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Beginning with Christ: An Old Testament Theology of Marriage

Geoffrey R. Boyle

Even as marriage falls within the natural law, being given to Christian and pagan alike, nothing can be said of marriage apart from the flesh of Jesus Christ. As Saint Paul says, “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), and “In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9).¹ He is the beginning—the *ἐν ἀρχῇ*, the *בְּרֵאשִׁית*—in whom Genesis 1:1 attributes all of creation and whom Proverbs 8:22 identifies as Wisdom.² He is also the end—the *τέλος* and *אַחֵרִים*—the very perfection toward which his creation is promised and the reality in which all things find their summation and substance.³

The flesh of Jesus is everything. Saint Paul writes, “For *in him* all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and *through him* to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled *in his body of flesh* by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Col 1:19–22). Similarly, Luther once said, “No, comrade, wherever you place God for me, you must also place the humanity for me. They simply will not let themselves be separated and divided from each other. He has become one person and does not separate the humanity from himself as Master Jack takes off his coat and lays it aside when he goes to bed.”⁴ Norman Nagel emphasized this reformer’s high Christology: “Luther will have no God apart from Christ, no

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible translations are my own.

² Prov 8:22: *κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχῆν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ. יְהוָה קָנְנִי יְהוָה קִדְּם דְּרַבּוֹ רֵאשִׁית קְנָנִי יְהוָה. מֵאֵז מִפְּעֻלָּיו*. See Christopher Seitz, *The Elder Testament: Canon, Theology, Trinity* (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press, 2018), 201–219; C. F. Burney, “Christ as the APXH of Creation (Prov. viii 22, Col. i 15–18, Rev. iii 14),” *Journal of Theological Studies* 27, no. 106 (January 1926): 160–177; and Don Collett, “Reading Forward: The Old Testament and Retrospective Stance,” *Pro Ecclesia* 24, no. 2 (May 2015): 178–196.

³ Cf. Telford Work, *Jesus—the End and the Beginning: Tracing the Christ-Shaped Nature of Everything* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019).

⁴ Martin Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528), in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976), vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986), vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), 37:218–219 (hereafter cited as AE).

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gap between God and Christ, no gap between his two natures, no gap between his body and the bread, no gap between Christ and us, or a part of us, and no gap between any of these and God's words."⁵ All of this because "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

God is no abstraction; neither is theology. He gives himself to be located and found, circumscribed for us and our salvation. He has taken to himself "a body prepared for him" (Heb 10:5; Ps 40:6) and refuses to leave it behind. So, any theology of marriage—whether New Testament or Old Testament—must begin with the flesh of Jesus Christ. In this way, we might say, all theology is theology of the body, which simply means Christology, *his* body.

Almost forty years after Pope John Paul II offered his lectures on the theology of the body, we find them even more timely than ever.⁶ Consider the centrality of the body to the conversation in our culture: sexuality, gender, transgenderism, marriage, mental and physical disability, pornography, care for the elderly and the infirm, abortion, and so-called "death with dignity." The body stands at the center of it all. And apart from the flesh of Christ, one finds no answer to the psalmist's cry "What is man that you are mindful of him?" (Ps 8:4).

The incarnation sets the tone for all our thinking about the body—male *and* female. It is all in the flesh of Jesus. Count the times Saint Paul says "in him"—incredible! God creates man in the image of Jesus. But note well: Jesus *is* the image of God (ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ); we are created *in* the image (וְנִבְרָאנוּ בְּצַלְמֵהוּ/κατ' εἰκόνα). That is, male and female are created *in Christ*, who is the image of the invisible God.

The beginning comes in Christ—for man and mankind. "Have you not read," Jesus says, "that he who created them from the beginning [ἀπ' ἀρχῆς] made them male and female?" (Matt 19:4). It is this "from the beginning"—a beginning enacted in the incarnation and known only from the resurrection—that launches us into what it means to be created male and female, and thus to marry and be given in marriage.⁷

⁵ Norman E. Nagel, "The Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar According to Luther," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 39, no. 4 (1968): 237.

⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline, 2006).

⁷ Saint John the Baptizer recognized this abrupt upturning of time as Jesus approached for baptism: "This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes [ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεται] a man who ranks before me [ὅς ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν], because he was before me [ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν]" (John 1:30). Bonhoeffer reflects on this theologically ordered time and existence: "But the God of the creation and of the real beginning is, at the same time, the God of the resurrection. From the beginning the world is placed in the sign of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Indeed it is because we know of the resurrection that we know of God's creation in the beginning, of God's creation out of nothing" (*Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3*, trans. John C. Fletcher, in *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3* [New York: Macmillan, 1978], 19).

Of course, the fall into sin brought bodily and spiritual corruption. Our bodies (and thus our marriages and families) need redemption. “Wretched man that I am!” Saint Paul exclaims. “Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God *through* Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24–25). Like the creation of our bodies, so also our redemption comes only *in* the body of Jesus. “By sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin,” Saint Paul concludes, “he condemned sin *in [his] flesh*” (Rom 8:3).⁸ Similarly, to the Colossians Saint Paul says, “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled *in his body of flesh* by his death” (Col 1:20). He thereby locates our atonement in the crucified flesh of Jesus.

This crucified body of Jesus rises again on the third day. “Put your finger here,” he says to Thomas, “and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20:27). And who is it that John sees in the revelation ascending to the throne to open the sealed scroll? The Lamb who was slain (Rev 5:6). The bodily resurrection of Jesus means our bodily resurrection. If not, Saint Paul argues, our faith is futile and our preaching is in vain (1 Cor 15:12–21).

Then—and, perhaps, most strikingly—with his body Jesus ascends into heaven, where he ever sits for us at the right hand of the Father. “And truly great and unspeakable was [the Apostles’] cause for joy,” Saint Leo proclaimed at the ascension, “when in the sight of the holy multitude, above the dignity of all heavenly creatures, the Nature of mankind went up. . . . Christ’s Ascension is our uplifting.”⁹ Whatever we make of this body (and what goes with it: marriage, children, family) must be grounded in the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.¹⁰

Now, back to our title: “Beginning with Christ: An Old Testament Theology of Marriage.” Thus far, we have begun with Christ but without yet mentioning *how* or

⁸ See Jonathan F. Grothe, *The Justification of the Ungodly: An Interpretation of Romans*, vol. 1, *Romans 1–8* (n.p., 2005), 405: “This third use of *sarx* in this sentence refers to the flesh of the incarnate Christ, the place and means by which God won the victory over Sin and condemned it to its end.” Also, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:382: “It tells us where God’s ‘condemnation’ of sin took place. It took place in the flesh, i.e., in Christ’s flesh, Christ’s human nature.”

⁹ Leo the Great, Sermon 73.4, trans. Charles Lett Feltoe, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, 14 vols., ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952–1957), 12:187 (hereafter cited as NPNF²).

¹⁰ He partook of our nature in the incarnation so that we might *partake of the divine nature* (cf. 2 Pet 1:4). Saint Athanasius put it this way: “He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God” (*On the Incarnation*, trans. A Religious of C.S.M.V. [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996], 93). And Saint Gregory of Nazianzus said, “For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved” (“Epistle 101, To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius,” in NPNF², 7:440.)

why this is fitting for “an Old Testament theology.” To do so, let us begin a bit obliquely and then hit it head on. In *For the Time Being*, W. H. Auden says, “By the event of this birth the true significance of all other events is defined, for of every other occasion it can be said that it could have been different, but of this birth it is the case that it could in no way be other than it is. And by the existence of this Child, the proper value of all other existences is given, for of every other creature it can be said that it has extrinsic importance but of this Child it is the case that He is in no sense a symbol.”¹¹ Another: In a chorus from *The Rock*, T. S. Eliot puts it this way:

Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in time and of time,
A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history: transecting, bi-
secting the world of time, a moment in time but not like a moment of
time,
A moment in time but time was made through that moment: for without the
meaning there is no time, and that moment of time gave the meaning.¹²

Finally, and most pointedly, Dorothy Sayers simply asserts, “The resurrection is the only thing that has ever really happened.”¹³

Ironically, we do not have *time* to get into a metaphysical discussion of time.¹⁴ Nor is that really the point. For now, let us simply say that we have been so swept up by Enlightenment assumptions of time—the sort of historicism that leads one to stand *over* the Scriptures, rather than *under* them—that we have missed what they hold most centrally: the person and work of Jesus Christ (John 5:46).¹⁵

Jesus is the eternal Word made flesh. The church confesses against the Arians just as strongly today as in the fourth century: there never was a time when the Son was not (Ps 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5, 5:5).¹⁶ Less clear, however, is what this Son has to do with the Old Testament. Is he external to it, ahead of it, and an object toward which it points? Or, is he somehow inside of it, inspiring it, taking it into his use and revealing himself within it? We are now well familiar with instantiations of the “pre-

¹¹ W. H. Auden, *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*, in *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 388.

¹² T. S. Eliot, *The Rock*, chorus VII, “In the beginning GOD created the world,” in *Collected Poems*, 1909–1962 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 163.

¹³ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (1943; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 22.

¹⁴ For that sort of reflection in the context of biblical exegesis, see Ephraim Radner, *Time and the Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

¹⁵ Cf. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), 212–217.

¹⁶ See Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, in NPNF² 4:339.

incarnate Christ.¹⁷ But where is he the rest of the time—locked away in heaven for future revelation, just waiting for his time? Or—and this is where it gets a bit tricky—is there a way to speak of his time (*καιρός*) actually *preceding* the Old Testament, giving voice and substance to the prophetic word? To say it another way, are Auden and Eliot and Sayers onto something, who poetically put their fingers on a deep theological reality?

If we believe that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who, in dying on the cross under Pontius Pilate, takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), and that *this* Jesus is *that* slain Lamb, whose Book of Life contains all the names written “from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8),¹⁸ then what is so difficult about seeing all of

¹⁷ See Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

¹⁸ As Martin Luther argues in his *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments* (1525), “When we consider the application of the forgiveness, we are not dealing with a particular time, but find that it has taken place from the beginning of the world. So Saint John in the Book of Revelation [13:8] says that the Lamb of God was slain before the foundation of the world” (AE 40:215).

Whether one translates Rev 13:8 according to the ESV (“everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain”) or the KJV (“whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”), the substantive meaning remains the same: what happens before the foundation of the world occurs on account of the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross in time. Wading into this requires an excursive footnote for clarification.

At first glance, the Greek of Rev 13:8 appears to tie “from the foundation of the world” to the slain Lamb: ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου. However, a parallel passage in Rev 17:8, following a similar construction (but without mention of the slain Lamb), suggests “written in the Book of Life” as the antecedent to the adverbial phrase “from the foundation of the world”: ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου. Then, in Rev 21:27, we again have the Lamb—no mention of being slain—with a slightly different construction, again tying the Lamb to the Book of Life: ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου. Thus, this question arises: Does “from the foundation of the world” refer to the Book, the providential writing, or to the slain Lamb? Translations vary. KJV, NKJV, and NIV all favor “*the Lamb slain* from the foundation of the world.” ESV, NASB, and RSV favor the names being written before the foundation of the world.

The Greek syntax of Rev 13:8 alone remains indeterminate. Recourse to parallel or similar passages is instructive. Saint Peter employs similar vocabulary and affirms the theological assertion: “Knowing that you were ransomed [ἐλυτρώθητε] from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot [ἀλλὰ τιμὴ αἵματι ὡς ἀμνοῦ ἀμώμου καὶ ἀσπίλου Χριστοῦ]. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world [προεγνωσμένον μὲν πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου] but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you” (1 Pet 1:18–20).

Jesus also testifies of the Father’s love for him “from the foundation of the world”: ὅτι ἡγάπησάς με πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου (John 17:24). Again, Saint Paul locates our election *in Christ* “from before the foundation of the world [ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου]” (Eph 1:4). Finally, there is the “eternal covenant” (perhaps better translated “testament”) mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews, located in the blood of Christ: “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant [ἐν αἵματι διαθήκης αἰωνίου]” (Heb 13:20). Cf. Vincent Skemp, “Participial Aspect and the Lamb’s Paradigmatic Witness in Revelation 13:8,” in *Studies in the Greek Bible: Essays in Honor of*

Scripture—Old Testament and New Testament—as witnesses to this profound reality in the flesh of Jesus Christ? That is, while the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus certainly occur *in* time, they also affect all of time—before and after. In time, God comes down to man, as man. In time, man ascends to God and sits at his right hand. In time, God unites to man and man to God, the infinite to the finite, mortal to the immortal. The Athanasian Creed beautifully confesses this union of natures in Christ as “one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God.” This Jesus, the crucified, now sits at the right hand of the Father as “alpha and omega, the beginning and end” (Rev 1:8). And from this ascension of the incarnate God, we may speak of the historical flesh of Jesus Christ standing outside of time, over time, and shaping the very fabric of time. Thus, both before and after the cross, he delivers the atoning work of the cross to his people.¹⁹ Luther makes this very point while discussing the delivery of the benefits of Christ:

We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, *before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world*. For inasmuch as he had

Francis T. Gignac, S.J., ed. Jeremy Corley and Vincent Skemp (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2008), 186–214.

Louis Brighton sees Rev 13:8 speaking proleptically of the cross, supporting the KJV tradition (*Revelation*, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999], 346). R. C. H. Lenski argues strongly for the “permanent effect” and “efficacy of [God’s] Son’s death extend[ing] backward as also it extends forward from that day on Calvary” (*The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998], 400). Presuming that our eternal election (names written in Christ, the Book of Life) derives from the atonement accomplished by the blood of Christ on the cross (FC SD XI 13–15), consider Lenski’s deduction: “How could there be the *Lamb’s* book of Life so that the name of any of the blessed might be written therein ‘from the foundation of the world,’ if the Lamb and his having been slain did not extend back before and ‘from the foundation of the world?’” (*Interpretation*, 400). Cf. George Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 168.

Thus, whether Saint John intends his readers to consider the Lamb slain “from the foundation of the world” or the divinely written names in the Book of Life “from the foundation of the world,” in both cases, we perceive our Lord’s gracious delivery of the atoning benefits of the cross of Christ to all—whether before or after the event itself.

¹⁹ Lest there be any confusion, this does not suggest that this eternal Christ somehow brought his flesh down from heaven at the incarnation (as though it were already and always his apart from the incarnation in time). Nor does it suggest that he somehow suffered before or apart from the cross, as if in some eternal cruciform life. Rather, the argument rests on the foundational reality of these historical events and the theological reasoning that permits them to be prophetically given, revealed, and distributed to the people of God—both before and after the cross.

determined once to achieve it, *it made no difference to him whether he distributed it before or after*, through his Word, as can easily be proved from Scripture.²⁰

This is what Saint Paul is after in Ephesians 5:31–33, which *must* be the starting point. In his instructions regarding marriage—how husbands should love their wives and wives be subject to their husbands—he does not begin with marriage and liken it to Christ and the church, nor does he begin with Adam and Eve, as though *that* were the first and exemplar marriage; instead, he runs it all the other way around. He says, “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church [τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστὶν ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν]. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph 5:31–33).

What is the “mystery” to which Saint Paul refers? Indeed, what is a mystery? In short, a mystery is something present, albeit hidden, then revealed, drawing one ever deeper into it.²¹ In the Pauline corpus, *μυστήριον* refers to the hidden things of God (his will and work), now revealed and delivered through the apostolic preaching of Christ. Regarding the mystery here in Ephesians, Thomas Winger offers a definition: “a *μυστήριον* is something that was once *hidden* in the mind of God, yet has now been *disclosed* through the revelation of Jesus Christ to his apostolic messengers. As the content of the mystery in Paul’s usage is always Jesus Christ, the application of the term to holy marriage implies also that *Christ* was once hidden in marriage and is now visible.”²² So, the mystery that is great or profound here in Ephesians is that the “institution” found in Genesis *actually follows* the reality of

²⁰ Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, in AE 40:213–214, emphasis my own.

²¹ The English “sacrament” transliterates the Latin *sacramentum*, which derives from the Greek *μυστήριον*. As it comes into the LXX, *μυστήριον* means “the secret thoughts, plans, and dispensations of God, which are hidden from human reason, as well as from all other comprehension below the divine level, and await either fulfillment or revelation to those for whom they are intended” (Frederick W. Danker et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000], s.v. *μυστήριον*, 662).

Raymond Brown has uncovered the Semitic background of *μυστήριον* in the divine council (הַיְהוָה יוֹד). The semantic shift within יוֹד—from the assembly to the verdict revealed (i.e., from council to counsel)—is where *μυστήριον* originates (“The Pre-Christian Semitic Concept of ‘Mystery,’” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20, no. 4 [1958]: 417–443, 421).

Appearing only once in the synoptics—“unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11; Matt 13:11; Luke 8:10)—the term gains theological weight by way of Saint Paul. Cf. Rom 11:25, 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7, 4:1, 13:2, 14:2, 15:51; Eph 1:9, 3:3–4, 3:9, 5:32, 6:19; Col 1:26–27, 2:2, 4:3; 2 Thess 2:7; and 1 Tim 3:9, 3:16. The only remaining references within the New Testament are Rev 1:20, 10:7, 17:5, and 17:7.

²² Thomas M. Winger, *Ephesians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 620.

Christ and his church.²³ He calls it a “mystery” because the reality has always been there, *hidden* to be sure, from the foundation of the world. James Voelz attempts an explanation for how this might be in terms of a proleptic invasion: “We may say, then, that *what happened in the OT*, either ‘ordinarily’ or in the special historical ‘visitations’ of God, *happened because of the future*. That is to say, *what happened in Israel’s history was determined by the future*, by what would happen in the Age to Come/ὁ μέλλων αἰών. . . . [T]hings happened in Israel’s history, OT people experience what they experienced, because of what God would do in the Age to Come—which age invaded history proleptically, and manifested its shape and form, in the Christ-event.”²⁴

Because of this, Saint Paul cannot help but tie together the present and lived reality of marriage with the marriage of Adam and Eve in the garden, both of which derive from and point toward the true—or, like Dorothy Sayers might say, the only *real*—marriage.²⁵ That is, when the side of Christ split open by the spear, and water and blood poured forth, marriage found its *institution*.²⁶ From *that*—the cross—Adam and Eve were made one flesh, just as the church with Christ. Again, Winger supports all of this:

²³ “One could even say more precisely that the *first marriage* (that of Adam and Eve) refers to Christ and the church” (Winger, *Ephesians*, 623). “Even all that is said of Adam and Eve is to be interpreted with reference to Christ and the church” (Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 3.5.32, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, New Testament, vol. 8, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philip-pians*, ed. Mark J. Edwards, 189).

²⁴ James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, 2nd ed. rev. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 259–260.

²⁵ William Weinrich attests to this, saying,

In Ephesians 5 Paul’s point is not that Christ’s love for his Bride, the Church, is patterned after what was to be the case between Adam and Eve in the Garden. Rather, it is in view of Christ’s love for his Bride, the Church, that husbands are to love their wives and that wives are to be subject to their husbands as to their head. The true marriage was not that marriage in the Garden. The true marriage is that between Christ and the Church. All other marriages (including that first one in the Garden)—and this is true the more marriages are blessed by love—are faint images and icons of that Marriage of the Lamb with his Bride, the Church. (*“It Is Not Given to Women to Teach”: A Lex in Search of a Ratio* [Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1993], 23).

²⁶ Saint Augustine says, “And since the Lord has enlightened us through the apostle, to show us what we were in search of, by this one sentence, ‘The two shall be one flesh; a great mystery concerning Christ and the Church,’ we are now permitted to seek Christ everywhere, and to drink wine from all the water-pots. Adam sleeps, that Eve may be formed. When Adam sleeps, Eve is formed from his side; when Christ is dead, the spear pierces His side, that the mysteries may flow forth whereby the Church is formed” (“Tractate on the Gospel of John 9.10,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, ed. Philip Schaff, 14 vols. (Repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 7:66 [cf. Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, 221 vols. (Paris: Migne, 1841–1865), 35:1463]).

The full meaning of Gen 2:24 was not clear until Christ came. Now, by the revelation of the mystery, we see that it was never just about marriage; its deeper meaning was always about Christ's leaving the Father and cleaving to the church. The referent of "the mystery" is therefore Gen 2:24 itself, a mysterious passage that has now been made clear. The meaning of Paul's words, then, is this: "but I say [that Gen 2:24 refers] to Christ and to the church" or "but I disclose the mystery of Gen 2:24 as being Christ and the church." The staggering import of Paul's words is a thoroughgoing reversal of the manner in which the symbolism of marriage is typically expressed. Paul does not simply say that the relationship of Christ to the church is *like* marriage. Rather, the apostle teaches that God *first* had Christ in mind and *then* instituted marriage to reflect what he would ultimately do. In other words, earthly marriage reflects Christ and the church, not the other way around.²⁷

If Winger is right, and Genesis 2:24 theologically *follows* the crucifixion of Jesus, then the whole picture of marriage in the Old Testament derives from and extols this reality found in the flesh of Jesus. Every narrative, every law, every poetic and prophetic utterance regarding husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, and those sharing in the household—it all comes from and leads to the union of Christ with his church (which also explains why foreigners and resident aliens are also included, for the church of God includes even Gentiles).

Of course, we have not time or space to run through everything the Old Testament says of marriage. Attention to the genealogical framework undergirding the Old Testament requires further unpacking.²⁸ We could track the family dynamics of the patriarchs—what might such a theological portrayal of Judah and Tamar reveal?²⁹ Then there is the mandated divorce of foreign wives in Ezra 9–10. Familial inheritance rights, tribal identity, and the familial character of kings and priests—the list of possibilities is too great to exhaust.

For now, let us briefly address three theological aspects of the Old Testament portrayal of marriage: first, the patriarchal hierarchy of gift-giving; second, the association of idolatry and adultery; and third, eschatological love.

Hierarchy—that is a bad word today. So is "patriarchal." The Old Testament nevertheless confesses an order within marriage and family along just such lines. Husbands are over their wives—hence, Sarah calls Abraham "lord" (Gen 18:12; 1 Pet 3:6). Fathers and mothers are over their children—hence the fourth

²⁷ Winger, *Ephesians*, 624–625.

²⁸ Cf. Jean-Paul Audet, "Love and Marriage in the Old Testament," *Scripture: The Quarterly of the Catholic Biblical Association*, vol. 10, no. 11 (July 1958): 65–83.

²⁹ Cf. Jeffrey Pulse's treatment of this in his *Figuring Resurrection: Joseph as a Death and Resurrection Figure in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 80–89.

commandment's obedience and blessing. Genealogies tend to track only fathers and sons, and even Moses required a revelation to sort out the inheritance for Zelophead's daughters (Num 27:1–11).

Of course, hierarchies are ordered top-down. Those higher up bear the greater responsibility. They give; the other receives. That is how God created Adam and Eve. She came from him, not the other way around. But the one on top—the one who comes first—is put there specifically for gift-giving. Husbands are above their wives—parents above their children, teachers above their students, pastors above their people, prophets, priests, and kings above those ordered under them. But in no case does the Old Testament ever speak of a higher value, worth, or preference for the one above. That is not what the hierarchy—much less the patriarchy—was given for. Neither does it make sense, anyhow. A teacher is no more important than the student. Without students, there is no teacher. The same goes for pastors and people, parents and children, and so forth. You cannot be husband without wife. Order and hierarchy say nothing about value or importance. If anything, the more important and greater is the one below. As our Lord said, “For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves” (Luke 22:27). In this way, he who is above all and over all humbles himself *under* all.

Husbands are given to serve wives—protection, provision, procreation. Parents are given to serve children—house and home, education and faith, training up in the way they should go (Prov 22:6). The hierarchical and patriarchal ordering in the Old Testament assumes such service (gift-giving)—for it is precisely the promised seed that bears the substance of their faith. Thus the shock when the Lord tells Abraham, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen 22:2). Thus the horror as Israel joins in Molech's child sacrifices (Lev 20:1–5; Jer 7:31) and at the slaughtering of the holy innocents in Moses' day (Exod 1:15–22). Parents are to protect and prosper their children, blessing them in old age—not offering them up to the demonic abortion clinics, or the many dehumanizing institutions on offer in this world. Husbands and fathers, by virtue of their vocations, stand in the stead and by the command of the heavenly Father and the heavenly bridegroom. The patriarchal hierarchy derives from and images forth the heavenly hierarchy. While none is greater than another—coequal in majesty, coequal in divinity—nevertheless, the Son, who comes *from* the Father, obeys the Father, and the Spirit is sent by both.

This Trinitarian *order* types itself into the familial fabric of the Old Testament. Isaac obeys father Abraham's sacrificial command to lay himself down on the wood, though, as tradition has it, he was plenty old enough to defend himself from such an

atrocities (the Talmud and Mishnah put him at thirty-seven years old!).³⁰ What the father wills, the son—rightly ordered—obeys. Of course, the father’s will to sacrifice the son betrays no arbitrary abuse of power or position but reveals the means by which gifts are to be given. The Father gives all authority in heaven and on earth to his Son (Matt 28:18). The Son discloses his very life—body and soul—through the Spirit. And we, having received the Spirit of Sonship, are ordered *in* the Son, *before* the face of the Father. Thus, the Old Testament hierarchical order in marriage and family holds the mystery of Trinitarian gift-giving. The higher serves the lower in order to raise the lower into itself. And where the order is rightly established, there comes the blessing: fruitfulness and multiplicity.

Sin disorders the hierarchy established by God. Eve’s curse suggests as much. What should have been a joyful submission to her husband and a pleasant fruitfulness from the womb became “*pain in childbearing*” and a false desire “*contrary to [her] husband*” (Gen 3:16). This plays out in Ham’s disclosure of Noah’s nakedness (Gen 9:18–27), Absalom’s usurpation of David’s authority (2 Sam 15), and the unparalleled wickedness of Jezebel (1 Kgs 18–21). Examples abound for this disordered hierarchy within the Old Testament families—divorce, polygamy, fornication, barrenness, disobedience, and incest, to name a few. Oddly enough, it takes a Moabitess-foreigner, Ruth, to reset the order. The point of all this suggests that the family dynamics within the Old Testament do not merely incite sociological inquiry or progressive comparison but relate a Trinitarian form of gift-giving, which longs to be reordered.

The chief descriptor of this disorder in the Old Testament ties to the language of adultery (ἑξῆς/μοιχεύω) and whoredom (ἑξῆς/πορνεύω). Within the prophets, the marital imagery of this disorder becomes overwhelming. But already in Moses we find the elision of adultery and whoredom with idolatry and false worship:

And [God] said, “Behold, I am making a covenant. . . . Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.” (Exod 34:10, 34:12–16)

Again, at the end of their wilderness wandering, we hear “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will

³⁰ Cf. Genesis Rabbah 55.4; and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Genesis.

rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them” (Deut 31:16).

In this way, the sixth commandment only *secondarily* refers to our marital life. The primary concern—as for *all* the commandments—is with the first: you shall not have any other gods. Of course, that is exactly what they did. “Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so” (Judg 2:17). The story of Israel’s fall finds graphic prophetic portrayal in Ezekiel 16 and 23; and Hosea and Gomer live it out. It grounds the rationale for Yahweh’s divorce of Israel in Jeremiah 2–3 and requires that he establish his covenant *and new covenant* with this adulterous people.

The entire Old Testament is the story of this marriage and family, and the putting back together thereof. God calls a people to himself from nothing, names them, weds them, joins himself to them, and makes them his own (Jer 24:7; 1 Pet 2:9–10). The covenantal promise ringing throughout the Old Testament is a wedding vow: “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exod 6:7). Again, “And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev 26:12). It rings throughout Jeremiah (7:23, 11:4, 30:22). Ezekiel heralds it from Babylon (36:28). It bookends the Book of the Twelve Prophets, being the foundational grammar in Hosea and climaxing in Zechariah (Hos 1:10, 2:21–23; Zech 2:11, 13:7–9). Ruth recognizes this marital vow and will not be found apart from it: “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

This promise—that he will be our God and we shall be his people—is the covenantal vow of marriage. Though we (and all Israel before us) were faithless, he remains faithful (2 Tim 2:13). The marriage of Hosea powerfully depicts this—taking to himself a “wife of whoredom” (זְנוּנִים אִשָּׁת), bearing children of whoredom—because the Land (Israel) has committed great whoredom. Each child, in his or her own way, symbolizes the broken covenant, divorce. Jezreel is the Valley of Slaughter.³¹ Lo-Ruhamma requires God to not be who he is and has promised to be—that

³¹ Jezreel has both positive and negative connotations, which is why his name does not change when the day of great reversals comes (Hos 1:10–11, 2:22–23). “Jezreel” first appears in Josh 15:56 as one of the cities listed in Judah’s inheritance of the land. Though many important political figures come *from Jezreel*, what gives meaning to its usage here is the blood shed when the prophet Elisha sends one of the “sons of the prophets” to ordain Jehu as king of Israel (2 Kgs 9:1–13). Once Jehu is heralded as king of Israel, the massacre begins. Jehu’s revolution concludes, “So Jehu struck

is, merciful. Lo-Ammi denies that he is their God and they are his people. This judgment sits also at the root of Ezekiel's lengthy oracles.

But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his. You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore. And you took your embroidered garments to cover them, and set my oil and my incense before them. Also my bread that I gave you—I fed you with fine flour and oil and honey—you set before them for a pleasing aroma; and so it was, declares the Lord GOD. And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them? And in all your abominations and your whorings you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, wallowing in your blood. (Ezek 16:15–22)

This whoring of Israel violated their marital covenant with Yahweh. They rejected and despised his promise. They despised his **טֹדֶן**—his steadfast marital love (Hos 4:1). Though he had redeemed them with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, and though he made them his own through signs and wonders, nevertheless, they left him for another—for many others. “Therefore, O prostitute,” Ezekiel cries out, “hear the word of the LORD: I will make you stop playing the whore, and you shall also give payment no more. . . . So will I satisfy my wrath on you, and my jealousy shall depart from you. I will be calm and will no more be angry” (Ezek 16:35, 16:41–42).

down all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his great men and his close friends and his priests, until he left him none remaining” (2 Kgs 10:11). All of this occurs in Jezreel. Blood, judgment, it all comes to mind with the birth and naming of Hosea's first child. That is his judgment—or, better yet, Israel's judgment lived out prophetically by Hosea's eldest son. But what about the reversal? How does this “Valley of Judgment” and blood turn into a blessing, as the other children do? What does Hosea mean “great shall be the day of Jezreel” (Hos 1:11)? Or when he says,

And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,
and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,
and I will sow her for myself in the land. (Hos 2:21–23a)

Notice the agricultural language: rain speaks to land, and land to grain, wine, and oil. These then answer Jezreel. Jezreel is Hebrew for “God sows.” The Valley of Jezreel was known for its fertility. The area is a fault basin, receiving an abundance of water. The day of great reversals brings for Jezreel a reinstatement of what his name intends for him to be: *sown by God*.

Exile—a casting out from his presence—became Israel’s lot for her whoredom. Cast out from Eden, cast into Egypt, kept in wilderness wandering, cast into Assyria (1 Kgs 17:6–8) and then, climactically, into Babylon. Exile is separation. In Jeremiah, he calls it “*divorce*”: “If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man’s wife, will he return to her? Would not that land be greatly polluted? You have played the whore with many lovers; and would you return to me? declares the LORD” (Jer 3:1). Therefore, “I had sent her away with a decree of divorce” (Jer 3:8).

We may not be capable of fully grasping the judgment and the wrath of God in this decree. Divorce has become so commonplace, so acceptable—even among Christians—that we seem to forget what it is: *death*. Moses permits divorce on account of the hardness of their hearts (Deut 24:1–4), but from the beginning it was not so (Matt 19:8). And, as we hear in Malachi 2:16, God hates divorce (כִּי־שָׂנֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַדִּבּוּר שֶׁלֹּחַ). Divorce and exile separate what God has joined together. The two having become *one flesh* now dies in its splitting apart. Israel’s unfaithfulness—her *whoredom*—calls forth the wrath of God.

Saint Athanasius frames this brokenness in terms of a divine dilemma: “It would, of course, have been unthinkable that God should go back upon His word and that man, having transgressed, should not die; but it was equally monstrous that beings which once had shared the nature of the Word should perish and turn back again into non-existence through corruption.”³² He will not and cannot be apart from his people. He cannot be *unfaithful*, even when they are. “What then was God, being Good, to do?” The solution requires God himself to act. And thus he does. Within Jeremiah’s “Little Book of Hope” (chapters 30–33), God promises a *new covenant*:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, *though I was their husband, declares the LORD*. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. *And I will be their God, and they shall be my people*. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. *For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* (Jer 31:31–34, emphasis added)

³² Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 32.

The new covenant is a new marital vow—a new *testament* between God and his people. Our bridegroom Lord does not leave us nor forsake us, but through the forgiveness of sins, he rejoins us to himself in a new vow and promise, new life—resurrection. So goes the story of Hosea and Gomer. Though the marriage began with great infidelity—a wife of whoredom who was given to whoredom—nevertheless, with the day of the Lord comes the great reversal: “And in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God.’ And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel” (Hos 1:10b–11). That eschatological “day” is the day of Christ. His incarnation is his “allurement” of his bride to himself. Hosea 2 draws together the great reversal, the eschatological day, and the new betrothal:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And *in that day*, declares the LORD, *you will call me “My Husband,” and no longer will you call me “My Baal.”* For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. And *I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.* And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, “You are my people”; and he shall say, “You are my God.” (Hos 2:14–23, emphasis added)

Though unbelief drives Israel into exile, divorcing and splitting apart the one-flesh union of God with his people, our Lord will not let it remain so. His covenant is a promise of love through the forgiveness of sins. But this covenant requires his testament, his death, his entering into the exile of sin and death and separation. Hosea prefigures this through his *buying back* Gomer from a house of prostitution (Hos 3). The suffering servant of Isaiah perhaps most clearly brings this to light. The blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah cries out for justice. And now a blood speaking a better word than the blood of Abel establishes this new marital covenant (Heb 12:24).

The Lord hears and answers: “Sing, O barren woman” (Isa 54:1). “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!” (Zech 9:9). The bride is redeemed by the bridegroom. The two—again—become one flesh. The dead are raised and the poor have good news preached to them (Matt 11:5). This is the marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:7).

This brings us to the culmination of the Old Testament witness regarding marriage and family. It sets us before the face of the bridegroom—no longer naked and ashamed but fully clothed with the wedding garments of salvation: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isa 61:10). This is the Song of Songs, the highest song, the *only* song. The Psalter, as it moves from left to right, traverses a great deal of woe and lamentation but climaxes in overwhelming praise. Even the Hebrew title, *Tehillim*, suggests that despite the overwhelming majority of laments, this is the book of *praises*.

Standing with Christ our groom before the gracious face of the heavenly Father, bound together in and by the Holy Spirit, the church—even we, ourselves—are addressed as *his loved one*: “Behold, you are beautiful, my love [רַעְיָתִי]; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves” (Song 1:15). He calls us “His Sister, His Bride” (Song 5:1). He crowns us with steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps 103:4). He gives us to share in the Promised Land, an inheritance in heaven passed down by birth into his family—marked by circumcision of old, baptism now. In him the exile gives way to return, divorce is overcome by his faithfulness, and death is trampled down by his death, that life be bestowed upon all those in the tombs.

As the Old Testament contains within it the work of Christ, hidden as a mystery, written and formed in marriage and family, it orders everything toward *love*. That is the first and greatest commandment: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God [אֱלֹהֵיךָ יְהוָה אֵת יְהוָה בְּרַת] with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:4–5). Love alone remains when faith gives way to sight, and hope to the attainment of the reality fulfilled. These three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The Song of Songs does not merely offer an example of love, or an otherwise secular love letter co-opted by the faithful, but bespeaks a prophetic utterance flowing forth from the heavenly council. Solomon gives us to listen in on an antiphonal song in which we also take part. Like Moses’ Song of the Sea, this song follows the great deliverance worked by God for his people. And once that deliverance is bestowed upon the beloved of God, who can help but to sing his praise? Psalm 45 embodies such a song:

My heart overflows with a pleasing theme;
I address my verses to the king;
my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

You are the most handsome of the sons of men;
grace is poured upon your lips;
therefore God has blessed you forever. . . .

Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear:
forget your people and your father's house,
and the king will desire your beauty.

Since he is your lord, bow to him. . . .
All glorious is the princess in her chamber, with robes interwoven with gold.
In many-colored robes she is led to the king,
with her virgin companions following behind her.

With joy and gladness they are led along
as they enter the palace of the king.

In place of your fathers shall be your sons;
you will make them princes in all the earth.

I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations;
therefore nations will praise you forever and ever. (Ps 45:1–2, 45:10–11,
45:13–17)

We long for this marital reality to be for us now and forever—that what God has joined together, no man may set asunder. But as we long and wait and look for this fulfillment to come, we pray: “Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices” (Song 8:14). “Make haste, O God, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me!” (Ps 70:1).

“Thus,” based on the Old Testament testimony to marriage and family, Christopher Mitchell concludes, “marriage cannot be confined to the order of creation or civil order, since it serves a vital role in the accomplishment of God’s redemption, preservation, and extension of His Church.”³³ Yes, we speak of marriage being instituted in the garden before man’s fall into sin. And because of that, marriage rightly belongs to all people—pagans and Christians alike. We are no *more* married than a Jewish or Hindu husband and wife. And Luther well advised that marriage be enacted at the courthouse and then sanctified by the word of God and prayer in the

³³ Christopher Mitchell, “What Is Marriage?,” in *Ethics of Sex: From Taboo to Delight*, ed. Gifford A. Grobrien (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 42.

church. Nevertheless, from the Old Testament we see that marriage is never *merely* marriage. Husbands are icons of Christ. Wives depict the church (even unawares). “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth” (Ps 127:3–4). Marital fidelity typifies the faithfulness that flows from union of God with man. Marriage begins on the cross, and in the resurrection the wedding hall is opened wide.

To desire other husbands, other lovers, is to desire other gods and lords (adultery equals idolatry). Do not do that, says the Old Testament. One Lord, one love, one marriage and faith and church and life. Yes, this is the reality of marriage and family—whether we fully see and comprehend it or not. This is the mystery that Saint Paul reveals to us and the Ephesians.

Not only does the marriage of Adam and Eve—their *becoming one flesh*—serve as a type of the reality, the substance of Christ and his church, but so also do our marriages. Husbands are icons of Christ. So, let them love their wives with that sort of self-sacrificial love. Wives are icons of the church. So, let them be subject to their husbands, receiving from them with thanksgiving just as the church does from her Lord. Children are like olive shoots around our table, bringing joy and vibrancy, receiving from their parents as we, in faith, from the Father in heaven.

Just as Adam and Eve in faith looked at the birth of Cain as the fulfillment of the promised seed, at first sight calling Him *Yahweh* (אֱתֵיְיָהוָה),³⁴ so also do we look at every birth as another miraculous fulfillment of the promise, sharing in and figuring the incarnation of the Son of God (1 Tim 2:15). As the world rages around and against us, seeking to utterly destroy marriage and family, let us cling to what these are—not in and of themselves, but what they are in and of Christ Jesus. He is the beginning and the end. In him and his flesh alone, we find our life and joy, our hope and the fulfillment of our longing.

The LORD bless you from Zion!

May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!

May you see your children’s children!

Peace be upon Israel! (Ps 128:5–6)

³⁴ Cf. Martin Luther, *Treatise on the Last Words of David* (1543), in AE 15:320–323.