

A Symbol of Something Greater: The Variety of Biblical Texts in Augustine's Marriage Theology

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Abstract

In reflecting on marriage, theologians today tend to focus on the Creation narratives of Genesis and Paul's Letter to the Ephesians as a basis for their articulation of the meaning of marriage. Such limitation in the Scriptural reference, though, ignores other biblical texts which may shed light on how marriage is to be lived as a Christian or how marriage is situated within the greater ecclesiological context. In examining Augustine's writings on marriage, we discover two different but related streams of thought: the first is an exegesis on the Creation narratives which gives rise to an incidental reflection on the divine origin of marriage; and the second is a focused investigation on the function of marriage based in a much wider range of texts. In analysing Augustine's writings on marriage, this paper demonstrates that theological reflection based in a wider range of texts can produce a richer understanding of Christian marriage.

In considering the meaning of Christian marriage, theologians today will often base a significant portion of their reflection in the Creation Narrative and in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. Paul Gondreau is by no means alone in arguing that marriage is a natural institution, belonging to God's natural law, which has been raised by Christ to the order of sacraments.¹ While the redemption and divinization of marriage are demonstrated through the relationship of Christ

¹ Gondreau, "The Natural Ordering to Marriage as Foundation and Norm for Sacramental Marriage," 41.

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and the Church, identified as a great mystery by Paul,² Gondreau argues the sacramental marriage can only be understood when constituted by natural marriage, as instituted at Creation.³ The use of these two accounts of marriage – from the Creation Narrative and from the Letter to the Ephesians – is quite reasonable as a Scriptural basis for reflection on Christian marriage. And yet, are these two passages approaching an exhaustive Scriptural basis? Are further insights available through the use of other passages of Scripture?

Augustine, while reflecting on the nature of Christian marriage, drew on a much wider range of biblical texts and was able to construct a rich understanding of marriage as an institution and as a relationship between the spouses. This paper will explore some of the texts employed by Augustine in his reflections on marriage, especially as they offer insights into how he constructed his theology of marriage. What emerges is two streams within his writings – one that focuses on the Creation narratives but for which marriage is an incidental topic, and a second where marriage is the primary object of study and a wider range of Scripture passages is employed.

I will begin with the examples of Augustine discussing marriage in relation to the Creation narratives. In these writings, the greater concern tends to be a discussion of some other theological proposition rather than marriage theology itself. The first example is Augustine's *Literal Meaning of Genesis*,⁴ looking particularly at the ninth book. First, Augustine addresses the question of why the woman was created, answering that it was so she could be a helper in the task of procreation.⁵

² Gondreau, 51.

³ Gondreau, 41.

⁴ All references taken from Augustine, "The Literal Meaning of Genesis."

⁵ Augustine also gives a longer explanation that the woman *must* have been created as a helper in procreation. In any other task where the man would have need of a helper – manual labour, companionship – another man would have been a far superior choice. (See for example *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* IX.5.9, IX.11.19) Although it seems problematic at the very least today, I would argue that Augustine's greater intention is to emphasize the existence of procreation prior to the Fall, which is much of the argument he is making throughout this book of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. In instances where Augustine is speaking directly on the topic of a comparison between men and women, he is typically adamant that it is only social conventions which place men above women, but that they are equal in terms of both mental and spiritual capacity.

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Because the cultural presumption of the time was that marriage was entered into only for the procreation of children,⁶ Augustine then infers that the first couple must have been married.⁷ The greater argument Augustine is attempting to make here, however, is that sexual procreation existed prior to the Fall. In discussing the first couple as a marriage that is intended to be procreative, Augustine is demonstrating that human sexuality pre-existed the Fall, and therefore marriage and sex are to be considered as originating in God and therefore good.⁸

The necessity of human procreation as original to creation is made apparent through the contrast of the angels. Augustine argues in *Literal Meaning of Genesis* that there are already sufficient angels in the heavenly city, so angels do not need to procreate and therefore do not need to marry. The only exception to this would be if the angels were to die off and therefore need to be replaced.⁹ Since angels were created immortal, procreation was never a necessity for them. From the moment of Creation, however, the first human couple was given the task of populating the earth and so needed to procreate. Further, God intended that all humanity be completely united in a single race, and created the first man as the single ancestor of all humanity.¹⁰ Hence the symbolism of the woman's creation from the man's side, undertaken by God to demonstrate the force of the union created by marriage.¹¹ Once again, we note that Augustine is less concerned with discussing marriage and more with a defense of the origin of procreation at the time of creation, and thereby the status of procreation and marriage as good.

⁶ Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods*, 17.

⁷ *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* IX.3.5.

⁸ *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* IX.3.5.

⁹ *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* IX.9.15.

¹⁰ *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* IX.9.15.

¹¹ *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* IX.13.23.

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*The City of God*¹² also includes a significant discussion of the Creation narratives. In many ways, this work repeats many of the themes discussed in *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, and so I will not rehearse them here. I would, though, draw attention to the emphasis Augustine places in this work on the descent of the entire human race from a single ancestor. Augustine argues that God created multiple couples of the other animals, and so they are united only by similarity of race. In the case of humans, however, God created only one original couple, and even then created the woman from the man, so that humanity is united not only by race but by kinship – however distant that relation may be following the successive generations.¹³ As with *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine’s interest in *City of God* is less focused on marriage itself and more on the question of the unity of humanity. Over the course of the whole work, Augustine charts the movement of humanity from an original unity, through the effects of sin and the opposition of the earthly city against the City of God, and the eventual reunification of the heavenly city, already begun by Christ. The unity of the first couple as the root of all human unity, discussed just above, is only the first step in this much larger saga.

Finally, *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*¹⁴ was written in response to the Pelagians and their dispute regarding original sin. Augustine reports that one argument put forward by the Pelagians against the teaching on original sin is that it would imply that marriage is evil since the person produced by the marriage is already sinful and therefore not the work of God. Augustine replies that such an argument confuses the goodness of marriage with the evils of lust. The correct interpretation, according to Augustine, is that marriage was always intended as part of God’s plan

¹² All references taken from Augustine, *The City of God*.

¹³ “God therefore created only one single man; not, certainly, that he might be alone and bereft of human society, but that, by this means, the unity of society and the bond of concord might be commended to him more forcefully, mankind being bound together not only by similarity of nature, but by the affection of kinship.” *The City of God* XII.22.

¹⁴ All references taken from Augustine, “The Grace of Christ and Original Sin.”

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while concupiscence is a sign of God's punishment on disobedience.¹⁵ Once again, Augustine's primary task is to defend marriage and sexual procreation as predating the Fall, and therefore as essentially good. As a result, many of the arguments that Augustine puts forward in *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* are similar to those in the works already discussed here (for example, the creation of the woman as proof of the intention for marriage and procreation prior to the Fall,¹⁶ the words of blessing to be fruitful and multiply as part of God's action during creation,¹⁷ and the effects of the Fall being, in part, that the genitals are no longer controlled by the will¹⁸ and that childbirth is now painful¹⁹). By invoking the Creation narratives, especially the identification of the first couple as actually married and at least capable of procreativity prior to the Fall, Augustine is able to counter one of the Pelagian arguments against original sin.

One thing that stands out in these examples is the almost tangential nature of Augustine's commentary on marriage. He is certainly invoking an idea of the first couple as married, and from this assumes a continuation from the first couple to the practice of marriage in his own time (and on into our time now), but the discussion of marriage occurs as an accident in the midst of a greater argument. Marriage is drawn into discussions of original sin, the unity of the human race, or a literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis, but marriage itself is not the topic under consideration. Indeed, in discussing marriage in light of the Creation narratives, Augustine says very little on the nature of marriage itself aside from it being procreative and essentially good.

Before moving on to the second main section of the paper, I would like to address some apparent exceptions to the pattern I have so far argued for in Augustine's writings. There are works

¹⁵ *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 33.38.

¹⁶ *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 37.42.

¹⁷ *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 35.40.

¹⁸ *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 36.41.

¹⁹ *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 35.40.

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not focused on marriage that will, for a short time, consider marriage itself. Likewise, there are moments in the works on marriage which consider the Creation Narratives. Even within these exceptions, however, there is the tendency to rely on other passages from Scripture when discussing a theology of marriage, and to look to the Creation Narratives largely when addressing a separate concern.

Within the text of *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, Augustine provides further reflection on the goods of marriage, although still within the work's concern for proving that marriage is good. To this end, Augustine provides Scriptural references for each of the goods of marriage.²⁰ For the good of procreation, he cites the First Letter of Paul to Timothy:²¹ "So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us."²² For the good of fidelity, the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: "For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."²³ And for the good of the sacrament, the Gospel of Matthew: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."²⁴ While Augustine obviously holds that marriage existed prior to the Fall, and therefore was essentially good, the identification and description of the particular goods of marriage relies on the writings of the New Testament.

A contrast to this passage from *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* can be found in *Marriage and Desire*,²⁵ where Augustine composes a rather charming but brief passage allowing each of the goods of marriage to defend themselves against the charge of propagating sin.²⁶ All

²⁰ *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 34.39.

²¹ All quotations of Scripture are taken from the NRSV.

²² 1 Timothy 4:14.

²³ 1 Corinthians 7:4.

²⁴ Matthew 19:6.

²⁵ All references taken from Augustine, "Marriage and Desire."

²⁶ *Marriage and Desire* I.21.23

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three of the goods claims that their origin occurred prior to the Fall. Procreation again invokes the command to be fruitful and multiply.²⁷ The sacrament finds itself in the statement that man will leave his parents and cling to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh.²⁸ Sadly, fidelity can not draw on a particular passage from the Creation Narrative, but does make the argument that fidelity would have been absolutely assured prior to sin, since there would have been nothing to tempt or to lead astray.²⁹ In contrast to the passage from *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, discussed just above, Augustine here is not attempting to prove Scripturally the existence of the goods of marriage. The list of the goods of marriage has already been established in earlier works. Rather, within the context of *Marriage and Desire* as a work in defense of marriage against the Pelagians, Augustine is again focusing on the proof of the origin of marriage prior to the Fall. The invocation here of the Creation Narratives in discussing the goods of marriage provides little reflection on marriage itself and serves rather to defend marriage against the arguments of the Pelagians.³⁰ In considering the nature of marriage, and especially his goods of marriage, Augustine turns to the rest of Scripture as a basis for his reflection.

I will turn now to Augustine's works on marriage specifically. A complete enumeration of the Scriptural passages referenced by Augustine in his theology of marriage is so extensive as to be beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I will examine a few Scriptural passages which became especially important in Augustine's thinking on marriage. Specifically, I will consider the

²⁷ Referencing Genesis 1:28, "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it'."

²⁸ Referencing Genesis 2.24, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh."

²⁹ *Marriage and Desire* I.21.23.

³⁰ It is worth noting that Augustine also makes short reference to the Creation narratives in *The Excellence of Marriage*. Here, Augustine very briefly discusses the possibility of sexual procreation prior to the Fall, and argues that the command to "Increase and multiply" indicates that marriage and procreation predate the Fall. (*The Excellence of Marriage* 2.2, referencing Genesis 1:28) This discussion, however, is very short and occurs only at the beginning of the work without being taken up again. The remainder of the work relies on Scripture beyond the Creation Narratives in order to articulate a theology of marriage.

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Scriptural texts that provide reflection on the goods of fidelity and the sacrament, and the relative value of marriage compared to celibacy. What I will demonstrate is the benefit Augustine received from reflecting on marriage in the light of myriad Scripture passages.

In discussing the good of the sacrament, Augustine makes surprisingly little use of Paul's statement that the relationship of husband and wife is a great sign of Christ and the Church.³¹ The function of husband and wife as a sign of Christ and the Church is discussed twice in *Marriage and Desire*. First, Augustine makes the rather unremarkable statement that the husband and wife are united permanently as long as they live, just as Christ and the Church are united as long as they exist.³² The thrust of the argument is the connection between indissolubility and marriage as a sacrament. In the second part of *Marriage and Desire*, Augustine discusses the unity of the first couple as a sign. It is their existence as two in one flesh that makes them a *prophetic* sign of what Paul would later refer to as the great sacrament.³³ Thus in the second example, there is a kind of layering of symbolism. The first couple is united in one flesh and so can serve as a prophetic sign of the eventual union between Christ and the Church. By extension, Christian marriages today continues to practice the same indissolubility, thus continuing to serve as a sign of Christ and the Church.³⁴

It is in the earlier work *The Excellence of Marriage*,³⁵ though, that Augustine takes a slightly different approach to the connection between indissolubility and the function of marriage as a sign – a connection which points to a more complex understanding than is often given credit

³¹ Ephesians 5:32, "This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church."

³² *Marriage and Desire* I.10.11.

³³ *Marriage and Desire* II.4.12.

³⁴ While the passage does reference the Creation Narratives, I contend that the primary Scriptural source for reflection here is Paul's letter. Having read Paul, Augustine then reads the symbolism into the first couple and the Creation Narrative. Thus it is not the Creation Narrative itself which suggests this reading but its reinterpretation in light of the passage from Paul.

³⁵ All references taken from Augustine, "The Excellence of Marriage."

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today. Here Augustine begins with the instruction from the Gospel of Matthew that a marriage cannot be dissolved by divorce except in the case of adultery.³⁶ Augustine notes that such a regulation against divorce is particular to Christians, distinct from the general practice of Roman society.³⁷ Since this instruction is so distinct, Augustine suggests that it must be for some greater purpose. “I do not think [the command not to divorce] could have been so strong at all, except that something from the weak mortal condition of mankind was being used as a symbol of something greater.”³⁸ Frustratingly, Augustine does not at this point make any suggestion of what marriage might serve to symbolize. It is not until much later in the work, following a discussion of chastity among the patriarchs, with the allowing and then disallowing of polygamy, that Augustine is prepared to comment on the significance of Christian marriage. While the polygamous marriages of the Old Testament were a sign of the plurality of peoples and nations who would one day be subject to God, the reinstated monogamy of Christian marriage is a sign of a future when all will be united and subject to God in the heavenly city.³⁹

Beyond even Paul’s statement of marriage being a sign of Christ and the Church, Augustine’s reflections on the passage from the Gospel of Matthew allow him to articulate an eschatological symbolism in marriage. Thus Augustine connects the indissolubility of marriage with its function as a sign through his own philosophy regarding the revelatory nature of material reality.⁴⁰ I mention this here precisely because this passage hints at a complexity in Augustine’s

³⁶ Matthew 5:32, “But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

³⁷ While divorce was possible in Roman society, there is some thought that we may over-estimate today how often the practice actually occurred. It should be noted, though, that the prohibition of divorce and remarriage due to a permanent bond of marriage did become a significant identity marker for early Christians. See Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods*, 64–65.

³⁸ *The Excellence of Marriage* 7.7.

³⁹ *The Excellence of Marriage* 18.21.

⁴⁰ Augustine’s concept of the sign – literally, sacramentum – takes in a revelatory character. The sign is a material object that reveals or, more precisely, prompts the person to contemplate a spiritual reality. Thus, in saying

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idea of marriage as a sacrament. While some theologians today may discuss marriage as indissoluble because it is a sacrament, Augustine presents us with the possibility that Christian marriage is a sacrament – that is, a revelatory sign – because it is indissoluble.

Augustine bases the good of fidelity largely in the statement by Paul that both husband and wife have authority over each other's bodies.⁴¹ This passage remains important in much of Augustine's later reflection and writing on fidelity, especially as it informs his understanding of the conjugal duty. Perhaps the most obvious interpretation of the instruction that the spouses have authority over each other's bodies is that their body is thus not their own to give to another. Augustine certainly had this meaning in mind when he stated, "husband and wife also have a duty of fidelity to each other...A breach of this duty of fidelity is called adultery, when, either because of the urge of one's own sensuality or by consenting to the other person's, one violates the marriage contract by sleeping with someone else."⁴² Augustine then interprets this authority over the body of the spouse as a kind of right to request sexual union from your spouse. The context here is especially helpful: Augustine is concerned with situations where one spouse may be capable of celibacy while the other is not, and so the one capable of celibacy may then deprive their spouse of sexual union and create the occasion for adultery.⁴³ To this Augustine gives the instruction that fidelity involves a responsibility to look for the good of the spouse, especially in their struggle with concupiscence. "Married people, therefore, not only owe each other fidelity in relation to

that marriage is a sacramentum of the unity of Christ and the Church, Augustine is implying that the spiritual unity is being revealed or manifested through the relationship of the spouses. For more on Augustine's theology of signs, see especially Cary, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought*, 92–95, 105–6; see also Lee, *Augustine and the Mystery of the Church*, 3–10, 20–24.

⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 7:3-6, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. This I say by way of concessions, not of command."

⁴² *The Excellence of Marriage* 4.4.

⁴³ *The Excellence of Marriage* 6.6.

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sexual union for the sake of having children...but also in a certain way they owe each other a mutual service to relieve each other's weakness, and thereby avoid illicit unions."⁴⁴ In short, Augustine sees the conjugal duty not only as sexual exclusivity of the spouses but as a kind of duty to help the spouse, especially in their moral well-being.⁴⁵ Thus the good of fidelity is not only the prohibition from giving your body to another who is not your spouse, but equally the prohibition from completely withholding your body from your spouse. The vision of marriage that emerges from Augustine's reflection is one where the spouses can rely on each other's support as they strive towards holiness and virtue.

A particularly challenging part of Augustine's theology of marriage is his insistence that Christians abstain from marriage as much as possible. The justification of this thought comes from the passage in Ecclesiastes, "a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing."⁴⁶ Augustine often reads the passage from Ecclesiastes in connection with a passage from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, "from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none."⁴⁷ These two passages are invoked a number of times across many of Augustine's works on marriage, with their implementation remaining surprisingly stable throughout his career.

⁴⁴ *The Excellence of Marriage* 6.6. See also *Marriage and Desire* I.14.16, "So what does the apostle grant as a concession but that when a husband and wife cannot practice abstinence, they demand from each other their conjugal rights, not because of the will to have children, but because of the pleasure of sexual desire?"

⁴⁵ I am drawing here on Teresa Morgan's recent study of 'fides' in the Greco-Roman world. As a description of relationships in general, fides refers to the responsibilities owed to each other by the people in the relationship. See Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire*, 52–53. My argument is that the fides in marriage as described by Augustine is not only sexual exclusivity of the spouses but the responsibility of the spouses to support each other in their overall moral development.

⁴⁶ Ecclesiastes 3:5b.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 7:29b. Augustine does give a brief exegesis of this passage, including some instruction on how a married person is to live as if they were unmarried. "For those who have their wives in such a way that they bear in mind the things of the Lord in order to please the Lord and who do not bear in mind the things of the world in order to please their wives are like those who do not have wives." (See *Marriage and Desire* I.13.15) Augustine's concern is that people not be distracted from spiritual things by the desire for material things. Hence the issue with being married is not that it is somehow less desirable, but that it poses the danger of distracting the person from spiritual concerns. A similar distinction will be made in a passage from *The Excellence of Widowhood*, discussed below.

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Augustine's concern comes from the belief that the necessity for having children (and therefore for marrying) has been alleviated by Christ and the establishment of the visible Church.⁴⁸ Hence, it is no longer a time for embracing, but a time to refrain from embracing. In the past, the propagation of children was a duty to be performed in order to build up the People of God. Now, however, there is an abundance of people from all races who may be reborn spiritually in the Church – the only way to build up the City of God now – and so it is a time to refrain from marriage and sexual relations.⁴⁹ For Christians, then, those who are capable of celibacy should neither marry nor propagate.⁵⁰ Indeed, if procreation is no longer a duty to human society, who would not choose to remain celibate now that the time for embracing has passed?⁵¹

Augustine's instructions to widows, *The Excellence of Widowhood*,⁵² provides a condensed version of his thought that Christians should not marry. In advising on whether the widow should remarry, Augustine concedes that she is free to do so but urges against it. Drawing on both Ecclesiastes and First Corinthians, Augustine rehearses his usual teaching that, unless the weakness of the flesh is an obstacle, Christians should reject marriage.⁵³ Augustine's specific advice to the widow is that, since she already has a daughter, marrying for a second time would not bring the particular benefit of giving her a child. In her case, remarriage would be a kind of admission that she cannot be celibate. Better to remain unmarried, then, and demonstrate an ability to be celibate.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Take for example Augustine's brief exegesis of Paul: "He says, *I tell you this, brothers: the time is short: the people of God no longer needs to be propagated by birth in the flesh, but to be gathered up by spiritual rebirth.*" (See *Marriage and Desire* I.13.15.)

⁴⁹ *Marriage and Desire* I.13.14.

⁵⁰ Augustine, "Adulterous Marriages" II.12.12.

⁵¹ *The Excellence of Marriage* 13.15.

⁵² All references taken from Augustine, "The Excellence of Widowhood."

⁵³ *The Excellence of Widowhood* 8.11.

⁵⁴ *The Excellence of Widowhood* 8.11.

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The preference for celibacy over marriage is somewhat related to the function of *fides* in the marriage. Even when a couple marries because they cannot be continent, Augustine expects that they will grow in continence until they both can be completely celibate. The responsibility of the spouses towards each other, described as the good of *fides*, is part of the process of becoming celibate. Hence Augustine's concern that a married person who has become capable of celibacy not completely deprive their (non-celibate) spouse of sexual intimacy. While marriage is not as holy as celibacy, Augustine holds that the spousal relationship remains important as a means of helping people to develop the virtue of continence.

Lest it seem that Augustine dislikes marriage, we should consider his use of a further passage from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians in his discussion of the distinction between married women and widows. Paul writes, "And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord."⁵⁵ Augustine begins by arguing that Paul is not implying marriage is in any way dishonourable, but that celibacy and vowed widowhood are simply more honourable.⁵⁶ In a similar way, Augustine argues that Paul's statement regarding unmarried women being holy in mind and body only implies that the unmarried women have greater holiness, while married women are holy but less so in comparison.⁵⁷ Finally, Augustine comes to the reason for this distinction, namely that unmarried women can devote their attention to God. "Accordingly, whatever attention she would otherwise give to things concerned with pleasing her husband, a Christian who is not

⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:34-35.

⁵⁶ *The Excellence of Widowhood* 5.7.

⁵⁷ *The Excellence of Widowhood* 6.8.

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married should reclaim and redirect to the purpose of pleasing the Lord.”⁵⁸ The greater holiness Augustine ascribes to the unmarried is not guaranteed, but is in potential due to their ability to direct their energies towards spiritual concerns.

In drawing on a wider range of Scripture, Augustine was able to articulate a rich theology of marriage. The sacrament is not only the sign of Christ and the Church, as given by Paul in his letters, but a symbol of the eschatological unity of all peoples with God that we already look forward to. Fidelity is a responsibility of the spouses towards each other as help and support in their moral development, especially in their growth in sexual virtue and continence. Finally, the new age inaugurated by the coming of Christ has changed the necessity of marriage and procreation in relation to celibacy. These reflections on marriage are not unrelated to the vision of the first couple as given in the Creation Narratives. For example, the idea that procreation and marriage are no longer necessary now would be incomprehensible unless there was a concept of them having been necessary before, as given in the Creation Narrative. Augustine was prompted to these reflections, though, only because he looked to the rest of Scripture and especially to the New Testament.

While Scripture typically, and properly, occupies an important place in theological reflection, the choice of biblical texts can have a distinct impact on the results of said reflection. In describing what marriage *is* – good, procreative, and a form of bond between the spouses – Augustine looked to the Creation Narrative. Yet, in order to describe what marriage *does* – signify the future union of God and all peoples and provide the support for the moral development of the spouses – Augustine looked to a much wider range of Scriptural passages. Our theology today can continue to benefit from such a wide range of Scripture. The Church is open to hearing the whole

⁵⁸ *The Excellence of Widowhood* 19.23.

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Word of God in reflecting on her identity and purpose in the world today. We would benefit from a similar openness when considering how God is calling us to live both as married and as unmarried or celibate within the Church and the world. By drawing on a wider range of Scriptural texts, we can reflect not only on Christian marriage, but on marriage as part of the Christian identity as a whole.

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