Thought,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990], 1284–315, at 1304).

⁶⁰ See note 44 above for *Epistle of Aristaeas*, no. 152.

⁶¹ Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 48 (emphasis theirs).

⁶² “Jesus’ silence on this matter [of homosexual acts] can only be interpreted as reflecting agreement with the tradition of Israel on this point. Besides, it is highly probable that he never directly came across this question in the Jewish milieu, since, given the existing prohibition, this behavior had no social visibility” (Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 114).

⁶³ In a video interview, James Martin, S.J., states: “In his long ministry, his three-year public ministry, Jesus says nothing about the topic [of homosexuality]” (“James Martin: Jesus Says Nothing about Homosexuality,” “Facebook Live” video, June 8, 2017, youtube.com/watch?v=cXAXlxAdBGQ). The entirety of this video makes clear that Martin does indeed intend to suggest such a tacit demurral on Jesus’s part. Father Martin, of course, is the author of *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity*, revised and expanded (New York: HarperOne, 2018).

so stunned that they queried whether celibacy would be preferable to marriage). And in his signature Sermon on the Mount, Edart reminds us, Jesus goes “to the root of the law’s demands” and otherwise “reaffirms the permanent validity of the Decalogue and takes no liberties with the moral law,” or with what Wilder calls “the norms themselves [of the Torah].”⁶⁴ For these reasons, we can safely assume that had Jesus discharged his mind on homoerotic practice, his language would have approximated Paul’s.

We can say more. If Jesus opposed divorce on the grounds that, as he says, “from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’” (Mark 10:6), it would have been exceedingly incongruous, to say the least, if he should not also have opposed homoerotic relationships on the same grounds, namely, that they violate the male–female structure (dimorphic complementarity) of our sexuality: “From the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’” Granted, the image of a “non-judgmental” and “tolerant” Jesus who stands ready to accept one’s sexual choices and lifestyles dominates today’s popular imagination, as when gay-rights demonstrators hold up rainbow-adorned posters that ask rhetorically, “What Would Jesus Do?” No matter if social pressure or convenience may incline us to lay aside the textual evidence in the interests of advancing a popular, politically correct image of Jesus, we must remain faithful to the written record. And the textual evidence, whereby Jesus resorts to the strongest language possible in raising the bar on sexual morals that extends to our very thoughts and desires, allows for one conclusion: it is highly improbable to suppose that, on the issue of homoerotic conduct, Jesus would move in a more lax direction. Not only would this be fundamentally out of step for him, it would pit him in direct opposition to the clear, unbending teaching of the Book of Leviticus, and thus to the hetero-normative moral teaching of the entire Torah.

What would Jesus do, then, if hypothetically confronted with persons committed to homosexual conduct? At the very least, we could expect him to have uttered, without personal condemnation, that same phrase he addressed to the woman caught in adultery: “sin no more.”

⁶⁴ Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 124–25. Wilder adds: “[Jesus’s change with regard to the Mosaic Law] did not carry with it the nullification of the moral aspects of the Torah. It is the legalistic character of the law which is dissolved, . . . not the norms themselves” (“Equivalents of Natural Law,” 126–27). For more on this, see Boughton, “Biblical Texts and Homosexuality,” 147–48.

A “Gravely Erroneous” Read on the Pauline Stance on Homosexuality

Given today’s ever-growing cultural acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle, we should not find it surprising that recent scholarship has witnessed myriad attempts either to dismiss outright or to soften the otherwise moral juggernaut of the Pauline condemnations of homoerotic conduct. Usually these efforts are put forward on the following two grounds: first, that the so-called homosexual “orientation,” and by extension loving, stable homosexual relationships, were unknown in the ancient world, with the result that what Paul condemns was more pederasty or abusive/violent sex (such as between master and slave) or prostitution than committed homosexual relationships as we understand them today;⁶⁵ second, that the meaning of these passages (as well as those in the Old Testament) remains obscure and, in any case, ever-evolving in light of cultural and historical change and modern scientific findings, if not eclipsed by these changes and findings.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Martin opines: “Certainly in Old Testament times they didn’t understand the phenomenon of homosexuality and bisexuality, I would say, as we do today” (“Jesus Says Nothing about Homosexuality”). Martin’s remarks make clear that he includes the New Testament in this (see the following note). For others arguing the same, see: Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 84; Gerald Coleman, “The Vatican Statement on Homosexuality,” *Theological Studies* 48 (1987): 727–34, at 728–29; Adriano Oliva, *Amours: l’Église, les divorcés remariés, les couples homosexuels* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2015); David G. Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together: The Christian Case for Gay Marriage* (New York: Harper, 2006), 93; Martii Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998); and Walter Wink, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” in *Homosexuality and the Christian Faith: Question of Conscience for the Churches*, ed. Walter Wink (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 33–49.

⁶⁶ Martin argues: “All these Bible passages [condemning homosexuality] that people throw at you, I think, really need to be understood in their historical context, right? I mean, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and even the stuff brought up in the New Testament where Paul talks about it, you know, once or twice, has to be understood in the historical context” (“Jesus Says Nothing about Homosexuality”). At one level, of course, Martin is correct, but his video and his book, *Building a Bridge*, make clear that his effort is to move beyond the biblical condemnation of homosexual conduct. For others arguing this position, see Garry Gutting (professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame), “Unraveling the Church Ban on Gay Sex,” op-ed in *The New York Times*, March 12, 2015; (opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/03/12/unraveling-the-church-ban-on-gay-sex/?_r=2). This position was also put forward by a homosexually active Episcopal priest at a panel discussion on same-sex marriage that I participated in at Rhode Island College in Providence, RI, in March of 2009. And it is the implicit position of Daniel A. Helminiak: “I do not presume the Bible provides the last word on sexual ethics. In my mind, the matter is more complicated than that. Historical, cultural, phil-

One well-known author, John Boswell, sums up the upshot of these efforts when he declares that the Bible takes “no demonstrable position” on sexual intimacy between members of the same sex within the context of a stable, affirming relationship.⁶⁷ Another, Daniel A. Helminiak, is even more unabashed: “To me this seems to be fact: the Bible supplies no real basis for the condemnation of homosexuality. . . . Taken on its own terms and in its own time, the Bible nowhere condemns homosexuality as we know it today.”⁶⁸ These conclusions find recycled airplay in those who appeal to them as authoritatively definitive, and it is not uncommon even to find high-ranking churchmen calling for a re-examination of the biblical teaching on homosexuality.⁶⁹

Boswell’s and Helminiak’s contentions notwithstanding, other biblical scholars (in unison with countless Fathers and Doctors of the Church) confirm that what Paul condemns is indeed what his words would on the

osophical, psychological, sociological, medical, spiritual and personal factors all come to bear on the matter” (*What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* [Tajique, NM: Alamo Square Press, 2000], “Preface to First Edition”).

⁶⁷ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, 92. For an outlining of these various arguments dismissing the Pauline condemnation of homosexual practice, see Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality in the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 74–75, and Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 81–83.

⁶⁸ Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, “Preface to First Edition” and “Preface to Millennium Edition.” For agreement, see Aaron Milavec, *What Jesus Would Say to Same-Sex Couples: Ratzinger’s Disordered Thoughts on Homosexuality + Nonviolent Resistance to the Christian Taliban* (Amazon Press, 2019). According to Krzysztof Charamsa, a Polish priest who held positions at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the International Theological Commission before being removed after “coming out” as gay: “The Bible never speaks about homosexuality as we know it today. . . . The Bible never condemns homosexuals, just as it never condemns heterosexuals, on the basis of their sexual orientation” (Andrea Miluzzo, “Interview with Krzysztof Charamsa after his coming out,” *LGBT New Italia*, January 8, 2016, trans. Flavia Viglione, lgbtnewsitalia.com/2016-01-08-interview-with-krzysztof-charamsa-after-his-coming-out-in-the-vatican-ive-never-read-anything-about-what-we-condemn-as-gender-ideology). For Scroggs, the Old Testament expresses “indifference” to homosexual acts (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 70).

⁶⁹ Thus, for instance, the afore-cited op-ed piece in *The New York Times*, “Unraveling the Church Ban on Gay Sex,” by Gutting, a professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. For an example of the call to re-examine the biblical teaching on homosexuality by those holding high office in the Church, see the comments of Bishop Franz-Josef Overbeck of Essen, Germany, in the February 2019 issue of the German theological monthly *Herder Korrespondenz*.

face of them suggest.⁷⁰ These scholars assure us that St. Paul stands strictly in line with the teaching of the Torah on the inherently immoral nature of homosexual conduct, as based especially upon Leviticus, upon the Sodom and Gibeah stories, and upon the male–female (natural-law) anthropology of Genesis. The multiple efforts to lay aside Paul’s condemnations of homosexual acts, these scholars argue, amount in the final analysis to revisionist attempts at evading the plain sense of these passages, even if said attempts are often not without erudite apparatus (Boswell’s historical studies, in particular, have been roundly debunked).⁷¹

If the Bible honors marriage, the life-long union of man and woman as expressive of God’s creative design, homosexual unions receive no such honor. They receive instead, without exception, the severest of censures. This is an undeniable and inescapable fact. Resorting to gerrymandering exegesis that stretches the imagination and which ends up sounding like an endorsement of the sexual revolution or of the gay-rights movement as a way of circumventing this reality will not do. St. Paul, to repeat, enjoins us “not to be conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2). So when confronted with a biblical exegesis that proposes a morality that smells of “conforming to the world,” we can safely assume we are no longer in the realm of biblical morality.

Perhaps modern sensibilities would have preferred St. Paul to have distanced himself and his vision of the Christian moral life from the harsh tone of Leviticus, as of the entire Old Testament precedent. But he does not. He opts for the opposite approach, and no amount of revisionist

⁷⁰ These scholars would include, in addition to Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart (*The Bible on Homosexuality*), the following: Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002); Boughton, “Biblical Texts and Homosexuality,” 148–52; Dennis Kinlaw, “A Biblical View of Homosexuality,” in *The Secrets of Our Sexuality: Role Liberation for the Christian*, ed. Gary R. Collins (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 104–15; and Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 276, 284–88. See as well Ceslas Spicq, *Les Épîtres Pastorales*, 2 vols. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1969), 1:334. Citing a rich array of texts, Roberto De Mattei (*Église et homosexualité* [Paris: Pierre Téqui, 1995]) lists the following Fathers and Doctors of the Church who followed Paul in condemning homosexual conduct: Augustine, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Peter Damian, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas (as we saw above in regard to: *ST* II-II, q. 154, a. 11; and *SCG* III, ch. 122; and see also *In IV sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 5), Catherine of Siena, Bernardino of Siena, Peter Canisius, Pope St. Pius V, and Pope St. Pius X. De Mattei also cites the Council of Elvira in Spain (AD 305), canon 71; the Council of Toledo XVI (AD 693), canon 3; and Lateran Council III (AD 1179), canon 11.

⁷¹ For a point-by-point refutation of the revisionist efforts, see Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 347–95.

or sloppy exegesis can alter this fact.⁷² Paul's message is unambiguous: if homoerotic conduct has no place in the life of the devout Jew who observes the law of Moses, then all the more should it be excluded, along with all forms of *porneia*, from the lives of those endeavoring to "put on" and "belong to" Christ. His language is strong and unbending ("will not inherit the kingdom of God," "shameless acts," "unholy and profane"), with no confusion of referent, such as pederasty or male prostitution, and with no exceptions, such as for homosexual orientation. If one wishes to dismiss the biblical condemnation of homosexual conduct, one must simply dismiss the Bible outright. Not surprisingly, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) as Cardinal Prefect, did not mince words when addressing the "new exegesis of Sacred Scripture" that seeks to downplay or dismiss the biblical censure of homosexual conduct: "These views are gravely erroneous."⁷³

Edart's final word on this matter could not contrast in any sharper terms with the afore-cited assertions of Boswell and Helminiak:

Paul is talking about acts considered to be the most serious, directly offensive to the divine law. This teaching was in line with first century A.D. Judaism. Paul makes no reference to sexual orientation or to specific sexual acts (pederasty, rape, etc.). It is the act itself that is condemned. . . . All homosexual acts are against nature, that is, opposed to the divine will, whether they be between men or between women. Moreover, beyond this argument, nothing in the text supports the thesis that Paul is talking about sexual relations imposed by force [i.e., rape or pederasty]. . . . Homosexual acts remain against nature whether they are experienced by someone with a heterosexual orientation or by a person with a homosexual orientation within the confines of a stable affective relation.⁷⁴

⁷² An example of sloppy exegesis is provided by James Martin, "Jesus Says Nothing about Homosexuality." For instance, Martin lumps together the condemnation of homosexual acts in Leviticus with the position of Leviticus on slave holding, improper attire, and crop placement: "We don't look at those passages [on slave holding, attire, and crop placement] in an ahistorical way, so why should we look at passages on homosexuality in that way?"

⁷³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in its 1987 *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1987), §4 (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html).

⁷⁴ Himbaza, Schenker, and Edart, *The Bible on Homosexuality*, 80, 105–6.

Our last word on this issue should go to the recent sex-abuse scandal in the Church, given that the “shameless acts” (Rom 1:27) committed by certain clerics were disproportionately of a homoerotic sort.⁷⁵ What this biblical teaching bears on homosexually active priests and bishops should appear obvious. Homoerotic acts are in God’s eyes deeply immoral—always and everywhere. “Sexuality has an intrinsic meaning and direction which is not homosexual,” writes Benedict XVI.⁷⁶ When these acts are committed by those entrusted with the office of the sanctification of God’s people and who are committed to a life of celibacy, they are of the most reprehensible and deplorable, even horrific and sacrilegious, sort.

Virginity (Celibacy): The Eschatological Virtue

Before closing our reflections on the vision of human sexuality in Jesus and Paul, we should give brief consideration to the privileged place that virginity or the celibate state enjoys both in Jesus’s counsel to pursue spiritual perfection “for the sake of the Kingdom of God” (Matt 19:12) and in St. Paul’s moral recommendation that all “remain single as I do” (1 Cor 7:7–8; see as well vv. 25–38). As these remarks “from the Lord” and from the Apostle intimate, human sexuality undergoes a transformation in the New Law of the Gospel. Ordering us not simply to an “earthly” good, as does the Mosaic Law, but to our ultimate, supernatural end (eternal life), the New Evangelical Law of Christ extends the meaning and purpose of human

⁷⁵ For the recent study showing a link between clergy sex abuse and homosexuality in the priesthood, see D. Paul Sullins, “Is Clergy Sex Abuse Related to Homosexual Priests,” Ruth Institute, November 1, 2018, ruthinstitute.org/clergy-sex-abuse-statistical-analysis. On this connection, Dominic Legge writes: “In the main, the persistent problem is with homosexually active priests. Fr. Roger Landry argues—rightly, I think—that most priests who persist in infidelity with women eventually leave the priesthood, but priests who cheat on their vocation with men often continue to live a double life. Most of the issues stem from this kind of duplicity. Networks of active homosexual priests have developed: They protect and promote their own and others who will tolerate them. . . . The sin is even more serious when a bishop, a seminary formator, or a priest uses the authority of his office—an office instituted by Christ for the sanctification of the faithful—in a perverse way, in the service of shameful and selfish passions” (“Cleansing the Church of Clerical Sacrilege,” *First Things*, August 16, 2018, firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/08/cleansing-the-church-of-clerical-sacrilege). For the Landry piece, see “Truth Is Needed to Free the Church from Sacrilege of Clergy Scandal,” *National Catholic Register*, August 7, 2018; ncregister.com/daily-news/truth-is-needed-to-free-the-church-from-sacrilege-of-clergy-scandal.

⁷⁶ Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times, a Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Michael J. Miller and Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 151.

sexuality beyond the carnal or earthly nature of the marital relationship to the very supernatural, glorified end of human life.⁷⁷

How so? Besides elevating marriage to the level of a sacrament (see again Eph 5:32), the New Law of Christ commends that virtue which, giving witness to St. Paul's declaration that "this world [including our bodies] in its present form is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31), consists in the perpetual sacrifice of sexual pleasure; namely, the virtue of virginity (often realized in the avowed celibate state). What is key here, as Benedict XVI notes, is the renunciation or sacrificial offering of the sexual pleasure that is proper to marriage, given "sexuality's intrinsic meaning and direction," which is "to bring about the union of man and woman." Celibacy makes sense, and as Benedict further explains, only as a renunciation of that good to which our sexuality by design orders us, a meaning that is lost when celibacy is opted by those "who don't want to get married anyway" (Benedict was speaking specifically of those who struggle with homosexuality).⁷⁸ By renouncing the earthly good of sexual pleasure (note this is far different from simply "not getting married," as claimed by those who favor the view that "sterile sex among men" does not violate the vow of celibacy), celibacy or virginity anticipates the glorified state of our bodies at the final resurrection, when

⁷⁷ See Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 107, a. 1: "The New Law which derives its pre-eminence from the spiritual grace instilled into our hearts . . . is described as containing spiritual and eternal promises, which are objects of the virtues, chiefly of charity [but also of chastity and virginity]." Earlier in q. 91, a. 5, Thomas explains: "To this (sensible and earthly good) man was directly ordained by the Old Law. Thus, at the very outset of the law, the people were invited to the earthly kingdom of the Canaanites (Ex 3:8–17). . . . But to this (our spiritual and heavenly good) man is ordained by the New Law. Thus, at the very beginning of his preaching, Christ invited men to the kingdom of heaven, saying (Mt 4:17): 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

⁷⁸ Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 151–53. Further, as Daniel Mattson, who himself has struggled with homoerotic desires, notes in his piece on homosexuality in the priesthood: "Men with homosexual tendencies find it particularly difficult to live out the demands of chastity. The vast majority of scandals in the Church since 2002 involve homosexual priests profoundly failing in chastity. This is no surprise to me. Chastity, I'm convinced (and the evidence bears this out), is much harder for men with a homosexual inclination than for others" ("Why Men Like Me Should Not Be Priests," *First Things*, August 17, 2018, firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/08/why-men-like-me-should-not-be-priests). Of note, for support he cites clinical psychologist James Loyd, C.S.P., who, after working with homosexual men (including priests) for over thirty years, maintains: "It is clear enough from the clinical evidence that the psychic energy needed to contain homosexual drives is far greater than that needed by the straying heterosexual" (cited by Mattson).

men and women “neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matt 22:30).⁷⁹ Even if retaining its sexed design, the human body on the Last Day will yet be raised “celestial,” “imperishable,” “spiritual,” “immortal,” and with “power” and “glory,” to use St. Paul’s vocabulary (1 Cor 15:40–44).⁸⁰

For Thomas Aquinas, this eschatological spiritualized state means “the soul will, to a certain extent, communicate to the body what properly belongs to itself as a spirit.”⁸¹ That is, at the final resurrection, the glory of the beatified soul will redound or overflow into the resurrected body, so that the body will receive what Aquinas terms an “incorruptible being” (*esse incorruptibile*).⁸² Part and parcel of the body’s *esse incorruptibile*, Aquinas further explains, is “subtlety” (*subtilitas*), whereby the body, entirely subject to the spirit and sharing fully in the soul’s spiritual enjoyment of

⁷⁹ R. R. Reno relates (per the testimony of the Irish philosopher William Desmond): “The main debate in the Jesuit dining room [at Fordham University in the 1970s] concerned whether or not sodomy constituted a violation of the vow of celibacy. Some priests took the line that celibacy concerns the conjugal act, not sterile sex between men” (“Catholicism after 2018,” *First Things*, October, 2018, firstthings.com/article/2018/10/catholicism-after-2018). Hence the excessively narrow and skewed definition of celibacy as simply “the restriction against marriage for members of the Catholic clergy” that James Martin, S.J. offers in his *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 216.

⁸⁰ As for the glorified, spiritualized resurrected body retaining its sexed design, see Aquinas, *In IV sent.*, d. 44, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 3, corp., and qa. 4, ad 2: “The diversity [of sex] befits the perfection of [our] species. . . . And therefore just as humans will rise again in diverse statures, so too, in diverse sexes. And although there be a difference between the sexes, nevertheless there will be no shame [*confusio*] in the mutual sight, for there will be no sexual desire inciting them to base acts, which is the cause of this shame. . . . [qa. 4, ad 2] The difference between the sexes and [genital] members will be for restoring the perfection of human nature [*ad naturae humanae perfectionem reintegrandam*] both in the species and in the individual” (trans. Beth Mortensen, Peter Kwasniewski, and Dylan Schrader [Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2018], 74–75, with adaptations). Aquinas makes the same argument in *SCG IV*, ch. 88.

⁸¹ Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 97, a. 3; see also q. 98, a. 2, ad 1.

⁸² See *ST III*, q. 54, a. 2, ad 2; and *SCG IV*, ch. 86. See also *ST II-II*, q. 18, a. 2, ad 4. For more on all this, see Philippe-Marie Margelidon, O.P., *Les fins dernières: de la résurrection du Christ à la résurrection des morts*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions Lethiel-leux, 2016). See also Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Résurrection de Jésus et résurrection des morts: Foi, histoire et théologie* (Paris: Cerf, 2012). For more on what this *esse incorruptibile* spells in terms of the healing of our bodies, particularly in the case of those with disabilities, see my essay, “Disability, the Healing of Infirmary, and the Theological Virtue of Hope: A Thomistic Approach,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 6, special issue 2 (2017): 70–111.

God, will not engage in the bodily activities of eating, drinking, and sexual union, as these “serve the corruptible life.”⁸³

Because it gives witness to the glorified state that awaits the final resurrection, virginity or celibacy is sometimes called the eschatological virtue.⁸⁴ As John Paul II, who insists that “a complete theology of the body” must include reflection upon virginity or celibacy, puts it, the state of virginity or celibacy “is a sign that the body, whose end is not death, tends toward glorification.”⁸⁵

John Paul II goes on to relate celibacy to the nuptial meaning of human sexuality by seeing it as signifying a kind of spiritual marriage. By this he means the celibate individual makes the complete gift of self not to one other person “in the flesh,” but to all God’s people “in the spirit.”⁸⁶ In this way celibate persons, renouncing the sexual pleasure that is proper to marriage “in the flesh,” imitate Christ’s own spousal union with the Church. They can thus be considered “married” in this higher sense.

Aquinas makes a similar move by creatively linking celibacy or virginity with God’s command “to be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). This command, Thomas argues, implies not only physical or bodily fecundity, but spiritual fecundity as well. By devoting themselves “to the contempla-

⁸³ Aquinas, *SCG* IV, ch. 86; see also ch. 83 and *ST* Suppl., q. 83, aa. 1–6.

⁸⁴ See: Spicq, *Théologie morale du Nouveau Testament*, 2:562; Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary T. Noble (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 131; John Paul II, General Audiences of December 16, 1981, and (especially) March 24, 1982 (*Man and Woman He Created Them*, 395 and 419); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 108–9, 125–40, and 155–76; and Lawler et al., *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 24–29. For its part, the Second Vatican Council writes in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, §44: “It [the consecrated religious state which is avowed to a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience] not only witnesses to the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ, but it foretells the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom. . . . The religious state clearly manifests that the Kingdom of God and its needs, in a very special way, are raised above all earthly considerations.” The wording is even more explicit in Vatican II’s Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, §12.

⁸⁵ John Paul II, General Audiences of March 17 and 24, 1982 (*Man and Woman He Created Them*, 415 and 419). In his “theology of the body” General Audience discourses, John Paul II devoted considerable attention to celibacy or virginity, covering it in seventeen consecutive general audiences (beginning on December 16, 1981, and ending on July 14, 1982 [*Man and Woman He Created Them*, 394–457]).

⁸⁶ John Paul II, General Audience of April 14, 1982, (*Man and Woman He Created Them*, 431–32).

tion of divine things for the beauty and welfare of the entire human race," celibate individuals fulfill the spiritual thrust of God's command to be fruitful and multiply.⁸⁷

Conclusion

In closing, we can say that Jesus and Paul, indeed, the biblical witness as a whole, present a high—extremely high—estimation of human sexuality, with marriage at the marrow of its teaching. As this essay has attempted to show, the core principles embedded in the moral teaching of Jesus and Paul signal nothing less than a whole vision of human sexuality. According to this vision, God has endowed man and woman with a sexed nature for the express purpose of conjugal love, that is, for a union defined by—and by only—its joint procreative and unitive orderings. Realized in only one form, namely, the life-long loving and exclusive union of one man and one woman, marriage marks the normative good, the intrinsic meaning and direction, of human sexuality.

Conveying the mind of God on sexual choices and lifestyles, this biblical teaching, clear and unambiguous, corrects the skewed vision of human sexuality that human sin has wrought—Genesis traces the corruption of human sexuality directly to the fall of man. This skewed vision is everywhere to be found in Western society today, just as it was everywhere to be found in the ancient world outside the nation of Israel. By the standards of biblical morality, the modern turn toward sexual license and unbridled hedonism, ensuing upon "the false principles of a new and utterly perverse morality," to quote Pope Pius XI (*Casti Connubii* [Encyclical Letter On Christian Marriage], §3), and by which the procreative and unitive orderings are severed from each other, marks nothing less than a turn toward "madness and evil," as Gandalf the wizard, in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, says of Lord Denethor after Denethor had lost his mind and had ordered his own death and the death of his innocent son Faramir.

Has Western culture today, abandoning the principles of biblical morality in favor of what Benedict XVI again calls a "new philosophy of sexuality" (albeit a philosophy that is identical in practice to what the New Testament condemns as *porneia*), lost its mind and ordered its own cultural death as regards sexual choices and lifestyles? It would seem so. For those who wish to "belong to" and "put on" Christ (in the full Pauline sense), there is but one choice: to heed Gandalf's example in contesting the will of the Lord Denethor by contesting the will of this new philosophy

⁸⁷ ST II-II, q. 152, a. 2, ad 1. See Servais Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 458–59.

of sexuality and returning to biblical standards, that is, returning to a morality of conjugal love. Our very happiness and flourishing in the sexual arena depend upon it.

NEV