

Marriage and asceticism

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Marriage has had a changing form over the centuries, especially from the pre-modern to the modern era.

Marriage—modern and pre-modern

In the pre-modern era, marriage was regarded as a necessity, enabling the survival of both spouses, through their clearly defined roles, and through the procreation of children, providing both an additional work force and security for the parents in their old age, and also the continuation of the family name and society at large. In the modern era, where it has become possible for greater numbers to live independently, finding both security and fulfilment in their own careers, marriage itself has come to be seen as an arena for self-fulfilment and wholeness, in what has been called a 'companionate' marriage. Whereas Christianity offered a challenge to the former apparent necessity of marriage—relativizing both marriage and celibacy, for freedom and wholeness in the Holy One—Christianity has been, as it were, co-opted into 'companionate' marriage, as a religious icing on the cake, as part of all the things which contribute to what comes to be seen as traditional marriage and traditional values. Questions of marital asceticism, which have long been focused on sexual activity and its regulation, often no longer serve to challenge the married to acknowledge that their source of life lies elsewhere, but are also co-opted into the internal dynamics of 'companionate' marriage: temporary sexual abstention serves to increase the love of the spouses for each other, enhancing the properly personal character of their sexual intercourse when it again takes place. The concern of this essay is not simply to look at ascetic practices within marriage, but to look again at some of the most important texts regarding marriage to see if they offer a fuller, and more challenging, framework for understanding marital asceticism, and perhaps marriage itself.

Marriage and asceticism, or marriage versus asceticism?

As already suggested, the subject of 'marriage and asceticism' almost inevitably raises in our minds issues concerning sexual activity and its regulation. It has been a uniform teaching of the Church, from the beginning, that marriage is the proper context for sexual activity; and so, at least until the twentieth century, the ascetic dimensions of marriage are most often described in terms of the regulation of sexual activity, which, given the limited possibilities, usually devolve into practices of continence and abstention and the affirmation of a procreative intent: that marital intercourse should only occur for the sake of procreation.

This restricted scope of understanding marital asceticism is indicated by a quick survey of how the subject has been treated during the last two millennia. Although there are passages in patristic homilies and scriptural commentaries dealing with marital relations more broadly, there are very few writings by the Fathers devoted to the topic of marriage; the more usual work is on the subject of virginity, though, as we will see, this sometimes offers unexpectedly valuable material for married Christians.¹ Besides containing various stipulations about who can get married, and the conditions for ending marriage, the canonical literature does not have much to say about marital relations themselves, apart from regulating sexual activity in ever increasing exactitude—stipulating when, where, and under what conditions, marital intercourse can take place. Even the hagiographical material also points in the same direction. John Chryssavgis, in a review of a book by Mark Moses, an erudite Athonite monk, called *The Sacrament of Love: The Married Saints of the Church* (in Greek),² notes that almost all those married saints described here are, as it were,

¹ For a collection of passages from St John Chrysostom, see *St John Chrysostom: On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. C. P. Roth and D. Anderson (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1986). St Augustine offers a whole treatise devoted to *The Good of Marriage*, trans. in *Fathers of the Church*, 27 (New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1955).

² Mark Moses, *The Sacrament of Love: The Married Saints of the Church*, in Greek (Athens: Akritas, 1988), reviewed by John Chryssavgis in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34 (1989), 182-89.

saints despite their marriage. They are saints because they are mothers and fathers of holy children; because they lived in the earliest period of the Church or were martyrs; because they were married to pagan or unfaithful spouses and 'tolerated' this relationship; because they were royalty; because they were married against their will, and their spouse 'suddenly' died, 'liberating' them to become monastics; because their marriage was not consummated, living as brother and sister, or 'escaping' marital relationships by 'feigning sickness'; or, finally, because they abandoned their family, wife and children altogether to become monastics. As Chryssavgis points out, this hardly provides edifying material for married people seeking sanctity *within marriage* and *as married*. This is to say nothing about the sanctity of the people whose lives are recorded in this way, but to question its value as a model of Christian married life. Or, perhaps, as in the case of patristic texts *On Virginity*, it forces us to look beyond the 'companionate' marriage and nuclear family, that we have come to regard as 'traditional,' to find what marriage has to offer in another realm altogether.

It seems, then, that abstinence and procreative intent have come to define marital asceticism. However, for all that such concerns have come to define popular understandings of marital asceticism, it is neither the last word that Christian theology has to say, nor, perhaps more importantly, is it the first word. When we take account of what else is said, we can perhaps begin to see these concerns in a fuller context, no longer simply as abstention for the sake of abstention, as if this in itself were a superior mode of life, but as an educational tool directing us to a fullness of existence for which we need to be trained, a fullness which has yet to be attained.

Marriage in the Old Testament and Rabbinic Judaism

Clearly the first word, for theology, regarding marriage, are the foundational texts of Genesis. In particular, Gen. 1:27-28:

So God created the human being 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 and subdue it.'

While attention is usually drawn to the blessing of God, 'Be fruitful and multiply,' as the basis for the procreation of children, it is striking that these same words are used of other animals (Gen. 1:22), even though they are not said to be 'male and female': both humans and animals procreate and multiply, but only human beings are specifically described as male and female in the creation account in Genesis. In other words, it is possible that here there is an intimation of something in human existence as male and female greater than the ability to procreate. What this further dimension might relate to is indicated by the parallel construction of the text. It is often said, especially by Old Testament scholars concerned to demarcate the intent of the supposed underlying Priestly source, that the creation of the human being in the image of God pertains to his vocation of subduing the earth; the Priestly writer has, as it were, democratized the position of the king, who formerly was alone held to be in the image of God, so that it is God alone who is king, ruling creation through the human being, the king of creation. The text itself, however, does not link the image status of the human being with the subduing of the earth. Rather, the text places 'in the image of God he created him' directly in parallel with 'male and female he created them.' What it is to be in the image of God is hinted at by the creation of human beings as male and female, a finger pointing to what is otherwise mysterious and unknown. Not that there is in God anything corresponding to 'male and female,' but human beings, and they alone, are provided a way into the mystery of God through this unique aspect of their existence.³

The second foundational text is in Gen. 2:18-25:

³ Cf. P. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (London: SCM, 1992), 12-21. She concludes (p.21): 'God is neither male nor female, nor a combination of the two. And yet, detecting divine transcendence in human reality requires human clues. Unique among them, according to our poem, is sexuality. God creates in the image of God, male and female. To describe male and female, then, is to perceive the image of God: to perceive the image of God is to glimpse the transcendence of God.'

Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.' So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Here the emphasis is clearly on the man and the woman together forming a couple, one flesh. The early Rabbis, following a tradition that goes back to the second century B.C. (cf. *Jubilees* 3:2-6) explained this passage in terms of God instructing Adam of his need for a mate. In v.18, it is God who observes that man is alone and in need of a helper. Yet he then creates the animals! Who it was that found that Adam was still alone in v.20 is not clear, but Adam's cry in v.23, 'This at last ...' presumes that Adam is the subject.⁴ If this is the case, then God created the animals, not in an attempt to make a mate for Adam, but to educate Adam of his own need. Thus:

'And Adam named all the cattle ...' [This verse teaches that] while he was calling each one by its proper name, he noticed them copulating

⁴ The interpretation of these words, 'This one, at last,' shows that the significance of the event is not simply that of a long-awaited expectation being fulfilled: 'When Adam saw Eve, he said, "This is my mate." As Scripture says, "And Adam said "This at last is bone of my bones,"' [meaning] this one time, woman was created from man; from now on a man takes the daughter of his fellow and is commanded to be fruitful and multiply. [Another interpretation] This one time God acted as groomsman for Adam; from now on he must get one for himself.' *Abot de Rabbi Nathan*, quoted in G. Anderson, 'Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden,' *Harvard Theological Review*, 82 (1989), 121-149, at 125.

each with its mate and he couldn't figure out what they were doing, because the feeling of erotic attraction had as yet no power over him, for Scripture says, 'But Adam himself did not find a mate like himself.'⁵

In a similar vein to God's education of Adam, God's act of 'building' the rib into a woman (v.22) is interpreted as God's adornment of the bride.⁶ God himself acted as groomsman, leading Eve to Adam,⁷ while the precious stones of Eden are taken as referring to the marriage canopy.⁸ Not surprisingly, this divine activity resulting in the marriage of Adam and Eve culminates in a fruitful union, the fertility of which reflects the fertility of Eden itself:

'R. Joshua b. Qorha said, "They went to bed two and got out seven: Cain and his twin sister, Abel and his two twin sisters."'⁹

Dominical teaching on marriage

Although the curse of barrenness is alluded to in the New Testament, for instance in Christ's discussion about the levirate marriage—the childless woman who married seven brothers, prompting Christ's reply, 'in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage' (Mat 22:23-33)—there is in fact very little mention of the subject of procreation in the New Testament. The two most important and interesting NT texts pertaining to marriage do not mention procreation, but rather point to an overarching divine pedagogy. First, the discussion about divorce and eunuchs in Matt. 19:3-12:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' He answered, 'Have you not read

⁵ Taken from *Midrash ha-Gadol*, cited in Anderson, 'Celibacy or Consummation', 127.

⁶ *Genesis Rabbah* 18:1.2.b. Trans. J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

⁷ *Gen. Rab.* 18.3.2.b.

⁸ *Gen. Rab.* 18.1.3.a-b.

⁹ *Gen. Rab.* 22.2.3.c.

that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.' They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' 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.' The disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.' But he said to them, 'Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.'

Christ affirms emphatically the original intent of God for his creation: that the two, the male and female, should become one flesh (with no mention of procreation) and that this is to be an unbreakable unity. However, because of their hardness of heart, their inability to live up to this goal, the possibility of divorce was granted through Moses, as a concession, something that was not from the beginning and does not belong to the original plan. Christ, however, as the one who is from the beginning, the Word with the Father in eternity, revokes this concession (though in Matthew an exception is still granted), so that those who divorce their wives are guilty of adultery.

Then comes one of the most intriguing exchanges in the pages of the New Testament, containing words that are usually taken out of this context. In response to Christ's reaffirmation of what was from the beginning, the original plan, the disciples say, well, in that case it is better not to marry. A response which provokes Christ's words about the different types of eunuch. The most difficult part of interpreting these words turns upon v.11: what is the 'saying' to which Christ refers, the 'saying' which not all can receive?

It is possible that it refers back to v.10, so that the difficult saying is that it is better not to marry. In which case, those who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven are

straightforwardly those who have abstained from marriage, living lives of celibacy, and this is, without qualification, better. This absolute statement can be softened somewhat by taking v.11 to refer to what Christ is about to say in v.12, so that it only refers to those who have been particularly called to this, those who have been given the special grace to receive this saying: for them it is better not to get married (leaving open the possibility that for others it might be better to get married). In both cases, this line of interpretation takes the 'eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven' to refer to those who have abstained from marriage, either because it is better absolutely, or because it is better for them. And this is, indeed, the way in which these 'eunuchs' have been understood, at least since the fourth century.

In both cases the meaning of 'eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven' is given by the disciples' statement in v.10. The difficulty with this interpretation is that it has Christ approving the disciples' statement of disbelief, endorsing their hard-heartedness at receiving his teaching concerning the original plan of God for males and females. But this goes totally against the general tendency in Christ's exchanges with his disciples, in which the disciples almost always do not understand or fail to grasp the full import of Christ's words, only to be upbraided for their slowness.

The alternative would be to take the 'saying' of v.11 to refer to Christ's own teaching, that from the beginning God created human beings as male and female that they might come together in the unbreakable bond of being one flesh, which, as the disciples have indeed just shown, not all can receive. And in this case, the 'eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven' would be those who have received this saying, that is, the monogamous Christian. If this is the case, then Christ (or at least the evangelist) is playing upon the *trope* of eunuch—a *trope* for the most obedient servant, the one who has no family to get between himself and his master.¹⁰ The true eunuch, the most obedient servant, is the one who receives the word of Christ and

¹⁰ Cf. Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 7.5.59-65, and the discussion (regarding the description of Melito of Sardis as a 'eunuch') in A. Stewart-Sykes, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2001), 5-8.

lives by it. This would seem to be the interpretation which most respects the integrity of the passage as a whole.

A further interesting aspect of Christ's words in Matt. 19 is that, for what is the original plan of God for males and females, they refer us not so much to the past as to the future. Certainly, from the beginning, God intended males and females to come together in an unbreakable union, but, also from the earliest times, with Moses, divorce was permitted, as this goal was still too hard for human beings. In the light of Christ, the divorce allowed by Moses can now be seen as a pedagogical tool, allowing us to grow into the truth envisioned from the beginning.

St Paul on marriage

This same pedagogical dynamic, and orientation towards the future, can be seen in the other key New Testament text regarding marriage, 1 Cor. 7:1-6:

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote it is well for a man not to touch a woman [*or*: is it well for a man not to touch a woman?]. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control. I say this by way of concession, not of command.

Verse 1 is exceptionally ambiguous, even in the Greek. It might be Paul's reply to whatever it is that the Corinthians wrote: his reply being 'It is well for a man not to touch a woman,' or it could be the question of the Corinthians, 'is it well...?' However, what follows strongly suggests that it is the Corinthian question.

The argument in the following verses parallels Matt. 19. Paul's argument is: because of the temptation to immorality, the fact that we are created as sexual beings, everyone should have a spouse, and give themselves to each other, for their bodies are not their own. This is

stated very emphatically, in a strikingly reciprocal manner; it is laid down as the basic principle, in very much the same way that Christ affirmed God's original plan. Then, in a very cautious and qualified manner, Paul suggests (and no more) that 'perhaps by agreement for a season' the basic principle he has laid down might be set aside for the sake of devotion to prayer. But, he immediately adds, before finishing the sentence, that husband and wife are to come together again, lest they be tempted through lack of self-control.

Then, finally, v.6: this has been said by concession, not command. What has been said as a concession? Since Augustine, this concession is often taken to refer to Paul's permission to 'come together again,' so that the normal state for married people is abstinence, from which a concession is granted for a specific purpose (usually taken as procreation, although this is not even mentioned here). It seems more likely, however, that, given what Paul has just established as the first principles, his 'concession' is to separate for a limited period, by agreement, for the sake of prayer, an abstention which married people are 'perhaps' to undertake. In this line of interpretation, Paul is saying that, yes, the two becoming one flesh is indeed the divinely established paradigm of human life, but that, for those who find it difficult to maintain this reality while also fulfilling the demands of prayer, temporary abstinence might be appropriate.

It is also important to note Paul's very cautious introduction of this concession, for, as he continues, 'To the married I give the charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband ... and that the husband should not divorce his wife' (1 Cor. 7:10-11). And, furthermore, how Paul's words thereafter to the unmarried and the widows are also significantly qualified: 'To the rest I say, not the Lord' (1 Cor. 7.12). So, in a similar manner to Moses' concession of divorce on account of the Israelites' hardness of heart, Paul also introduces a concession, the possibility of temporary separation, due to human weakness. These concessions point us to the future, when we will have finally matured into the pattern that God established from the beginning.

St Irenaeus on marriage

A similar outlook can be seen, towards the end of the second century, in the writings of St Irenaeus of Lyons. In his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, Irenaeus describes a unitary creation of man: combining both creation accounts, to assert that the man fashioned from the mud by the hand of God is in the image of God, and his inspiration, the breath of God which animates him, typifies the Spirit. He then continues by extending the unitary account of the creation of man to the formation of Eve. In *Dem.* 13, Irenaeus paraphrases and extends Gen. 2:18-23:

And He decided also to make a helper for the man, for in this manner, 'God said "It is not good for man to be alone, let us make him a helper fit for him",' since among all the other living things no helper was found equal and like to Adam; and God Himself 'cast a deep sleep upon Adam and put him to sleep', and, that a work might be accomplished out of a work, sleep not being in Paradise, it came upon Adam by the will of God; and God 'took one of Adam's ribs and filled up flesh in its place, and He built up the rib which He took into a woman and, in this way, brought [her] before Adam'. And he, seeing [her], said, 'This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman", for she was taken from her man.' (*Demonstration* 13)

Irenaeus keeps to the biblical text, describing the creation of Eve in terms of a companion for Adam.

Irenaeus adds to the scriptural account that sleep did not yet exist in Paradise, and he explains this temporary 'suspension' of Adam's existence by the intention of God to 'accomplish a work from a work'. This divine initiative reaches its conclusion in the formation of the woman. Bone from bone, Eve is of the same formation as Adam. The formation of man as a sexual being thus belongs to the arrangements of God for the growth and maturation of man: God prepares a 'helper' suitable, like and equal to Adam. There is no suggestion in any of this that the formation of woman was in view to procreation, let alone, as some of the later Fathers have been taken as holding, that this action

of God was prompted by his foresight of the fall of human beings into mortality.¹¹

Irenaeus continues, in *Demonstration* 14, by describing the life of Adam and Eve in the Paradise:

And Adam and Eve, for this is the name of the woman, 'were naked and were not ashamed' (Gen 2:25), since there was in them an innocent and childlike mind and they thought or understood nothing whatsoever of those things which are wickedly born in the soul through lust and shameful desires, because, at that time, they preserved their nature <intact>, since that which was breathed into the handiwork was the breath of life; and while the breath remains in <its> order and strength, it is without comprehension or understanding of what is evil: and thus 'they were not ashamed', kissing [and] embracing each other in holiness as children.

While the breath of life maintained its order and strength, and Adam and Eve retained their integrity and natural state, they were able to embrace each other in holiness, without the base thoughts that arise through desires and shameful pleasures. Not only existence as male and female the created state of human beings, but interaction between the two, in holiness, is clearly envisaged as a dimension of their life, growth and maturation.

Later, in *Demonstration* 17, Irenaeus continues by mentioning that Adam knew his wife Eve after their expulsion from Paradise, following the Genesis account (4:1-2), but he does not present this in a causal manner (i.e. as if, having fallen into mortality outside of Paradise, only now do they need to procreate). Elsewhere, while describing the parallel between the disobedient virgin Eve and the obedient virgin Mary, Irenaeus has this to say as an aside:

[...] in paradise 'they were both naked and were not ashamed', inasmuch as they, having been created a short time previously, had no

¹¹ Such a position is usually based upon the writings of Sts Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, though regarding the former, I have argued that it is based on a mistaken reading. Cf. J. Behr, 'The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De Hominis Opificio*,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 7 (1999), 219-47.

understanding of the procreation of children: for it was necessary that they should first come to the adult age, and then multiply thenceforth. (*Against the Heresies* 3.22.4)

It seems that Irenaeus understood the blessing of God in Gen. 1:28, 'increase and multiply', in a sequential manner: grow/increase and [then] multiply. The procreation of children is part of God's economy for the human race, which would come into effect when the newly created 'children' have reached a suitable age and maturity. Accordingly, when they have attained such maturity, they would have been able to conceive children whilst remaining in holiness, robed in sanctity. Irenaeus also suggests that as God has foreordained the number to which the human race should increase, human beings, on the completion of this number, shall cease from begetting and being begotten, from marrying and giving in marriage, so preserving the harmony formed by the Father.¹² Procreation shall cease once the foreordained number has been reached; but human existence as male and female will not cease, for it is the condition and framework, as created by God, for never-ending maturation and growth of human beings towards God. Thus the intention of procreation is the same both in Paradise before the apostasy and after the apostasy in the human life of mortality: the completion of the number of human beings foreordained by God. There is no suggestion, as for instance in Athenagoras who wrote a few decades before Irenaeus, that the procreation of children is the human response to a life of mortality, an attempt to make the mortal immortal.¹³ For Irenaeus, procreation belongs to the growth which God has set before man; and while adulthood is the age for procreation, human existence as male and female is never restricted to the function of procreation.

Given the way in which both Christ himself and Paul emphasize the original intention of God to create human beings, male and female,

¹²Cf. *Against the Heresies* 2.33.5, referring to Matt. 22:30.

¹³Cf. Athenagoras *On the Resurrection* 12.2. Athenagoras is here echoing a standard classical theme, cf. eg. Plato, *Symposium* 208e; T.H.J. van Eijk, 'Marriage and Virginit, Death and Immortality,' in J. Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser (eds.), *EPEKTASIS: Melanges offerts au Cardinal J. Danielou* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 209-35.

who come together to form one body, an original intention for which the human race is being trained by pedagogical concessions, it is tempting to take Irenaeus' description of Adam and Eve 'kissing and embracing each other in holiness' as children in the Garden in eschatological rather than protological terms: that is, as a description of the reality to which we are to grow, rather than simply as an innocence long lost.¹⁴

Clement of Alexandria on marriage

A seismic change occurs, however, with Clement of Alexandria, a contemporary of Irenaeus. His writings are much more concerned with Christian deportment than Irenaeus; he has a word to say about everything! A lot of Clement's ethical advice is taken more or less verbatim from the Stoic Philosophers—especially Musonius Rufus—though it is usually made more demanding, wanting to outdo Stoic morality in his own rigorism. For instance: 'If, as the Stoics believe, reason recommends that the Sage does not even move a finger by chance, how much more necessary is it for those who seek wisdom to control the organ of intercourse.'¹⁵ Clement certainly had a high regard for marriage—but he defines it in terms of procreation:

The goal of marriage is procreation, and its end is fair children. (*Paed.* 2.10.83.1)

Marriage is the first coming together according to law of man and woman for the procreation of legitimate children. (*Strom.* 2.23.137.1)

Every aspect of marital sexual activity is rigorously deduced from this principle; everything which does not conform to this finality is severely condemned. Even the 'conjugal rights' which Paul had defended against the Corinthians, are restricted by Clement to the

¹⁴ Justifying this perspective would be Irenaeus' comparison of the human race to Jonah, claiming that they have been swallowed by the whale from the beginning (*ab initio*). For Irenaeus, the true reality of human beings does not lie in the past, but hidden with Christ in God. Cf. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁵*Paedagogue* 2.10.90.2.

finality of procreation, something never mentioned by the apostle.¹⁶ In this context Clement speaks extensively about the need to 'follow nature,' established as it is by divine providence.¹⁷ Clement even cites with approval Epicurus' maxim that 'sexual intercourse does no one any good; it is desirable if it does no harm', and adds that even lawful intercourse is perilous except insofar as it is undertaken for procreation.¹⁸

This understanding of marriage, as dominated by a procreative finality, is based, for Clement on the divine command recorded in Genesis to 'Multiply!' (Gen 1:28). Thus, for Clement, the identification of marriage with procreation is not a restriction, but the fulfilment of God's designs. Clement even speaks of man becoming like God through his co-operation in the birth of another man, while marriage is described as 'co-operation with the work of nature'.¹⁹ However, whilst praising marriage in this way, Clement, perhaps inevitably, subordinates the marital bond to the finality of procreation, and this leads inexorably to the same attitude with regard to the sexual nature of human beings (we will put off our sexual differences in the resurrection).

Although Clement utilized the writings of the Stoics in his ethical teaching, it is striking that he ignores what else the Stoics had to say about marriage. In one of the most touching passages regarding marriage from antiquity, Musonius suggests:

The husband and wife [...] should come together for the purpose of making a life in common and of procreating children, and furthermore of regarding all things in common between them, and nothing peculiar or private to one or the other, not even their own bodies. The birth of a

¹⁶Cf. *Stromata* 3.17.107.5; J. P. Broudhoux, *Mariage et Famille chez Clément d'Alexandrie*, *Theologie Historique*, 11 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1970), 174.

¹⁷Cf. *Paedagogus* 2.10. *passim*. esp. 87.3, 90.3-4, 95.3.

¹⁸*Paedagogus* 2.10.98.2; cf. Epicurus, *Frag.* 62 (Usener, 118.22).

¹⁹*Paed.* 2.10.83.2. This connection between begetting and becoming like God, the Begetter of all, had already been made by Philo, *Dec.* 22.107. For the description of co-operation, see *Paed.* 2.10.93.1; *Strom.* 3.9.66.3. In *Strom.* 3.12.87.4, Clement considers the relation to be one of a joint-cause or a servant.

human being which results from such a union is certainly something marvellous, but it is not yet enough for the relation of husband and wife, inasmuch as quite apart from marriage it could result from any other sexual union, just as in the case of animals. But in marriage there must be above all perfect companionship (συμβίωσις) and mutual love of husband and wife. [...] Where, then, this love for each other is perfect and the two share it completely, each striving to outdo the other in devotion, the marriage is ideal and worthy of envy, for such a union is beautiful.²⁰

Human existence as male and female is not limited to the ability to procreate, for this can happen even outside marriage and is something that animals also do. Rather, human existence as male and female is fulfilled in this 'perfect companionship,' in *symbiosis*. This ideal of symbiotic unity has become an increasingly popular one in modern literature on marriage, but there is nothing like it in Clement. This is perhaps because procreation was so central to Clement's understanding of marriage, that he simply forgot to speak of the mutual relationship between husband and wife; the most he does is to encourage (in passing) the husband to love his wife. But it might also be due to the dangers involved in a 'symbiotic' marriage, although Clement does not spell out what these might be.

St Gregory of Nyssa on marriage

An indication of what these dangers might be, and a fuller insight into the positive contribution of the concession granted by Paul, that of temporary abstinence, is given by the work *On Virginity* by St Gregory of Nyssa. On a straightforward reading, this treatise seems to praise virginity at the expense of marriage, taking these terms in their most obvious sense. However, as Mart Hart has pointed out, this is not a straightforward treatise; it is not an objective, neutral, systematic presentation of marriage and virginity.²¹ Gregory opens the work by

²⁰Musonius Rufus, 18a (Hense 67-8); trans. by C. Lutz, *Musonius Rufus: The Roman Socrates*, (*Yale Classical Studies*, 10, 1947), 89.

²¹ See esp. M. Hart, 'Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage,' *Theological Studies*, 51 (1990): 450-78, to which the following pages are heavily indebted.

stating: 'The object of this treatise is to create in the readers a desire for the life according to excellence' (*Virginité*, introd.) He creates this desire for virtue by deliberately depicting marriage, even the most blessed, in tragic terms, and emphasizing, in contrast, the many advantages of virginity. But in doing so, Gregory uses the terms 'marriage' and 'virginity' in two distinct senses. As well as its conventional meaning, 'marriage' is used as a metaphor for passionate attachment in general; while 'virginity', in addition to its conventional or literal meaning referring to the bodily state which has not been broken by intercourse with others, is also used to refer to a general attitude of non-attachment, spiritual 'virginity', which is possible also in marriage.

Gregory's depiction of marriage 'in tragic style' in the opening chapters of the work is not aimed against marriage itself, but the style of marriage that results from the readers' own concerns:

You wish that we begin from the most pleasant things? Well, then, the chief thing that interests one in marriage is the attaining of companionship (συμβίωσις). (*Virginité* 3)

Gregory begins, by describing at great length the pain and sorrow that lies smouldering under a marriage seeking this, to argue that, 'If only, before experience comes, the results of experience could be learnt, [...] what a crowd of deserters would run from marriage into the virgin life' (*Virginité* 3). But he then points out that such standards are not in fact the true criteria for determining what is good or bad in human experiences:

Riches, well-being, poverty, lack of means, and all the irregularities of life seem to differ greatly to those who are uneducated, whenever they make pleasure a criterion of such things, while to the lofty all things appear of equal value for the mind and no one thing is more preferable than the other (4.4.31-6)

As such, it is not marriage itself that is the object of Gregory's rhetoric, but the desire for pleasure that leads most people into marriage. It is not that pleasure itself is bad; rather, according to Gregory, the error lies in using pleasure as the criterion for distinguishing between good and bad. Moreover, the pleasure that is

desired, which obscures our correct judgment of what is truly good, and is the mistaken root of most marriages, is not, for Gregory, sexual pleasure, about which he has nothing negative to say. What is desired is *συμβίωσις*, by which he means not simply 'companionship,' but more 'co-dependency' (in the modern jargon), the delusion that one can find a certain permanence, security and even immortality in and with others. The human quest for permanence and security obscures our faculty of judgment and our ability to reconcile ourselves with the transience of things in this world. And its result is the tragic marriage as Gregory has described it: a marriage which seeks one's own security and well-being, the survival of oneself in one's own children, and the distortion of compassion into passion. If it is this that is sought in marriage, then the death of one spouse shatters the identity of the other, and the mortality that always hangs over human beings undermines any happiness they might be able to find in companionship. Such marriage, far from being the source of all desired blessings, in fact turns out to be the 'supplier' (*χορηγός*, *Virginité* 3) of innumerable ills and woes, and ultimately, through procreation, of death.

As such, what Gregory advocates, when he counsels us to avoid such marriage, is not a withdrawal from human relationships and affection, for this merely superficial withdrawal would offer no solution to one's frailty and mortality. Such a withdrawal would only be undertaken out of fear. The solution to the problem of one's own mortality, and the death of loved ones, is not celibacy *per se*, but the only virtue which can stand in the face of death, and that is courage. The fact that everything in life is impermanent does not mean that the enjoyment of life is bad, nor does it belong only to the unthinking. But in order to enjoy such impermanent things properly, we must consciously accept their impermanence, rather than place our hopes of security in them. This requires courage and that we place our trust in something, or someone, other.

In contrast to this metaphorical 'marriage'/passionate attachment, bodily virginity has the effect of shifting our human quest for permanence and stability away from the possession of material things, identifying ourselves with their impermanence, to find stability

instead in God. Gregory introduces the subject of bodily virginity in this way:

Well, then, toward such a disposition of the soul virginity of the body has been contrived (ἐπεινορήθη) for us, in order especially to inspire forgetfulness and amnesia for the soul from the impassioned movement of nature, since one is induced by no necessity to be condemned to the lower liabilities of nature. For, once one is free from such necessities, one is no longer in danger of turning away little by little through becoming habituated to that which appears to have been conceded by a law of nature and thereby also becoming ignorant of the divine and unmixed pleasure which only purity of heart, when it holds sway in us, hunts after by nature. (*Virginity 5*)

Virginity of body, Gregory says, is an artificial contrivance, enabling forgetfulness and amnesia of the soul regarding the impassioned movements of nature. Bodily virginity, Gregory continues, turns us away from the things that appear to us to be 'necessities, conceded by nature', which offer us 'mixed' pleasures rather than the 'unmixed' pleasures, offered by purity of heart. 'Mixed' pleasures are those that are intertwined with pain: for instance the pleasure of eating is mixed with the pain of hunger, the pleasure of sexual activity is mixed with the pain of yearning (cf. *Virginity 3*). The needs of the body are natural, and so too is the pleasure which accompanies them. But because of sin we have come to view these natural needs as a necessity, or more precisely, we have become habituated to seeking the pleasure which accompanies the satisfaction of these natural needs for the sake of the pleasure itself. By doing this, the pleasure ceases to be finite, and takes on the infinite character of our desire; turned in on ourselves and our desires, they become a black hole. The natural yearning of one sex for another is now transmuted into the arena for ultimate self-fulfilment, in a 'companionate' or symbiotic marriage; and if we vaguely recognize the impermanence offered by these pleasures, this only drives further our attempts to secure the other as our own.

In contrast, the 'unmixed' pleasure that the purity of heart strives after is one of non-attachment, taking pleasure in everything, but not identifying itself with any of them. The advantage of virginity of the body, therefore, is to allow one to let go of those anxieties created by

bodily pleasures, to experience the pleasure of purity of heart. The reduction of bodily and material needs which a celibate life involves is not designed to make life easier for its own sake, but to make easier the achievement of purity of heart, which will in turn alter our relationship to the natural needs of our animal and social life.

Gregory also gives (*Virginity 6*) a couple of water analogies to explain the aid offered by bodily virginity. For instance, while water from a spring naturally spreads out into many smaller, slower streams, becoming diffused over a wide area, the practice of virginity and continence is similar to the construction of a channel, gathering all the small streams into one, for a better use, now having the ability and power to reach the truly good. The other analogy concerns a pipe: although water naturally tends downwards, a pipe can force it to flow upwards, for it has no other direction to flow; so also, we can use self-control to direct the erotic power of the soul towards God. Rather than allowing the erotic power of the soul to become dispersed, seeking satisfaction among impermanent things, by denying the soul access to such things, it is forced to turn its energies towards itself for satisfaction, and ultimately upwards towards the truth. This artificial restriction of the natural energy of the soul, contributes towards the discovery of purity of heart, the true and natural good of the soul. The art of the celibate life, for Gregory, thus allows the channelling of one's energies and erotic power, symbolized as water; in order to dry up and deny life to what is a mistaken form of attachment to impermanent things, and thereby to enable the achievement of purity of heart.

Whilst praising the advantages of bodily virginity, such that it might seem necessary for true spiritual progress, Gregory also undermines any reliance placed on bodily virginity itself, much as he undermines marriage as it is commonly sought, by treating it as a metaphor for passionate attachment in general. In chapters seven to nine, Gregory turns again to a defence of marriage, picking up on some of the arguments of earlier writers who had defended marriage against those who considered it to be sinful, such as an appeal to tradition and that if marriage were sinful, what would that say about themselves as products of marriage? But Gregory does not stop at repeating these points. So far, he has presented a deliberately tragic

picture of marriage and a description of the workings of bodily virginity. In the question about the value or scope of marriage, it seems to Gregory that most people have not given full weight to the dual nature of the human being as a 'rational animal': the married, in Gregory's tragic depiction, live as if their whole life were identified with what supposed goods marriage could supply, living, in fact, as if they were only animals; while the despisers of marriage live as if they were not animals at all.

Now, in chapter seven, Gregory reveals that his rhetoric in favour of celibacy and against 'marriage' has been deliberately imbalanced. He has, he says, been trying to restore a natural balance. As pleasure itself is, he says, the co-worker of marriage, marriage needs no argument in its support. On the other hand, given the reality of the fallen condition, purity of heart is something that must be recovered, and therefore something that one must persuade people to seek: to stop dispersing themselves in the pleasures of the body and ultimately in the transient world considered in itself, so that purity of heart can once again be the natural condition and pleasure of the soul. Bodily virginity, he has suggested (*Virginity* 5 and 6), can be a suitable co-worker towards this rediscovery of the true pleasures of the soul. But this is, he admits, in some sense against nature (it is a contrivance), although it is necessary to combat something even more unnatural, and therefore more harmful, the inclination to judge what is good only by the standards of bodily pleasure.

To restore a proper balance, Gregory points out the inadequacies of literal, bodily virginity. Having given the analogy of diffused water being gathered into a channel, he later revises the analogy, pointing out that the skilled farmer is able to open a spot in the channel that will release just enough water for what the crops need. An inexperienced farmer, on the other hand, is liable to open the hole too wide, so that there is a danger of the whole stream bursting out and flooding the field. (*Virginity* 8). Celibacy, for Gregory, aims at correcting the lack of experience and skill, enabling a concentration on spiritual matters, which those who are moderate and skilful can practise in the world. It is an experienced (practical) wisdom, therefore, that is the basis of true moderation; celibacy is a merely a *substitute* for this and aims at bringing this about (as we have seen).

Gregory, in fact, goes even further:

One who is so weakly disposed as not to be able to stand up courageously to the burden of nature would do better to keep himself far away from such things rather than descend into a struggle which is greater than his ability. For there is no small danger for such a person, being led astray in the experience of pleasure, that he thinks that there is no other good than receiving it through flesh with a certain attachment and that he become wholly flesh by turning his mind entirely away from the desire of incorporeal goods, hunting in every way for the pleasant in these things, so as to be more a friend of pleasure than a friend of God. Well, then, since it is not possible for everyone, because of the weakness of his nature, to hit the mark of due measure in such matters, and because, according to the Psalmist, there is a danger for one who is carried away from measure of being stuck 'in deep mire,' it would therefore be profitable, as our treatise suggests, to pass through life without experience of such things, lest, under the excuse of things which have been conceded, the passions gain an entrance into the soul. (*Virginity* 8)

In this passage, Gregory explicitly asserts the reversal of the usual understanding of the relationship between celibacy and marriage. He does not say that it is marriage, but rather celibacy, that is a concession to weakness and a remedy for desire. The practice of celibacy is a kind of compromise with respect to true perfection in active virtue. Instead of claiming that celibates are the ones who are, more than all others, able to withstand the power of sexual impulses and to refuse to temptations of worldly wealth, power and honour, he argues, rather, that celibacy is for those who are too weak to stand up to the impetus of nature. Celibates have removed themselves from the world, but they have not, by that act, uprooted the passions which tie them to the world. Their way of life allows them to have a certain 'forgetfulness and amnesia' (*Virginity* 5) about bodily needs; they have put to sleep the passions, but have not learnt the wisdom by which they are to be used. Were they to give bodily nature its due by marrying, they might succumb to the temptations of this world, allowing their minds to be snared in concerns for wealth or honour. Such weaker people should remain as celibates, so that they do not risk letting the passions enter the soul by entering into a struggle that is greater than one's ability.

The 'burdens of nature' that human beings are called to withstand courageously are not, for Gregory, the troubles and concerns, dealing with the complexity of family dynamics, that are the everyday reality of married life. Rather, as his rhetoric against marriage considered as passionate attachment indicates, these burdens are more specifically the inevitability of death and loss and the insecurity that this creates, casting its shadow over all aspects of married life. The only real solution is not to avoid human affection and responsibilities, but the development of courage, an attitude that would not seek to identify one's stability and security with the transient world. Accepting one's own mortality and the inevitability of bodily separation from that which one loves, placing one's hope instead in God, one has the equanimity and balance to act as the situation requires.

Gregory finds his ideal in the example of Isaac:

We, however, recognize this as well about marriage, that while the concern and desire for divine things must be put first, we must not overlook the public service (λειτουργία) of marriage if it can be used with moderation and measure. Of such a kind was the patriarch Isaac, who did not accept the cohabitation of Rebecca in the peak of his prime, lest his marriage be a work of passion, but he did so when his youth was already spent, because of the blessing of God upon his seed. After serving the marriage up until the birth of a single child, he belonged again wholly to the unseen, closing his bodily senses. For the story seems to me to indicate this by telling of the weight of the eyes of the patriarch. (*Virginity* 7)

For Gregory, then, it is not celibacy *per se* that he advocates, but moderation within marriage. But even more important is that this is not moderation understood simply as a limitation of sexual activity in a marriage founded upon the satisfaction of the passions. If a marriage is entered into with the idea that the relationship with the spouse will provide the arena for fulfilment and wholeness, security and permanence, then this marriage inevitably becomes the source of tragedy, for another moral human being cannot provide the stability that is desired, no matter how 'moderate' are the sexual relations. Rather the moderation that is required is an understanding of marriage free from this delusion, another style or possibility for marriage: a

marriage based upon the foundation of *leitourgia*. Moderation simply as abstinence, tending towards permanent abstention, is not, as we have seen, an ideal to be achieved, it is rather a tool to be used in shattering our delusions and redirecting our attention and desire.

The word *leitourgia* referred to the public duty of the richer citizens to finance public projects, such as athletic training, banquets, ships for battle, etc. The description of marriage as a *leitourgia* thus parallels his earlier description of marriage as the supplier (the χορηγός) of tragedy. Considered under the aspect of pleasure, marriage was the supplier of pain and death, providing death with new mortals to feed upon, keeping death alive. Now, considered from a more authentic standpoint, marriage appears as a *leitourgia*, a public and communal service. Moreover, Gregory also describes God as the supplier (the χορηγός) in his relation to humanity, and the Incarnation is described as *philanthropia* (*Virginity* 2). God is not content to remain in the incorruptible state proper to the divine nature, but himself freely accepts physical corruptibility and vulnerability for the benefit of human beings. By calling marriage *leitourgia* and God the 'supplier', Gregory is in fact suggesting that the married life bears a greater resemblance to God than does celibacy, when marriage is undertaken for the benefit of the community, demonstrating a willingness to assume bodily burdens for the benefit of others, even if celibacy may appear to show a greater resemblance to the divine life in its freedom from such burdens.²²

²² A similar point can be found in Clement: 'True manhood is not shown in the choice of a celibate life; rather, the prize in the contest of men is won by him who has trained himself by the discharge of the duties of marriage and procreation and by the supervision of a household, regardless of pleasure and pain, by him who in the midst of his solicitude for his family shows himself inseparable from the love of God and rises superior to every temptation which assails him through children and wife and servants and possessions. On the other hand, he who has no family is in most respects untried. Taking care for himself alone, he is inferior to the one who falls short of him as regards his own salvation (ἡττᾶται πρὸς τοῦ ἀπολειπομένου μὲν κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σωτηρίαν), but who has the advantage in the conduct of life, as he truly preserves a faint image of providence.' (*Strom.* 7.12.70.8).

The common approach to marriage, seen as a means of attaining security and pleasure are mistaken, seeking security in that which is inherently transient, and they do not reflect the divine *philanthropia*. Only when marriage is undertaken, not selfishly, but as a *leitourgia*, does, for instance, the begetting of children become an act of generosity and beneficence, and not an attempt to create one's own immortality. Those who have learnt not to judge by the standards of the pleasures of the body, that is, those who have separated body and soul in true virginity, are not deluded into thinking that their children are 'their own,' the bearers of their honour and perpetuators of the family name. Those who have separated themselves from passionate concern for the world are not subject to the temptation to use their family as an excuse for seeking an ever-increasing wealth, ostensibly necessary for security in this world, for security is not to be found in this world. They will instead judge material concerns only in terms of the legitimate needs of the body, having a wider scope of philanthropy in which to deploy their resources.

True moderation thus requires true courage, and both of them require wisdom concerning the proper value of the things that come to be and pass away. It is in this context that Gregory interprets Paul's words about the differing concerns of those who are married and those who are not:

For it is not possible for *one who has turned his thought to this world*, taking up its anxious concern and busying himself in pleasing humans, to fulfil the first and great commandment of the Lord which says 'to love God from one's whole heart and strength'. For how will someone love God from the whole heart if ever he divides his heart between God and the world, and, stealing the love owed to Him alone, exhausts it in human passions? 'For the one who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord, but one who is married cares for the things of the world.' (*Virginity* 9; quoting 1 Cor. 7.32-3)

Gregory takes Paul's words about the married and the unmarried as metaphors for those who are attached to the world and those who are not: it is not the married, in distinction to the celibates, who cannot care for 'the things of the Lord,' but one who has turned his thought to the world (marriage as metaphor). Marriage only deprives God of the love due to him when one is under the delusion that marriage and its

concerns provide an immortality and a stability in and of themselves, that is, when they are seen as a fulfilment in themselves with no reference to God, when one has 'turned his thought to this world'. But for those who are not under this delusion, seeking instead authentic fulfilment and stability from God alone, for only God can provide this, rather than expecting it from marriage, there is nothing to hinder them from living in a married state and totally dedicating themselves in service to God. In fact, as we have seen, such a marriage displays a greater measure of virtue and likeness to God.

In all of this, Gregory is not simply reversing the common understanding of the positions of the married and celibates, but rather arguing that true virginity is to be attained in either state, just as attachment to the world can be found in either state. In this way, we can see the practices of bodily continence in their true value: not simply as a state to be attained by all, but as a means to attaining true virginity by all.

And the promise that such virginity holds out to Christians is great:

What happened in the spotless Mary bodily, when the fullness of the divinity which was in Christ shone out through the virgin, that happens in every soul that lives as a virgin according to reason (*κατὰ λόγον παρθενευούσης*), no longer effecting the *parousia* of the Lord bodily, for we no longer know Christ according to the flesh, Paul says, but spiritually dwelling in us, bringing the Father with him, as the Gospel somewhere says. (2; 254.24-255.3)

Conclusion

Marriage is not simply about physical procreation of children. That may happen if it is God's will. Rather, the challenge that Christianity brings to marriage, as it does also to the celibate life, is to undermine any confidence that we might place in either institution taken in itself, and to force us to look, instead, to Christ, to make Christ present in this world, spiritually to procreate Christ. A Christian marriage is thus defined neither by its (possible) procreative function nor by its unitive function, nor even by both combined. Each of these aims, taken in itself, is ultimately self-centred. Rather Christian marriage is a means

of manifesting Christ, continuing and extending his *leitourgia* and *philanthropia* (one part of which *may* be children). And, in turn, marital asceticism as temporary sexual abstention is not simply the married couple's brief taste of proper Christian existence, as if abstinence were in itself normative, nor is it, as it often becomes in modern thought on marriage, a means of making sexual activity, when it happens, more 'unitive'. Rather, temporary sexual abstention is a concession, as a God-given means of refocusing or redirecting our centre of attention, with the aim of achieving, finally, what was given from the beginning—to be males and females coming together in one flesh. Perhaps, one may finally say, marriage is the arena where we finally come to be males and females in the image of God. But the truth of this is still hidden with Christ in God, whose stature we have yet to attain.²³

A revised Orthodox ceremony of marriage?

ANDREW LOUTH

Several years ago I came across a booklet, published in 1997 by the Athens publishing house, *Ekdoseis Domos*, called *A New Ecclesiastical Service of the Mystery of Marriage*, offered to the Church 'by a certain anonymous married man'. Several things struck me about the service, not least the very first response of the couple to be married to the priest, asking what they seek 'in this eucharistic assembly': they 'desire the life of *askesis* in marriage'. *Askesis* is not an easy word to translate; its basic meaning is 'training', 'exercise', but it is cognate with the word *asceticism*, which conjures up a rather special kind of training—religious, aimed at achieving union with God, involving rigorous self-discipline and self-control, even self-punishment. The root from which both these words come is the verb *ἀσκέω*, which means, according to Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon, to work with raw materials.¹ The idea of asceticism as working with the raw materials of human nature to create something precious seems to me an attractive starting-point for an understanding of asceticism, and something that could well be applied to marriage, where the raw materials of two lives are worked together to create a microcosm of what it is to be human, and marriage, too, is seen as a kind of laboratory in which human beings in the full sense—persons shaped by human *koinonia* so as to be capable of *koinonia* with God—find their beginnings.

What follows is a translation of this *New Ecclesiastical Service*, prefaced by some general reflections on Christian marriage and Christian asceticism, and some more detailed reflections on the new service itself, in comparison with the traditional rite.

¹ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, rev. ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, 257, *s.v.*

²³ This eschatological orientation I've suggested lying behind Mat 19, 1 Cor 7 and Irenaeus, suggests fascinating parallels with the work of L. Irigaray, who attempts to explain sexual difference within the terms of a *parousia* of God who, rather than remaining in an inaccessible transcendence, is present here and now, in and through the body; the horizon of sexual difference offers the possibility of an enduring transfiguration of the world, which she describes as the 'third era,' the 'time of the Spirit and the Bride.' Cf. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. C. Burke and G. C. Gill (London, 1993), esp. 147-50.