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INTERSEX AND *IMAGO*: SEX, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY
IN POSTMODERN THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

by

Megan K. DeFranza, B.A., M.A.T.H., M.A.B.L

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2011

ABSTRACT
INTERSEX AND *IMAGO*: SEX, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY
IN POSTMODERN THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Megan K. DeFranza, B.A., M.A.T.H., M.A.B.L

Marquette University, 2011

Christian theologians regularly assume a binary model of human sex differentiation based on the creation narratives found in Genesis. Recent work in theological anthropology has grounded theological concepts such as the social view of the image of God, human personhood, and human relationality on the creation of humans as male and female in heterosexual marital relation. While these anthropologies have merit—particularly in correcting older versions of the *imago Dei* which privileged the male—they are inadequate for addressing the phenomena of intersex.

Intersex is a broad term used for persons whose bodies display some physical characteristics of both sexes—historically labeled “hermaphrodites” and more recently as persons with Disorders of Sex Development (DSD). Physicians estimate that at least one in every 4,500 children is born with an intersex condition.

Despite the good intentions of parents and doctors, many intersex persons are challenging the medical treatment they have received which aims at establishing their bodies as clearly male or female. They recount harrowing stories of surgeries gone bad, sex assignments rejected, records withheld, and medical treatment experienced as sexual abuse. Many are working to end “shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries” or advocating that intersex be recognized as a third sex or as a harbinger of a sexless society.

While some postmodern theologians are incorporating intersex alongside persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, more conservative Christians, such as Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, have yet to attend to the challenges intersex persons bring to their theologies and communities. In their attempts to justify heterosexual ethics some have turned a blind eye to the presence of intersexed persons or argued that intersex can and should be fixed through medical intervention. These same theologians often overemphasize the significance of sex difference for theological anthropology.

I argue that traditional sexual ethics do not preclude recognizing the full humanity of intersex persons as made in the image of God. I write in order to create theological and practical space for intersex persons and a more balanced vision of the *imago Dei* as it relates to sex, gender, and sexuality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Megan K. DeFranza, B.A., M.A.T.H., M.A.B.L

To my beloved husband, Andrew, for faithful love, patience, perseverance, help, wisdom, and laughter, without whom I would be a lesser person and none of this would be possible; to my daughters, Lórien and Eden, for love, lessons, and keeping my feet firmly planted on solid ground; to my parents, Jack and Pat Shannon, for life, love, and establishing my faith in Jesus Christ; to my brother, Mark Shannon, friend and editor extraordinaire; to Rebecca Cheney, recreational therapist; to Angela McManus for loving me and my children; to my mother-in-law, Barbara DeFranza, for moving away from husband and home to care for her grandchildren and help me to the end, and to Angelo for letting her go; to Edie and Dave Finnell, Christine and Greg Mutch, Anita Coco, Erika Miller, Jeff and Kellie Gentry, Jennifer Packard, Cheryl Deluca, Gigi Gregory, Stacey Shannon, Jacquie Cox and all my family and friends who have believed in me, counseled me, cheered me on, prayed for me, been patient with me, forgiven me, and loved me to the end... Words cannot express my gratitude and love.

I would like to thank all of my teachers, mentors, and administrators, in particular: Lyle Dabney, John Franke, Frank and Carolyn Curtis James, Mark F. Johnson, Edward Keazirian, Richard Lints, Therese Lysaught, Stephen Long, Alice Mathews, Doug Matthews, Beth Maynard, Joseph Mueller, Gale Prusinski, William and Aída Besançon Spencer, Tim and Julie Tennent, Wanda Zemler-Cizewski, Hessel Bouma, the Graduate School, and all of the Marquette University administration.

I would like to thank Mimi Haddad and Christians for Biblical Equality for risking their reputation to allow me to present my research at their annual conference in 2010. I am grateful to participants in the North Shore Emergent Cohort who listened to my work in progress, encouraged, and sharpened my thinking with their conversations. To Fr Michael Morse and John Pryor at All Saints Anglican Church and Center for Theology, thank you for the opportunity to share some of my research with the church.

To Jane Spalding and all intersex persons whose courage and wisdom spur me on.

To Stanely Grenz, for lighting my theological path, modeling a humble and irenic spirit, and showing me how to be a critically-loyal Evangelical. To John Paul II, for bringing Roman Catholics and Evangelicals closer together and for allowing me to stand on your shoulders... thank you.

To the God who made even me in the image of the loving and holy Trinity, who redeemed me from my sin and continues to forgive me for my failings, who perseveres in remaking me in *imago Dei*, conforming me to Christ, reconciling me in his Body, and renewing me in the Spirit... To this God be the glory now and forever, Amen.

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INTERSEX AND *IMAGO* **an Introduction**

In the Beginning God created the heavens and the earth...
Then God said, “Let us make human[kind]¹ in our image, according to our likeness,
and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle,
and over all the wild animals of the earth,
and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”
So God created the human in his image, in the image of God he created [the human],²
male and female he created them.
And God blessed them and said to them,
“Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.
Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air
and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”
Genesis 1:1, 26-28

Every Christian account of humanity begins here, in Genesis chapter one. From this passage we learn that human beings are made in God’s image and likeness, that humans were created as male and female, and that humans are given the charge to “fill the earth and subdue it,” participating in God’s rule over the earth and continuing God’s creation through *procreation*. And yet, the questions, “What is the human?” and “What is the image?” have been answered very differently by theologians throughout history.

¹ The Hebrew here is *adam* without the article, which can be translated as *human, a human, man, a man, or humankind*. I have translated it with the inclusive, *humankind*, in order to match the verb which is plural, “let them rule.”

² I have chosen to substitute the noun to which the pronoun is referring in order to avoid the confusion between natural and grammatical gender to which English-language readers are often prone. The Hebrew pronoun here is masculine because it must correspond to the masculine noun *adam*. We know that *adam* is an inclusive noun not only from this passage where it is then described as male and female but also from Gen. 5:2 “God created them male and female, and God blessed them and named them *adam* in the day when they were created.” Some translators change the Hebrew singular to an English plural in order to bring out the inclusive: “He created *them*.” I have chosen to retain the singular by substituting the noun to which the pronoun refers.

For centuries theologians have connected the image of God with “subduing” or “ruling” the earth—what has come to be called the “functional view” of *imago Dei*; others sought to search behind function to substance. Human rationality was viewed as that which made ruling possible, and reason was believed to be located in the soul. Because the soul was believed to be made out of the same substance as the divine, this came to be known as the “substantive” or “structural view” of the *imago Dei*.³ The substance or structure of the soul was also believed to be the seat of other human capacities such as the ability to love or to pursue virtue or holiness—attributes associated with the image of God by different theologians in history.⁴ Much less often have theologians considered “filling the earth” or “being fruitful” as linked to of the image. Even less often have they considered being created “male” or “female” as relevant to the discussion; although a number of them did believe that males more closely reflected the image of God because they believed males were more rational and therefore more natural, or rightful, rulers.⁵ Nevertheless, most theologians separated the image of God from being male or female or from human sexuality and procreation because they believed the testimony of John, who insisted, “God is spirit” (John 4:24). God does not have a body. Even when God did take on a body in the person of Jesus Christ, God did not engage in sexual activity by marrying or physically fathering children.

However theologians are beginning to overcome historical aversions and mistrust of sex, gender, and sexuality. They are asking, what is the theological significance of sex,

³ Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 76.

⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 168.

⁵ Frederick G. McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), esp. chapter 6, “Are Women Images of God?”

gender, and sexuality? Instead of viewing sex and sexuality as ways that humans mirror the animals, or associating sexuality with concupiscence as the primary illustration of sinful (disordered) desires, Christians are asking what good has God placed within the human body through biological sex differentiation, culturally-influenced gender identity/behavior, and sexual desire/activity. In their attempts to answer these questions, theologians are returning to the image of God.

Although he was not the first, Karl Barth (1886-1968) is often credited for challenging the traditional interpretations of the *imago Dei*.⁶ Rather than understanding the image as the soul's ability to reason, or the responsibility to rule over creation, Barth looked to the creation of Adam and Eve as a symbolic picture, an image of the Trinity. In Genesis 1:27-28, God said, "Let us make humankind in our image," and then what does God make? Not one but two, a man and a woman, who are to "become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Just as God is a plurality and unity, three in one, so humankind, created in God's image, exists as two who are called to become one.⁷ Thus, after Barth, we find that human sex differentiation and human sexuality (the means by which these two become one) have

⁶ Barth pulled together the contributions of Martin Buber, Wilhelm Vischer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Emil Brunner, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, and Friedrich Schleiermacher to argue that the way in which humans image God is in their existence as relational beings. Barth wrote, "Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man which is that of male and female...?" Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1 trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), 195. Cited in Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 271. Cf. F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 124; Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Imago Dei, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics," in *Image of God and Gender Models in Jewish-Christian Tradition*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991); Suzanne Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth: A Study in Biography and the History of Theology* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 50.

⁷ Some theologians have even gone so far as to include procreation as a functional view of the *imago*—procreation as analogous to divine creation of the universe. Grenz cites Henri Blocher and Meredith Kline as representatives of this view in Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 175.

been taken up into theological accounts of what it means to be made in the image of God. This view has come to be labeled the “relational” or “social view” of the *imago Dei*.⁸

The social view of the *imago Dei* has much to recommend it. First and foremost, as Barth pointed out, it provides a more thorough exegesis of the Biblical text. While in Genesis 1:26 the author connects the image to ruling and subduing, in verses 27-28 the image is connected first to humankind as male and female, followed by the commands to increase in number and fill the earth, and finally to the command to subdue the earth. A comprehensive theology of the *imago* should account for all that is within the text.

A second strength of the social view of the *imago Dei* is the full inclusion of women as equal participants in the image of God. Theologians who stress the social view insist that the man as male is not, nor can he be, the complete or perfect image of God to which woman is an afterthought, deviation, or lesser image—interpretations that have long histories in Roman Catholic and Protestant theological traditions. Theologians who attend to the social view of the *imago* insist that male and female must partner, not only in the filling of the earth but also in its rule and care. It is a theological vision affecting everyday praxis. The idea that God is a community of love and created humans to image the community of love in (human) sameness and (sex) difference has theological weight as well as practical power to change the ways in which we live in the world.

Lastly, the social view of the *imago Dei*, with its attention to human embodiment and sex differentiation, is also being connected to human sexuality. Though Barth was careful not to construe the I-Thou relationship between Adam and Eve as sexual, many

⁸ This position appears under various names: relational, communal, social, etc. Stanley Grenz speaks of the “social God” and “relational self” in his theological anthropology by the same title, while in his *Theology for the Community of God*, he discusses the social or relational view under the heading “The Divine Image as Special Community” (p. 178). I find using the term social for both trinity and *imago Dei* clarifies the connection.

who have built on his model have extended the social *imago* to include sexual desire and sexual union, as this dissertation will show. Just as contemporary theologians are working hard to overcome histories of interpretation that have devalued female embodiment, so many theologians are also working hard to overcome centuries of religious traditions which have devalued sexual bodies, sexual desire, and sexual acts within and outside of Christian marriage. The social view of the *imago* has much to recommend it.

At the same time, the social view need not eclipse other interpretations of the *imago*. Most theologians continue to highlight the significance of human reason and human responsibility to care for creation. Nevertheless, history has taught us that an overemphasis on rationality and rule has been the demise of the West. The Rule of Reason has been used to oppress and subjugate many who were believed to be less reasonable—women, ethnic minorities, cultural and religious “others.” Postmodern thinkers are now arguing that the Rule of Reason is not enough. Love, community, mutuality, the goodness of bodies, of sex, gender, and sexuality are goods too often lost when reason and rule are the center of our vision of God and God’s image in humanity.

The social *imago* has been the means by which theologians are recovering the value of human community, and the value of sex, gender, and sexuality. It has been added to structural and functional views of the *imago*, not to eclipse the former but in order to present a more complete picture of humanity created in God’s image.

While the social view of the image of God has recovered essential components of what it means to be human created in the image of God, it is not without its own weaknesses. First and foremost is the omission of anyone who does not fit into the sex/gender binary paradigm of Adam or Eve, male or female—human persons once

labeled androgynes or hermaphrodites whom we now call intersex. Physicians estimate that one in every 4,500 children is born intersex—a startlingly high number given how little recognition has been given to these persons in contemporary Western society.⁹ Indeed, many modern Westerners do not even know what intersex is, much less the statistical probability that they may know intersex persons at work, in their families, or within their religious communities.

John Calvin opened his systematic theology insisting that

true and solid wisdom consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other.¹⁰

Calvin recognized that theological anthropology and theology proper are intimately related and mutually conditioning. How we conceive of God affects how we conceive of the human and how we interpret the image of God. Likewise, how we conceive of humans affects how we conceive of the image and also impacts our understanding of God. The challenge for theologians today is that our knowledge of ourselves is changing.¹¹ The (re)discovery of intersex is one of the ways in which our knowledge of humankind is changing in the postmodern period.

Ignorance of intersex may be pardonable. Willful marginalization is not.

Postmodernity has made us more aware of and concerned to protect and celebrate the genuine diversity which exists in the human family, while at the same time working to acknowledge our common humanity and extending “human rights” to all persons. Thus,

⁹ I. A. Hughes, C. Houck, S. F. Ahmed, P. A. Lee, LWPES/ESPE [Lawson Wilkins Pediatric Endocrine Society/European Society for Paediatric Endocrinology] Consensus Group, “Consensus Statement on Management of Intersex Disorders,” *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 2 (May 2006), 1. See chapter 1 for more detailed discussions of the frequency of intersex.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.1. Henry Beveridge, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, 1997), 37.

¹¹ John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 14.

theological work in the postmodern period is much more attentive to differences of sex, gender, ethnicity, age, class, language, sexuality, as well as able and disabled bodies. It is within this milieu that intersex is resurfacing into public consciousness and discourse. Churches and theologians are beginning to ask questions about intersex—questions that have not been asked for centuries by Christians in the West.

Now that theologians are rediscovering that intersex persons have been members of the human family in each generation, it is necessary that we take their humanity seriously, listen to their concerns, respond to their criticisms and claims, and consider what they have to teach us about the ways in which we think about biological sex, gender, and sexuality. This reconsideration will return us to contemporary discussions of the social *imago*.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson summarizes the significance of the *imago Dei* for Christian anthropology:

...the image is a symbolic condensation of what in the Christian tradition it means to be fully human. Its significance increases further upon recognition that the *imago Dei* has the double function of referring both to human beings and to God. It thereby directs us to ask not only about the way in which God is imaged and what that communicates, but about how such imaging contributes to the valuing and devaluing of human beings as well. In important respects the *imago Dei* can serve as an index of *whom* the tradition has seen as fully human.¹²

Fulkerson focuses her argument on the fact that women (and ethnic minorities) have rarely been viewed (or treated) as true images of God. This dissertation extends the inquiry further, to the phenomena of intersex. For if women were not always recognized as fully human or fully created in the image of God (especially under the functional or

¹² Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "The *Imago Dei* and a Reformed Logic for Feminist/Womanist Critique," in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 95.

structural views of the *imago*) how are the intersexed to be included in discussions of the social *imago*, which pays attention to sexed bodies but only the sexed bodies of males and females? Are the intersexed fully human? Are the intersexed true images of God? Can intersex persons image God if they are physically prohibited from entering into heterosexual marital relations, unable to embody “male-and-female-in-relation,” imaging divine relationality through human sexual relations?

Some churches are including intersex as one more color within the rainbow of options which include persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). More conservative Christians, such as Evangelicals and Roman Catholics who continue to uphold traditional heterosexual ethics, have yet to attend to the challenges intersex persons bring to their theologies and communities. Many are unaware of the phenomena, while others have dismissed intersex because of its association with LGBTQ.¹³ For an in-depth theological investigation of intersex from an LGBTQ-affirming position, I recommend the excellent work of Susannah Cornwall.¹⁴ This dissertation is an attempt to begin theological reflection in the Evangelical, Catholic, and Anglican traditions in the knowledge that not all intersex persons identify with LGBTQ perspectives.¹⁵ Even among those who may, there are those who still ask that intersex be differentiated from the former, saying,

¹³ Cf. Charles Colson, “Blurred Biology: How Many Sexes Are There?” *BreakPoint* (October 16, 1996), <http://www.colsoncenter.org/commentaries/5213-blurred-biology>.

¹⁴ Susannah Cornwall, “The Kenosis of Unambiguous Sex in the Body of Christ: Intersex, Theology, and Existing ‘for the Other,’” *Theology & Sexuality* 14.2 (January 2008): 181-200; “No Longer Male and Female: The Challenge of Intersex Conditions for Theology,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Exeter, 2007; “Running to Catch Up with Intersex,” *Church Times* 7644 (18 September 2009): 13; “‘State of Mind’ versus ‘Concrete Set of Facts’: The Contrasting of Transgender and Intersex in Church Documents on Sexuality,” *Theology & Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (2009): 7-28; *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (London and Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2010).

¹⁵ Suzanne Kessler reports that two devout Christians who showed some interest in the Intersex Society of North America stopped participating in on-line discussions due to conflicting opinions. They

While LGBT communities can certainly provide forums for addressing intersex issues, conflating or collapsing intersexuality into LGBT agendas fails to acknowledge the specific and urgent issues facing intersex people.¹⁶

The “specific and urgent issues facing intersex people” include education about intersex, legal recognition of intersex, and advocacy for better medical care. Intersex advocates are working to end “shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries”—challenging medical paternalism which, until recently, kept patients (and sometimes parents) ignorant of their (child’s) medical conditions and made access to records difficult or impossible to obtain. Many intersex advocates are working to influence the medical community as well as parents of the next generation of intersex children to postpone irreversible, technological attempts to “correct” intersex (genital surgery and hormone therapies) until children are of the age of consent and pubertal changes (if any) have been allowed to manifest.

As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 1, most intersex surgeries are not medically necessary. They are performed in order to help the child “appear” less ambiguous, in the hope that parents will be better able to bond with their infants if they are not “affronted” at every diaper change and so that other potentially difficult societal interactions (e.g., in locker rooms or at urinals) will be avoided. Despite the good intentions of parents and doctors, many intersex persons recount harrowing stories of surgeries gone bad, of sex assignments rejected, and of medical treatment experienced as sexual abuse. These cries are leading to changes in medical standards of treatment. However, when Christians insist that male and female are the only human options,

were never heard from again. Suzanne J. Kessler, *Lessons from the Intersexed* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 87.

¹⁶ Emi Koyama and Lisa Weasel, “From Social Construction to Social Justice: Transforming How We Teach About Intersexuality,” *Teaching Intersex Issues: A Guide for Teachers in Women’s, Gender & Queer Studies*, 2nd ed., ed., Emi Koyama (Portland: Intersex Initiative Portland, 2003), 5.

theological weight is cast in favor of (early) medical intervention, ignoring the stories of suffering and the pleas of the intersexed for better care. Conservative Christians must give ear to these marginalized voices in our families, communities, and churches. As I will argue, Christian theological anthropologies, even the conservative anthropologies of Evangelicals and Roman Catholics do not necessarily stand in the way of these goals.

As a theologian raised and educated in the Evangelical world and completing doctoral studies at a Roman Catholic university, it may not come as a surprised that I now worship with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA)—a denomination that identifies itself with the historic streams of Anglo-Catholicism, Evangelicalism, and Charismatic renewal. These are the traditions which have formed my life of faith and within which I wish to speak as we continue to wrestle with the theological significance of sex, gender, and sexuality in the postmodern context. I do not presume to offer a universal Theological Anthropology in the modernist sense. Rather, as a postmodern theologian who recognizes the situatedness of all interpretation, I offer my arguments as one voice in the ongoing conversation on the meaning of sex, gender, and sexuality for theological anthropology in the postmodern context.

Most Evangelicals, conservative Anglicans, and Roman Catholics continue to defend traditional Christian (hetero)sexual ethics, even in the face of serious cultural and thoughtful theological challenges.¹⁷ But in holding to the significance of sex

¹⁷ Debating Christian sexual ethics is beyond the scope of this dissertation, especially as it has been handled adequately elsewhere. Eugene F. Rogers Jr. has provided a number of thoughtful, theological defenses of homosexual unions in his anthology, *Theology and Sexuality*, along with his own essay, “Sanctification, Homosexuality, and God’s Triune Life,” in *Theology and Sexuality*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers Jr. (London: Blackwell, 2002), 217-246. While I appreciate his, and others’, careful work, my own position remains closer to those of Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995); Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976, 1994); and especially William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers

complementarity for marriage (one man and one woman), theologians within these traditions have, at times, overemphasized the significance of sex “difference,” extending sex complementarity to justify theological notions of gender complementarity. In their attempts to provide theological justification for heterosexual ethics some have turned a blind eye to the presence of intersexed persons in the Scriptures, in Christian history, and among us today while others have argued that intersex can and should be fixed through medical technology in order to approximate what they believe to be “creational givens.”

It is my hope that by (re)educating ourselves on the phenomena of intersex we will be better able to read the Scriptures anew, upholding at the same time the goodness of male-female complementarity in marriage, as well as the full humanity of intersex persons, their place in the community of faith, and the lessons they can teach us about the theological significance of sex, gender, and sexuality. Intersex raises questions for theologians on two fronts: 1) What are the implications of Christian theology for understanding, care, and ministry to/with the intersexed? 2) What are the implications of intersex for theological anthropologies built upon a binary model of human sex differentiation? As this is a theological dissertation, emphasis will be placed on the latter set of questions in the hopes that they will remove theological stumbling blocks to the former. As such, I will also argue that space must be (re)opened within the binary

Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001). Like Webb, who acknowledges that his vision of gender egalitarianism is his best reading of Scripture but could be mistaken, I acknowledge that I may also be mistaken in my reading of sexual activity as restricted to heterosexual marriage; nevertheless, as much as I have great respect and love for certain lesbians and gays whom I know, and my heart breaks with them for the pain most have experienced, I cannot in good conscience affirm a practicing homosexual lifestyle from the Bible. I am unsympathetic to more radical proposals, such as those found in Elizabeth Stuart, ed., *Religion is a Queer Thing: A Guide to the Christian Faith for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1997). Stuart rightly observes that debates over gay marriage are really discussions as to how far heterosexual marriage can be stretched. She laments that this fails to address bisexual persons as well as others, e.g., those who advocate polyandry and communal sexuality (Stuart, 2). I must agree with her that marriage does remain the model for Christian sexual ethics, including the debate over gay marriage.

framework of the Christian tradition in order to enable intersex persons to be accepted as they are, supported if they decide to bring their bodies in line with a male or female gender identity, and also embraced if they decide to forego medical interventions, choosing instead to identify as intersex.

Methodology

Given that a growing number of works are already available either written by intersex persons themselves¹⁸ or drawn from interviews with intersex persons by the non-intersexed,¹⁹ this dissertation was accomplished through text-based research of available materials. Nevertheless, as I was working on this project, I was privileged to talk with several persons with intersex conditions, who were willing to identify themselves and discuss their experiences with me. I thank them for their courage, trust, and contributions to my own thinking.

Extant Theological Work on Intersex

Medical, historical, anthropological, legal, and sociological works on intersex are becoming increasingly available.²⁰ Only a few theological explorations have been proffered.

Patricia Jung argues that biblical texts do not require sexual dimorphism but can be read to support “sexual polymorphism.”²¹ Karen Lebacqz works from an ethic of the

¹⁸ E.g. Kailana Sidrandi Alaniz, Cheryl Chase [Bo Laurent], Sally Gross, Thea Hillman, Morgan Holmes, Emi Koyama, Jane Spalding, Lisa Weasel.

¹⁹ E.g. Gerald N. Callahan, Alice Domurat Dreger, John Money, Sharon E. Preves, Elizabeth Reis.

²⁰ E.g. Accord Alliance, Alice Domurat Dreger, Julia Epstein, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Julie A. Greenberg, Gilbert Herdt, Melissa Hines, Ieuan Hughes, *et al.*, Intersex Society of North America, Intersex Support Group International, Katrina Karkazis, Suzanne Kessler, Thomas Lacqueur, Wendy McKenna, Sharon E. Preves, Elizabeth Reis, Leonard Sax, Sharon E. Sytsma, Claudia Wiesemann, *et al.*, Andrew Zinn, Kenneth J. Zucker.

alleviation of suffering but does not engage with Scripture.²² J. David Hester, a biblical scholar, begins his study of intersex by connecting it to the ancient category of the eunuch and moving from the gender transgression of eunuchs to advocating “transgressive sexualities.”²³ Virginia Ramey Mollenkott is a former fundamentalist who continues to identify as “Evangelical” in her approach to the Bible but left the Evangelical sub-culture when she came out as a lesbian in the 1970s.²⁴ Her work, *Omnigender: a trans-religious approach*,²⁵ focuses on the experiences of transgender to which she believes intersex is related as a biological justification for diversions from the binary sex/gender system. Susannah Cornwall offers the most comprehensive theological exploration of intersex to date, comparing and contrasting intersex to transgender, disability, and queer theologies.²⁶ These writer attend to “the specific and urgent issues facing intersex people” at the same time that they employ intersex as one more argument against traditional Christian sexual ethics. It is the dearth of theological materials from Evangelicals and Roman Catholics which motivated the present study.

A few Evangelicals have written briefly on the phenomena of intersex. Chuck Colson’s treatment in “Blurred Biology: How Many Sexes Are There?” represents those

²¹ Patricia B. Jung, “Christianity and Human Sexual Polymorphism: Are they Compatible?” in *Ethics and Intersex*, Sharon E. Sytsm, ed. (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2006), xxv.

²² Karen Lebacqz, “Difference or Defect? Intersexuality and the Politics of Difference,” *The Annual for the Society of Christian Ethics* 17 (1997): 213-229.

²³ J. David Hester, “Eunuchs and the Postgender Jesus: Matthew 19.12 and Transgressive Sexualities,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28, no. 1 (2005): 13-40; and “Intersexes and the End of Gender: Corporeal Ethics and Postgender Bodies,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 13, no. 3 (November 2004): 215-225.

²⁴ Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and Richard Mouw with Krista Tippett, “Gay Marriage: Broken or Blessed? Two Evangelical Views, on “Speaking of Faith” (August 3, 2006), <http://being.publicradio.org/programs/gaymarriage/index.shtml>.

²⁵ Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Omnigender: a trans-religious approach* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001).

²⁶ Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*; Cornwall, “The Kenosis of Unambiguous Sex in the Body of Christ: Intersex, Theology, and Existing ‘for the Other’;” Cornwall, “No Longer Male and Female: The Challenge of Intersex Conditions for Theology,” Ph.D. Dissertation; and Cornwall, “Running to Catch Up with Intersex.”

who view intersex as a product of the Fall—punishment for the original sin of Adam and Eve.

The Bible teaches that the Fall into sin affected biology itself—that nature is now marred and distorted from its original perfection. This truth gives us a basis for fighting evil, for working to alleviate disease and deformity—including helping those unfortunate children born with genital deformities.²⁷

His theological conviction that intersex is a product of the Fall leads directly to an argument for medical intervention—a logical move paralleled in Dennis Hollinger’s *Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life*.²⁸ Colson’s dismissal of intersex seems motivated by his fear of what he calls “the homosexual lobby.”²⁹ He does not attend to intersex in its own right.

Other Evangelicals have provided more helpful treatments. Amanda Riley Smith opens the door to the possibility of welcoming the intersexed *as* intersexed in her article, “What Child is this? Making Room for Intersexuality.”³⁰ Heather Looy and Hessel Bouma III, psychologist and biologist respectively, argue for the consideration of the full humanity of intersex, their inclusion in the community of faith, and better medical, psychological, and pastoral care.³¹ Their articles begin to wrestle with the theological issues attending intersex but they write in order to ask theologians to contribute to the task.

²⁷ Charles Colson, “Blurred Biology.”

²⁸ Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 74, 84.

²⁹ Charles Colson, “Blurred Biology.”

³⁰ Amanda Riley Smith, “What Child is this? Making Room for Intersexuality,” *Regeneration Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (Winter 2002) : 27-30.

³¹ Heather Looy, “Male and Female God Created Them: The Challenge of Intersexuality,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 21 (2002): 10-20; Heather Looy, “Sex Differences: Evolved, Constructed and Designed,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 29:4 (Winter 2001): 301-313; and Heather Looy and Hessel Bouma, III, “The Nature of Gender: Gender Identity in Persons Who are Intersexed or Transgendered,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33:3 (2005): 166-178.

We must acknowledge that our expertise is as a psychologist and biologist, drawing on science and experience. Our search of the theological literature to understand creation norms for human sexuality and gender has uncovered little in depth or well-developed material. It is our hope that this article may stimulate conversations and promote the theological scholarship needed to help address these issues further.³²

I have found no Roman Catholic treatment of intersex from a theological perspective other than one offered by an intersex person.³³ The story of Selwyn/Sally Gross is worth recounting at length for it places the theological arguments made by Gross, myself, and others in their proper context—the lives of real people.

Gross was born in South Africa to Jewish parents in August 1953. The birth heralded not joy but distress as the mother was told that her infant “was likely to die of dehydration.” Looking back on the moment, Sally considers,

Now a new born infant doesn’t die of dehydration unless you don’t feed it... My suspicion is that back then in 1953 the reaction was: “Oh my God! What do we do, let’s let nature take its course.” But then someone relented.³⁴

Although born intersexed with ambiguous genitals, Gross was given the sex assignment of male and named Selwyn.³⁵ Selwyn knew that he was different, especially when he hit puberty and his sexual drive never developed. Gross simply assumed that he was “one of nature’s celibates” but found little room for celibacy within Judaism where “[o]ne is expected to produce grandchildren.”³⁶ Although a committed Orthodox Jew, Gross began to look elsewhere to make sense of his experiences. “I did not believe at the time that Orthodox Judaism had religious symbols which could make sense of the way in which I

³² Looy and Bouma, 176.

³³ Sally Gross, “Intersexuality and Scripture,” *Theology and Sexuality* 11 (1999): 65-74.

³⁴ Sally Gross, “The Journey from Selwyn to Sally,” *The Natal Witness Features*, South Africa (February 21, 2000), <http://www.intersex.org.za/publications/witness1.pdf>. See page 31: Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia can expose an infant to the risk of dehydration but it is not clear from Gross’ case whether this diagnosis applies.

³⁵ Intersex Society of South Africa, “Biographies: Sally Gross,” <http://www.intersex.org.za/biography.html>.

³⁶ Gross, “The Journey from Selwyn to Sally.”

was different, whatever it was...”³⁷ The place which Roman Catholicism carved out for celibates led him to consider Christianity.

The image of the Cross seemed to be an icon of all manner of confusion and suffering. The Holocaust was there, the horror of apartheid was there, and my own personal confusion and pain—which I could never publicly admit—was there as well. And in the resurrection was a symbol that this was transcended. And at the back of my mind, there would have been an awareness that in Christianity there are strands of tradition in which celibacy is valued and turned to positive use.³⁸

Selwyn was baptized in 1976. After working against apartheid in South Africa and engaging in political activism in Israel for several years, he moved to Oxford in 1981 and was accepted as a novitiate in the Dominican order. Selwyn was ordained to the priesthood in 1987, whereupon he taught moral theology, ethics, and philosophy at Blackfriars, Oxford and other Oxford University colleges. Later he became sub-prior at the priory at Cambridge.³⁹

In the early 1990’s Selwyn was invited by the Dominicans to return to South Africa to teach. The struggle against apartheid, in which Gross had been deeply involved, had been won. Looking back, Sally reflects that there was finally space to consider the tensions in her own life:

“There were two areas of tension: there was the issue of my Jewish/Christian identity and the issue of bodiliness and gender, although I thought that was secondary. ...At that stage I rather naively thought I’d see someone with some expertise in this area and after a couple of sessions I could get on with the rest of my priestly life, full stop.” Gross laughs. “It wasn’t as simple as that.”⁴⁰

Selwyn’s counselor was more experienced with transsexuality than intersexed but still encouraged Gross to submit to medical testing.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

These tests showed that Gross's testosterone levels were in the middle of the normal female range and less than an eighth of the bottom of the male range. "The counselor was absolutely spot on but nevertheless sought to regiment this in terms of transsexuality and a change of gender."⁴¹

Gross was granted a one-year leave from the Dominicans to explore the possibility of a gender change but forbidden to contact fellow brothers, parents, most friends and "denied moral and material support as a matter of principle."⁴² However, one senior Dominican priest encouraged Gross to look upon this exploration as

something which was priestly—maybe that in my bodiliness, God was working out a preaching of that passage in Paul: "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female." But all of them, all assimilated here.⁴³

Unfortunately this latter view was not taken up by her religious superiors. When they learned of the congenital nature of Gross' condition—indicating the possibility of being raised as female instead of a male—she was greeted with suspicion, as a threat which needed to be removed.

a Papal Rescript stripped Gross of clerical status and annulled her religious vows, [but] not without an element of subterfuge. Rumors had been circulating in Catholic circles that Gross had reverted to ultra-orthodox Judaism. This seemed to suggest that a dismissal was being prepared on the grounds that she had "notoriously defected from the faith"—a cause for immediate dismissal and excommunication without right of appeal. Gross pre-empted such a hostile dismissal on such false grounds by agreeing to cooperate in a laicisation process. ...Gross was laicized on the basis of a notional petition for dispensation from priestly celibacy but celibacy had never been the issue. "I am one of nature's celibates. It was not my petition, it was contrary to what I had said."

Even with lay status, further prohibitions were placed on Gross, although without any canonical justification. "They effectively made it impossible for me to remain in communion."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Sally Gross, "Shunned by the Church," *The Natal Witness Features*, South Africa (February 22, 2000), <http://www.intersex.org.za/publications/witness2.pdf>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Gross had hoped to remain not only within the Catholic Church but within her religious order.

...an order in which there are congregations of women and some mixed communities as well. Had there been a willingness to find a way of accommodating my religious vocation, a way could have been found without too great a difficulty, although it would have taken a lot of courage.⁴⁵

Sally admits that she misses the priesthood but has found a place worshipping with the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in the wake of the loss of her church.⁴⁶

Gross employs her training in Judaism and Christian theology as she considers intersexuality in the Scriptures. She recounts the assertion, “put to me by a conspicuously pious, intelligent, theologically sophisticated but fundamentalistic Christian of my acquaintance,” who informed her, on the basis of Genesis 1:27, that “an intersexed person such as me does not satisfy the biblical criterion of humanity, and indeed even that it follows that I am congenitally unbaptizable.”⁴⁷ She finds this “rather comical” given the rabbinical tradition indicating that the original human was a hermaphrodite before God removed the woman from the side of the man.⁴⁸ She also notes rabbinical traditions which state that Abraham and Sarah were each intersexed.⁴⁹ Although she admits that the commentaries on Abraham and Sarah “like many rabbinical exegetical glosses of an anecdotal rather than legal character, are perhaps a trifle far-fetched and quaint,” nevertheless,

They do make it abundantly clear that those who, more than any others, cherished and preserved the Hebrew text of Scripture and sought faithfully to ensure that no scriptural ‘jot and tittle’ was changed, did not see intersex conditions as falling under the condemnation of the canon of Hebrew

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Gross, “Intersexuality and Scripture,” 70.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 71-73.

Scripture. Quite the contrary, they contemplated with equanimity the possibility that leading and revered scriptural characters were intersexed.⁵⁰

Given the possibility of defending hermaphroditism/intersex from the Scriptures, and the additional prohibition of the removal of gonads (when they do not constitute a health risk) suggested by Deuteronomy 23:1, Gross concludes:

Biblical literalists are indeed arguably bound by Scripture to respect the sense of many people who are intersexed that violence was done to them in infancy by the imposition of what was in effect cosmetic surgery, and to accept that it is right and proper that those who are born intersexed be enabled to remain physically as they are and to identify as intersexed.⁵¹

Elsewhere she testifies,

I am a creature of God, and ... I'm created, and intersexed people are created, no less than anyone else, in the image and likeness of God.⁵²

Believing that she speaks the truth, I offer the following dissertation to show how space can and must be made, even within conservative Evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism, for the intersexed among us who are, truly, created in the image of God.

Structure of the Argument

The structure of this dissertation fits with Evangelical, Anglican, and Roman Catholic theological methods:

Part I will present several challenges to the binary sex model, arguing that theological anthropology can no longer assume that all humans fit into the category of either "Adam" or "Eve."

Chapter 1 will explain the phenomena of intersex and the medical and sociological challenges which intersex brings to the idea that humans exist, or should exist, only as

⁵⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁵¹ Ibid., 74.

⁵² Sally Gross, speaking in Wessel Van Huyssteen, *The 3rd Sex*, broadcast SABC (South Africa), (November 2003); cited in Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*, 1.

male or female. I will document the growing evidence that medical technology cannot “fix” all intersex conditions and that some persons are justified in their desire to be recognized as intersex, rather than as male or female, and should be granted the right to such recognition, outside and inside the church.

Chapter 2 will detail the existence of intersex persons in history, especially as recorded in the Christian Scriptures and Christian history. In biblical times and during the early history of Christianity, many intersex conditions would have been recognized under the broad category of the eunuch. I will show how Jesus’ recognition of those who are “eunuchs from birth” in Matthew 19:12 changed the course of intersex and discussions of the theological significance of sex, gender, and sexuality in ways that have been lost to contemporary students of the Bible.

Chapter 3 will review the history of theological anthropology paying close attention to how answers to the questions “What is the human?” and “What is the image?” relate to biological sex differentiation. I will recount how different historical figures have wrestled with how many sexes *are* or *should be* recognized by society as well as how theologians have thought about the sexes as equally human and, thus, as equally valid images of God. In order to do this, I will trace the development of Western theology in three movements: from its inception in the classical period, through the Protestant and Victorian Reformations in the modern period, into current, postmodern reconstructions of the human and the *imago Dei*.⁵³

⁵³ As a theologian writing in the United States of America, the history I recount is that of Western Christianity. It is only in the postmodern period that Western theologians are beginning to learn the value of non-Western (non-white, non-middle and upper-class) contributions and critiques of Western theological construction. Some of these contributions will be acknowledged later in the dissertation.

Having established medical, sociological, biblical, historical, and philosophical challenges to the binary sex model, Part II of the dissertation will explore how we must reconstruct theological anthropology in the postmodern period as it relates to sex, gender, and sexuality. To do this, I will interact with significant theological voices from two major traditions in American Christianity—Evangelical and Roman Catholic—in order to affirm what can be affirmed in these traditions, critique what must be critiqued, and move the conversation forward in theological construction.

Chapter 4 will analyze how sex and gender have been treated in Evangelical and Roman Catholic theological literature and argue that these traditions must move from thinking about women as the paradigmatic “other” to the recognition of other “others” in our theological anthropologies.

Chapter 5 will show how the binary sex model has been used to read sexuality into certain visions of the *imago Dei* such that the social *imago* is being transformed into the sexual/spousal *imago*. I will illustrate the dangers of these trajectories for both Evangelical and Roman Catholic anthropologies, suggesting alternative readings of the creation narratives in Genesis and a return to the social *imago* as a way to avoid the sexualization of the *imago Dei*.

Chapter 6 will conclude this project by exploring the tensions which christology and eschatology bring to discussions of sex, gender, and sexuality. I will argue that, rather than dismantling the categories of male and female, space can and should be opened up for the addition and inclusion of intersex whose humanity was also taken up by Jesus Christ in the incarnation. I will conclude by suggesting that christology does not lead to the erasure of sex/gender identities “in Christ” even while it does call for a de-centering of

personal identity which makes space for the healing of the self and reconciliation in the community of God. In such ways can we work to balance the binary in the postmodern “already/not yet.”

CHAPTER 1

INTERSEX: MEDICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES TO THE BINARY SEX MODEL

In this chapter we will begin by exploring contemporary, medical descriptions of intersex. We will trace the history of intersex from the time before medical technology—when intersex existed at the margins of society—to the virtual erasure of intersex by the medical establishment. We will then hear objections to the medicalization of intersex, paying particular attention to the voices of intersex persons themselves. Lastly, we will hear from those who lay the blame for the abuse of the intersexed at the foot of the binary sex model and ask whether Christianity is to blame for the current dichotomy.

WHAT IS INTERSEX?

Normal Sex Development

Intersex is a term used to describe persons who do not fit into standard medical descriptions of male or female. It is important at the outset to establish what is considered normal or typical by the medical community so that variations from the norm can be understood. In this paper “normal” is employed according to the classical sense of “norm,” “standard” or “type.” Thus, “abnormal” does not indicate “freakishness” but atypical development.

Anne Fausto-Sterling, a biologist at Brown University, after researching the frequency rates of intersex conditions around the globe, describes what is considered “typical” or “normal” by medical practitioners today:

We define the typical male as someone with an XY chromosomal composition, and testes located within the scrotal sac. The testes produce sperm which, via the vas deferens, may be transported to the urethra and ejaculated outside the body. Penis length at birth ranges from 2.5 to 4.5 cm; an idealized penis has a completely enclosed urethra which opens at the tip of the glans. During fetal development, the testes produce the Müllerian inhibiting factor, testosterone, and dihydrotestosterone, which juvenile testicular activity ensures a masculinizing puberty. The typical female has two X chromosomes, functional ovaries which ensure a feminizing puberty, oviducts connecting to a uterus, cervix and vaginal canal, inner and outer vaginal lips, and a clitoris, which at birth ranges in size from 0.20 to 0.85 cm.¹

Intersex as an Umbrella Concept

The term “intersex” is not a diagnosis but an umbrella concept used to cover a wide range of variations in sex development. Many intersex conditions result in ambiguous genitalia, either at birth or throughout the life course of the individual; however, not all intersex conditions are indicated by genital inspection. The Consortium on the Management of Disorders of Sex Development lists the following as intersex-related conditions: “congenital development of ambiguous genitalia, congenital disjunction of internal and external sex anatomy, incomplete development of sex

¹ Melanie Blackless, Anthony Charusvatstra, Amanda Derryck, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Karl Lausanne and Ellen Lee, “How Sexually Dimorphic are We? Review and Synthesis,” *American Journal of Human Biology* 12 (2000): 152. This article will be cited as Blackless et al., according to current citation standards. However, Fausto-Sterling explains in her larger work [*Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 51], that she researched the literature “together with a group of Brown University undergraduates.” Given this admission, and so that the reader can more easily connect the threads of her arguments, I will list Fausto-Sterling as the author in my text.

anatomy, sex chromosome anomalies and disorders of gonadal development.”² Each of these will be described in what follows.

“Intersex is not a discrete or natural category.”³ While most people believe they know what makes a person male or female—chromosomes, gonads, genitals, secondary sex characteristics—it is not clear what type and how many variations to these norms it takes to classify a person as intersex. Should a person with external female genitalia who has XY chromosomes and testes be considered male, female or intersex? How large does a clitoris need to be before it is considered a micropenis? These decisions are made by humans, typically by doctors. What doctors believe about physical norms and variations, the usefulness of the intersex designation, and social standards for genders all factor into decisions about sex assignment. They also factor into debates over which conditions “count” for estimates of frequency rates.

It will be helpful for the reader to become familiar with certain intersex conditions before entering the debate over which variations “count.” An exhaustive list of intersex conditions is not possible or necessary for the thesis of this paper. Instead, I will describe some of the more common variations and their implications for my argument.

² Consortium for the Management of Disorders of Sex Development, *Clinical Guidelines for the Management of Disorders of Sex Development in Childhood* (Rohnert Park, CA: Intersex society of North America, 2006), 2.

³ Intersex Society of North America, “What is intersex?,” <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>, 1.

Types of Intersex Conditions

Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS)

AIS is an intersex conditions which occurs roughly once in every 13,000 births.⁴ Androgen insensitivity comes in two types: complete (CAIS) and partial (PAIS). Persons with AIS are born with XY chromosomes (i.e., that of a typical male). XY chromosomes set into motion the normal development of testes which begin to secrete higher levels of testosterone in XY individuals as early as eight weeks of gestation.⁵ But people with AIS are unable to process male hormones (androgens). Because their cells lack the proper receptors, persons with CAIS develop female external genitals. They retain undescended or partially descended testes. They usually have a short vagina and no cervix, though some lack a vagina altogether. Because genitals appear normal (for females) at birth, CAIS is not usually discovered until puberty when menstruation does not occur. Given this description of androgen insensitivity the reader may not find it surprising that these “girls” do not menstruate. What is surprising, however, is that these individuals do develop secondary sex characteristics typical of pubescent girls. The Intersex Society of North America explains how feminizing puberty is possible:

At puberty, the testes are stimulated by the pituitary gland, and produce testosterone. Because testosterone is chemically very similar to estrogen, some of the testosterone converts back to estrogen (‘aromatizes’) in the bloodstream. This estrogen produces breast growth, though it may be late.⁶

Thus, higher levels of testosterone during puberty result not in the typical masculinization of those with androgen receptivity (i.e., growth of underarm and pubic hair, adam’s

⁴ Intersex Society of North America, “How Common is Intersex,” <http://www.isna.org/faq/frequency>, 1. Blackless, et al., list the frequency as .076/1,000 on page 153. This translates as 1:13,153 (according to my calculations) which the Intersex Society of North America has rounded to 1:13,000. I prefer to cite frequency rates as “1 person per” so that one does not need to think of percentages of persons.

⁵ Melissa Hines, *Brain Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23.

⁶ Intersex Society of North America, “Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS),” <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>, 3-4.

apple, voice descent, increased muscle mass); rather, higher levels of testosterone have the opposite effect—increased feminization of XY individuals. CAIS has been called “classical testicular feminization” in recognition of this process. It has also been labeled “male pseudo-hermaphroditism.”

This last designation—male pseudohermaphroditism—gained parlance in the Victorian era. During the 19th century, doctors looked to gonads to determine sex assignment when genitals were “unclear” or, in the case of CAIS individuals, when normal sex development—such as menstruation—did not occur.⁷ Gonads were seen as primary for two reasons. First, reproduction was viewed as the principle marker for sex identification. Second, scientific knowledge of gonadal hormone production and their influence on sex development was growing. Within the Victorian schema, the CAIS patient, with male gonads and female genitalia would be considered a “male” on account of “his” testes, but a “pseudohermaphrodite” on account of “her” genitals and secondary sex traits. On the flip side, a person with male external genitals and ovaries would have been labeled a “female pseudohermaphrodite.” The only persons labeled “true hermaphrodites” were those who possessed both an ovary and a testis, a rare condition now called “ovotestes.”⁸ More recent scholars reject the language “pseudo-hermaphrodite” because it is considered offensive, confusing, and imprecise.⁹

⁷ Sex assignment is the phrase used to denote what sex the child is called at birth, i.e., what is recorded on the birth certificate. Sex assignment is irreversible in some societies.

⁸ Alice Domurat Dreger, “Doubtful Sex: The Fate of the Hermaphrodite in Victorian Medicine,” *Victorian Studies*. (Spring 1995): 335-370. See also Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough,” *Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Christine L. Williams and Arlene Stein (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002): 468-473.

⁹ Alice D. Dreger, Cheryl Chase, Aron Sousa, Philip A. Gruppuso and Joel Frader, “Changing the Nomenclature/Taxonomy for Intersex: A Scientific and Clinical Rationale,” *Journal of Pediatric Endocrinology & Metabolism* 18:8 (2005): 729-733. See also Consortium, *Clinical Guidelines*, 16. The Intersex Society of North America explains that the term hermaphrodite is a “mythological term” implying

While in the Victorian era persons with AIS would have been considered “men” by the medical establishment, today these individuals are overwhelmingly declared to be women. They look like girls at birth. They look like women after puberty. Paradoxically, CAIS women develop along the lines of the contemporary, Western ideal of womanhood: they are tall and lean, with little to no body hair.¹⁰ Thus, these individuals typically have unquestioned female gender identities and roles until confronted with their diagnosis, either at puberty or as adults.¹¹

Partial androgen insensitivity is less common than its complete form, occurring approximately in only one in 130,000 births.¹² Whereas individuals with CAIS appear “unambiguously” female, persons with partial androgen insensitivity (PAIS) have bodies that fall anywhere along the spectrum. Charmian Quigley and Frank French, doctors at the Laboratories for Reproductive Biology, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “proposed a grading system for the phenotypic features (external appearance) in AIS.”¹³ The scale runs from AIS Grade 1 to Grade 7 with increasing severity of androgen resistance—and hence decreasing masculinization with increasing feminization.”¹⁴ The following chart may be found at www.AISSG.org, the website of one of the largest and most trusted support groups for persons with AIS:

“that a person is both fully male and fully female. This is a physiologic impossibility.” Intersex Society of North America, “Is a person who is intersex a hermaphrodite?” <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>, 16.

¹⁰ Sharon E. Preves, *Intersex and Identity: The Contested Self* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 28.

¹¹ Hines, 32. See also the AIS Support Group (UK), “Terminology Problems,” http://www.aissg.org/21_OVERVIEW.HTM.

¹² Intersex Society of North America, “How Common is Intersex,” 1. Blackless, et al., list the frequency as .0076/1,000 on page 153. This translates as 1:131,530 (according to my calculations) which the Intersex Society of North America has rounded to 1:130,000.

¹³ This scale is modeled on the Prader classification for Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) to be discussed below.

¹⁴ Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group (AISSG), UK, “What is AIS?: Forms of AIS (Complete and Partial),” http://www.aissg.org/21_OVERVIEW.HTM. Charmian A. Quigley, et al., “Androgen Receptor Defects: Historical, Clinical and Molecular Perspectives,” *Endocrine Reviews* 16:3 (June 1995): 271-321, see page 281 for chart and explanations.

Grade 1	PAIS	Male genitals, infertility
Grade 2	PAIS	Male genitals but mildly ‘under-masculinized’, isolated hypospadias ¹⁵
Grade 3	PAIS	Predominantly male genitals but more severely ‘under-masculinized’ (perineal hypospadias, small penis, cryptorchidism i.e. undescended testes, and/or bifid scrotum)
Grade 4	PAIS	Ambiguous genitals, severely ‘under-masculinized’ (phallic structure that is indeterminate between a penis and a clitoris)
Grade 5	PAIS	Essentially female genitals (including separate urethral and vaginal orifices, mild clitoromegaly, i.e. enlarged clitoris)
Grade 6	PAIS	Female genitals with pubic/underarm hair
Grade 7	CAIS	Female genitals with little or no pubic/underarm hair

At the CAIS end of the spectrum the outward appearance is completely female (AIS Grades 6/7) and the sex of rearing is invariably female. In PAIS the outward genital appearance can lie anywhere from being almost completely female (Grade 5), through mixed male/female, to completely male (Grade 1); it has been suggested that slight androgen insensitivity might contribute to infertility in some otherwise normal men. Some babies with PAIS may be raised as males but many are re-assigned as female. ...Before puberty, individuals with Grade 6 or 7 are indistinguishable.¹⁶

Some individuals with complete androgen insensitivity reject the label intersex.

They consider themselves as females and resent association with those whose gender identities are less certain. On the other hand, individuals with partial androgen insensitivity, especially those resulting in ambiguous genitals, are more likely to resonate with intersex terminology and the efforts of intersex advocacy groups. Despite recent efforts by some AIS support groups to distance themselves from intersex concerns, the question of intersex remains. What should determine sex assignment? External genitalia or internal gonads? Reproductive structures or personal gender identity?

The shifting opinion of the medical community over the years illustrates how sex designation is socially constructed for intersex conditions. When society (e.g. the medical

¹⁵ Hypospadias is a condition of the penis where the urinary opening (meatus) is located off-center on the glans (mild), along the penile shaft (medium), or under the penis (severe). See description below. Kessler, *Lessons*, 166-167.

¹⁶ Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group (AISSG), UK, “What is AIS: Forms of AIS (Complete and Partial),” http://www.aissg.org/21_OVERVIEW.HTM.

establishment) considers gonads or chromosomes as the primary markers of sex, persons with CAIS are “really” men. When society (e.g. the medical establishment, psychological consensus) considers external genitalia and/or personal gender identity as primary, persons with CAIS are “really” women.¹⁷

Given the reality of social construction for sex determination for the intersexed, it is valid to question the entire schema within which such construction currently takes place. Should persons with CAIS or PAIS be forced to choose between two options for sex assignment? Should they be given a third option, intersex, along with the traditional categories, male and female? Some have proposed an even more nuanced scheme, wherein one would combine labels. Thus, a person with CAIS, who identifies as a woman, would be considered an “intersex woman.”¹⁸ Such a designation recognizes that XY individuals with CAIS can appear more feminine than XX women and more accurately reflects the complexity of the issues for sex and gender identification.

Anne Fausto-Sterling has argued for public recognition of the five sex categories used by medical doctors since the Victorian period: male, female, male pseudo-hermaphrodite, female pseudo-hermaphrodite and true hermaphrodite.¹⁹ Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna argue that the entire system should be tossed. If people want to identify as a particular sex, or intersex, let them. Some may want to identify as male or female during their reproductive years, so as to find a suitable partner, and then change

¹⁷ When, in 1968, the International Olympic Committee moved from genital and breast inspection to buccal smears to verify the sex of athletes, AIS women were rejected from competitions and some medals were revoked. Ironically, because CAIS women cannot respond to any androgens, even the normal level of androgens circulating in XX women, they are at a greater disadvantage than their XX female competitors. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 1-5.

¹⁸ Kessler, *Lessons*, 88-89

¹⁹ Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes,” 468-473.

designation at other (non-reproductive) seasons of life. What's the harm?²⁰ We will return to their proposals toward the end of this chapter after we consider a few other intersex conditions. We turn next from the “male pseudo-hermaphrodite” to one condition which fell under the old label, “female pseudo-hermaphroditism.”

Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH)

CAH is an intersex condition which occurs anywhere between one in 13,000 and one in 36,000 births.²¹ It is an “inherited enzyme deficiency condition, causing a malfunction of the fetus’s adrenal gland, which results in the overproduction of fetal androgen.”²² Thus XX individuals can have androgen levels that are similar to those of typical males and XY individuals can have higher than average levels.²³ Higher levels of androgens “can make XX embryos have larger than average clitorises, or even a clitoris that looks rather like a penis, or labia that look like a scrotum.”²⁴

Virilization in girls with CAH is highly variable...and in a small number of cases, virilization is so extensive that genetic females are misidentified as males at birth and assigned and reared as boys until other consequences of the CAH syndrome result in a correct diagnosis. Usually, this occurs sufficiently early to allow reassignment to the female sex. However, in some cases it does not. XX individuals with CAH do not have testes or Müllerian Inhibiting Factor, and so they retain female internal reproductive organs and are capable of reproducing.²⁵

²⁰ Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, 1985), 166.

²¹ Intersex Society of North America, “How Common is Intersex?,” 1. Blackless et al. list the frequency as .0770/1,000 on page 156. This translates as 1:12,987 (according to my calculations) which the ISNA has rounded to 1:13,000. It should be noted that Blackless et al. list this rate for classic CAH caused by 21 hydroxylase deficiency—the most common enzyme deficiency associated with CAH. Other enzyme deficiencies are also listed with additional frequency rates. They do not provide a combined estimate.

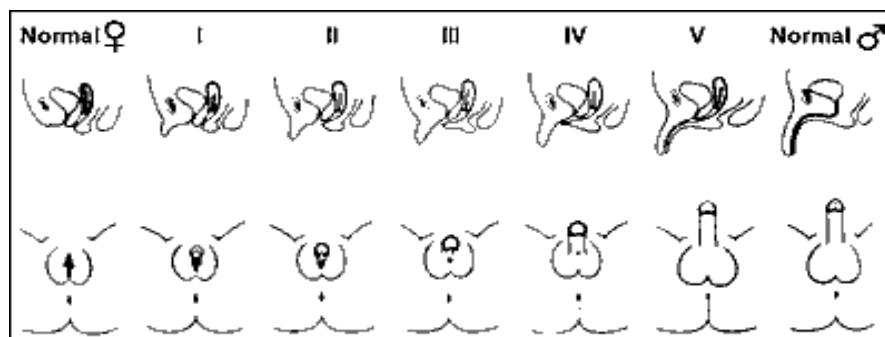
²² Kessler, *Lessons*, 165-166.

²³ Hines, 29.

²⁴ Intersex Society of North America, “Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH),” <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>, 5.

²⁵ Hines, 30.

In 1954 Andrea Prader created what has come to be called the Prader Scale to classify degrees of virilization caused by CAH.²⁶



0	normal female genitals
1	slight enlargement of the clitoris (cliteromegaly)
2	enlarged clitoris and partial fusion of the labia producing a “funnel-shaped” cavity for the urethra and vaginal openings
3	enlargement of the clitoris such that it is often described as a “phallus.” At this stage the labia are so fused that they are indistinguishable from a scrotum and there is only one “urogenital” opening
4	complete fusion of the scrotum with urogenital opening at the base or shaft of the phallus,” what is often labeled hypospadias on a genetic male
5	mild to medium hypospadias
6	normal male genitals

Virilization does not stop after the birth of the child. CAH can trigger other secondary sex characteristics typical of male puberty: “dense body hair, a receding hairline, deep voice, prominent muscles, etc.”²⁷

“Among the many causes of intersex, only CAH represents a real medical emergency in the newborn period.”²⁸ CAH can cause severe dehydration leading to death within the first weeks of the infants’ life. At puberty, additional medical intervention is

²⁶ CARES Foundation (Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia Research Education Support), “What is the Prader scale?” http://www.caresfoundation.org/productcart/pc/surgery_considerations_cah.html#prader. Adapted from diagrams published by Phyllis W. Speiser and Perrin C. White, “Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia due to 21-Hydroxylase Deficiency,” *Endocrine Reviews* 21 no. 3 (2000), 251.

²⁷ Intersex Society of North America, “Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH),” 5.

²⁸ Ibid. See page 15 in Selwyn/Sally Gross’ story.

needed to create a vaginal opening separate from the urethra for menstruation and so that urine does not pool in an internalized vagina.²⁹

CAH can also occur in XY males who may also be in need of medical as well as psychological care.

[U]ntreated CAH can cause boys to have their puberty earlier than other boys. This can be a problem because it will stop them from growing taller ...and because it can cause them to be very sexual well before other children their age are having such strong sexual thoughts and desires.³⁰

CAH is only considered an intersex condition when it occurs in XX individuals. The Intersex Society of North America notes that while “1 in 10,000 to 18,000 children are born with congenital adrenal hyperplasia... the prevalence of CAH-related intersex is about 1 in 20,000 to 1 in 36,000.”³¹ But these numbers only represent classic CAH conditions which begin in utero. CAH can also start later in life, something which has been coined late-onset CAH or LOCAH.

Late-onset congenital adrenal hyperplasia is an enzyme deficiency which occurs anytime after age five. If a child shows premature signs of puberty, clitoral growth or male pattern hair growth (hirsutism) doctors may check for LOCAH. After puberty, signs of the condition “include hirsutism, menstrual disorders, and clitoral enlargement.”³²

Late-onset CAH is the single most common intersex condition. Fausto-Sterling explains that “[w]hile the incidence of late-onset 21-hydroxylase varies widely among

²⁹ Consortium, *Clinical Guidelines*, 6.

³⁰ Intersex Society of North America, “Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH),” 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Blackless et al., 156.

different ethnic groups, its overall frequency is extremely high.”³³ Because of the degree of variation, it is helpful to see the distribution among groups:³⁴

Ashkenazi	37/1,000
Hispanics	19/1,000
Yugoslavs	16/1,000
Italians	3/1,000
Mixed Caucasians	.01/1,000
Average by my calculations	15.002/1,000 or 1:67

That one in every 67 persons could have an intersex condition may come as a shock to the reader. However, while the Intersex Society of North America and others list LOCAH as an intersex condition others have questioned its inclusion.³⁵ Fausto-Sterling calculates frequency rates for all intersex conditions with and without LOCAH.³⁶ Leonard Sax and Ieuan Hughes have argued to the contrary that LOCAH is not an intersex condition and should not be counted in estimates of intersex conditions.³⁷ Sax bases his argument on the fact that these children are born with genitals which match their chromosomal patterns (i.e., XX babies have female genitals, XY babies have male genitals). He insists that the symptoms of LOCAH in adult women—“oligomenorrhea” (i.e., infrequent menstrual cycles), “hirsutism” (i.e., male-pattern hair growth),

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Intersex Society of North America, “How Common is Intersex,” 1.

³⁶ “If [LOCAH] is deleted, the frequency estimates obtained from population surveys would come to 0.228%, the same order of magnitude found after combining the incidences of severe and medium hypospadias and cryptorchism (0.05 + 0.4 = 0.45%). Alternatively, if mild hypospadias and late-onset CAH in the final calculations are included the combined figure is 2.27% for hypospadias and cryptorchidism, compared with 1.728% obtained from summing the incidence of all known causes for which available data exist. ... Which number one chooses to use depends on the specific population under study, and the assumption as to what should count as true dimorphism. I would appear, however, that earlier estimates that intersexual births might run as high as 4% are unwarranted, except in populations in which a particular genetic condition occurs with high frequency (Fausto-Sterling, 1993; Money, 1993).” Blackless et al., 161.

³⁷ Leonard Sax, “How Common is Intersex? A Response to Anne Fausto-Sterling,” *Journal of Sex Research* 39:3 (August 2002) : 176. Ieuan Hughes, in personal correspondence via e-mail (November 4, 2008), in which I asked him how he and his colleagues arrived at the figure of intersex rates as 1 : 4500 cited in Hughes, et al., “Consensus statement on Management of Intersex Disorders.”

“infertility,” “acne,” “mild clitoromegaly,” and a complete lack of symptoms in others—disqualify LOCAH patients from classification as intersex.³⁸

I would agree with Sax that persons who do not present symptoms and yet inflate the numbers for intersex should lead researchers to show caution when calculating frequency rates. Still, I wonder what Sax would say to the young woman who begins to grow a beard, learns she is infertile and, as a result, begins to question her femininity. According to John Money, an early leader in the field of sexology and the medical management of intersex, “a girl with excessive hair growth... will generally need special counseling to help prevent serious social disturbance of social and personality development.” But he also writes, “Androgen-induced hirsutism in girls is not accompanied by a corresponding masculinization of the gender identity or the body image. Therefore the woman with hirsutism is mortified and intent on ridding herself of the unwanted hairiness.”³⁹ In a culture where gender is considered foundational to one’s identity, such experiences can lead to severe personal disorientation. While the phrase “pseudo-hermaphrodite” may be rejected as politically incorrect in current parlance, such language may more accurately reflect the feelings of affected parties.⁴⁰

In the West if a child born with ambiguous or masculinized genitals is discovered to have CAH doctors recommend that parents raise the child as a girl. Medical management includes the preservation of female internal reproductive organs, genital surgery (e.g., vaginoplasty, clitoral reduction) and hormone therapy to ensure masculine

³⁸ Sax, “How Common in Intersex?,” 176.

³⁹ John Money, *Sex Errors of the Body and Related Syndromes: A Guide to Counseling Children, Adolescents, and Their Families, 2nd Edition* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 1994), 79-80.

⁴⁰ In fact, many intersex persons have found relief in finding a name for their condition, be it hermaphrodite, pseudo-hermaphrodite, intersex or a more medical description. See discussion below, under “true hermaphrodite” for evidence that these “politically incorrect” terms have become a rallying point for many.

secondary sex characteristics do not develop “naturally.” Doctors in Saudi Arabia, trained in Western medical traditions, typically follow the same procedures; however, some Saudi parents have rejected their recommendations. Fausto-Sterling recounts how these parents rejected the suggestion that they begin raising their “son” as their daughter.

Nor would they accept feminizing surgery for their child. As the reporting physicians write, ‘female upbringing was resisted on social grounds. ... This was essentially an expression of local community attitudes with ... the preference for male offspring.’⁴¹

Another commentator on this same example writes: “It has to be accepted that attitudes toward sex of rearing and in particular toward feminizing genitoplasties in late-diagnosed patients with CAH in the Middle East is going to be very different from those in Europe.”⁴²

Westerners are keen to critique the sexism so apparent in the example above but feminist scholars are eager to point out that sexism pervades the Western medical tradition even still. In addition to the preservation of female reproductive organs, surgeons explain that genital surgery is simply easier for females than for males. It is difficult to construct a well-functioning penis. A vagina, on the other hand, is not considered quite as difficult. Fausto-Sterling reports one surgeon remarking: “you can make a hole but you can’t build a pole.”⁴³ Suzanne Kessler describes the frustrations of many that though a well-functioning penis is often the criteria for male sex assignment a well-functioning vagina (self-lubricating, sensitive, able to change size and shape) is not.

⁴¹ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 58-59. Quoting V. Sripathi S. Ahmed et al., “Gender Reversal in 47,XX congenital virilizing Adrenal Hyperplasia, *British Journal of Urology* 79 (1997): 786-87.

⁴² Fausto-Sterling quoting J. D. Frank [“Editorial Comment,” *British Journal of Urology* 79 (1997): 789] in *Sexing the Body*, 281-282.

⁴³ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 59.

A vaginal opening with the potential of receiving a penis (even if painful) is all that is required.⁴⁴

Once again we are reminded that sex, at least for the intersexed, is socially (and medically) constructed. Societies have presuppositions about gender which influence how they construct sex for the intersexed. When (Western) society gives preference to chromosomes and internal reproductive organs over external genitals and make gendered assumptions about the relative difficulty of genital surgeries, CAH patients are assigned as female and medically “managed” along the female pathway. When (Middle Eastern) society gives priority to external genitalia and social preference for male children, CAH patients are reared and medically “managed” along the masculine pathway.

Large cultural differences, like those described above, shed light on the socially constructed nature of sex assignment for the intersex debate. Though some may think that Sax and Fausto-Sterling are being overly pedantic when they debate the inclusion of LOCAH in intersex tallies, given the information presented above we can at least grant that debate is warranted. Presuppositions must be excavated and put on the table.

True Hermaphroditism or Ovo-Testes

Ovo-Testes is one of the rarer intersex conditions. Though frequency rates vary significantly among populations, Fausto-Sterling proposes an average of one in 100,000 live births.⁴⁵ With ovo-testes, an individual is born with one ovary and one testis or a combination of gonads which contain both ovarian and testicular tissue. Ovo-testes

⁴⁴ Kessler, *Lessons*, 26-28.

⁴⁵ Blackless, et al., 159.

sometimes produces ambiguous external genitals but not always. Ovo-testes accounts for “fewer than 5 percent of all cases of ambiguous genitals.”⁴⁶

In the Victorian era, when gonads were seen as primary indicators of sex, this condition was labeled “true hermaphroditism.”⁴⁷ Today, physicians and some intersex persons reject the label “hermaphrodite” because, unlike the mythological creature, persons with ovo-testes cannot impregnate themselves.

Other Variations of Gonadal Development

Like ovo-testes, **Swyer Syndrome** is a variation on typical gonadal development. Persons with Swyer Syndrome are born with “streak gonads,” “minimally developed gonad tissue present in place of testes or in place ovaries.” An XY baby born with Swyer will look like a typical female at birth. Unlike persons with AIS, secondary sex characteristics will not develop at puberty because the gonads cannot produce androgens or estrogens. Where medical treatment is available, children are typically reared as girls and given hormone replacement therapy to bring about feminizing puberty.⁴⁸ Swyer Syndrome confirms the thesis that without higher levels of androgens (typical of male development) genitals will develop along the female pathway whether or not the individual has a Y chromosome.⁴⁹

Gonadal Dysgenesis is a “form of intersexuality characterized by undifferentiated gonads, sometimes resulting in atypical external genitals. It represents

⁴⁶ Kessler, *Lessons*, 13-14; quoting Mariano Castro-Magana, Moris Angulo, and Planton J. Collipp, “Management of the Child with Ambiguous Genitalia,” *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality* 18, no. 4 (April 1984) : 172-188.

⁴⁷ Dreger, “Doubtful Sex: The Fate of the Hermaphrodite in Victorian Medicine,” 335-370.

⁴⁸ Intersex Society of North America, <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>, 9.

⁴⁹ Hines, 24-27.

about one-third of all cases of intersexuality.”⁵⁰ Swyer is a type of gonadal dysgenesis for XY individuals.⁵¹ Turner Syndrome can also be seen as a type of gonadal dysgenesis but because it is caused by a variations of the chromosomes, it will be discussed below.

Alternative Chromosome Combinations

There are a number of variations from the normal patterns of XX female and XY male. Fausto-Sterling lists the most common variations as “XXY, XO [one X chromosome], XYY, XXYY, XX males, and 47XXX females.”⁵² Some individuals are “mosaics” having different genetic combinations in different cells. For the purposes of this paper, we need not investigate all of these variations in detail. Rather, I will select a few of the more common syndromes associated with genetic anomalies as examples.

In **Turner Syndrome**, a genetic abnormality affecting 1:2,000—3,000 female births, all or part of one sex chromosome is missing.⁵³ Therefore, its karyotype is listed as XO or 45,X, although it can also occur in XY individuals. In addition to causing ovarian failure, some people with Turner Syndrome may have other physiological abnormalities.⁵⁴

Because most Turner Syndrome babies lack a Y chromosome, their bodies do not make typical male levels of testosterone necessary for male reproductive and genital development. Most Turner patients, therefore, present as female. It is for this reason that

⁵⁰ Kessler, *Lessons*, 166.

⁵¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swyer_syndrome.

⁵² Blackless, et al., 152.

⁵³ Blackless et al list the frequency rate as 0.369/1,000 which translates as 1: 2,710 (by my calculations). Blackless et al, 152. The Turner Syndrome Society of the United States lists 1:2,000 on their website. Andrew Zinn, “Turner Syndrome—The Basics, Genetic Overview,” http://www.turnersyndrome.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=40&Itemid=57.

⁵⁴ E.g. extra neck skin, cardiac abnormalities, mild hearing loss, greater risk of non-verbal learning disabilities. If they are not treated with growth hormones they are typically “16 centimeters shorter than their predicted adult height based on parental heights.” Ibid., Zinn. Sax, “How Common is Intersex?,” 176. Consortium, *Clinical Guidelines*, 7.

Leonard Sax has argued against the inclusion of this syndrome in intersex estimates.⁵⁵

On the other hand, many individuals with Turner Syndrome have a mosaic karyotype.

Some cells have 45,X others 46,XX. Some can even have cells with a Y chromosome.

While Andrew Zinn claims that the presence of some cells with a Y chromosome is “not enough to cause male sexual features” others present evidence to the contrary.⁵⁶

Jane Spalding, an intersex woman writing under a pseudonym, explains her condition as XY-Turner Mosaic. Mosaicism indicates that while some cells carry one karyotype, other cells carry a different pattern. Jane’s karyotype (45X and 46XY) produced “masculine-seeming genitals” but even these never caused her to question her sense of female gender identity. After puberty she explains that she didn’t develop the secondary sex characteristics of either sex:

At 22 I looked like an underdeveloped girl with the genitals of a 14-year old boy. I had reached 5’6” but weighed less than 120 pounds. My arms and legs were disproportionately long from delayed epiphyseal closure. I had neither the broad shoulders of a man nor the full hips of a woman. I had no Adam’s apple, no muscle mass, no breast development, and no beard. Not even those masculine-looking genitals had completed their journey to manhood.

I wasn’t homosexual. I didn’t want to be effeminate or a transvestite. I didn’t understand why my heart insisted that I was female when my genitals were clearly male. And if they were male then why wasn’t the rest of me? Even with short hair, people said that I looked like a girl.⁵⁷

Turner Syndrome is included by Blackless et al. because of the fact that it does not fall into either traditional karyotype: 46,XX (female) or 46,XY (male).

⁵⁵ Sax, “How Common is Intersex?,” 176.

⁵⁶ Zinn.

⁵⁷ Clara Jane Spalding, “What do children know?” <http://www.obgyn.net/young-woman/young-woman.asp?page=/young-woman/articles/xyturner>. Originally published at <http://www.sonoworld.com/Client/Fetus/page.aspx?id=389> (August 6, 1999).

Klinefelter's Syndrome is also included as an intersex condition because of its atypical chromosome patterns: XXY, XXYY.⁵⁸ “XXY individuals diagnosed with Klinefelter syndrome have external male genitalia, small testes, impaired spermatogenesis” [most are infertile], and “frequent gynecomastia” [breast growth].⁵⁹ Sax writes against the inclusion of Klinefelter's Syndrome as an intersex condition because it can go unnoticed by many men. Some discover their diagnosis during fertility evaluations. Still, for others, Klinefelter's Syndrome leads to profound ambiguity. One man with Klinefelter's Syndrome explains how he appreciates the label “intersexed” because it fits with his experience.

It is only fairly recently that I have discovered the term ‘intersexed’ and how it relates to my body. I like the term because I prefer more choices than male or female. ...It wasn't until I was 29 years old that a label was put on my physical differences, differences I never quite understood. I had large nipples on smallish breasts, peanut-size testicles, and cellulite-type hairless fatty tissue over most of my body. I was told at an infertility clinic that I had an extra X chromosome and a karyotype of XXY-47. This is commonly known as Klinefelter's syndrome. I was informed that I was genetically sterile and that my ‘sex glands’ produced only 10 percent of what was considered normal testosterone levels for a male. I was advised to immediately start testosterone replacement therapy... The medical journals called my condition ‘feminized male.’ I had always felt caught between the sexes without knowing why.⁶⁰

Despite arguments to the contrary, Klinefelter's Syndrome does at times blur the lines of clear demarcation between the two traditional sexes. Klinefelter's Syndrome occurs in roughly 1:1,000 births.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Blackless, et al., 152.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ D. Cameron, “Caught Between: An Essay on Intersexuality,” *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*, Alice Domurat Dreger, ed. (Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 1999), 90-96.

⁶¹ Intersex Society of North America, “How Common is Intersex,” 1, <http://www.isna.org/faq/frequency> (Accessed online July 2, 2008). Blackless, et al., list the frequency as .922/1,000 on page 152. This translates as 1:1,085 (according to my calculations) which the ISNA has rounded to 1:1,000.

Other Non-XX, Non-XY Chromosome combinations such as 47,XXY males, 47, XYY males, 46,XX males, and 47,XXX females occur in roughly 1:1,500 births.⁶²

Whether these variations should be considered intersex is open for debate. Blackless et al. include them on the basis of their chromosome pattern alone. Sax argues against their inclusion because their genes do not result in genital ambiguity or gender identity problems. He notes that men with an extra Y chromosome have lower than average intelligence though their fertility is usually unaffected. Similarly, “women with an extra X chromosome ... are fertile” but may also have lower than average intelligence.⁶³

Other Genital Anomalies

Blackless et al note that “XY babies born with testes, but complete absence of a penis, are extremely rare, probably occurring only 1:1,000,000 births. In contrast, complete or partial vaginal agenesis is fairly common.”⁶⁴

Vaginal Agenesis (also called Müllerian agenesis, congenital absence of the vagina or aplasia of the vagina) can be attributed to androgen insensitivity and also to **Mayer-Rokitansky-Küster-Hauser Syndrome (MRKH)**.⁶⁵ MRKH affects as many as one in 6,000 females.⁶⁶ In addition to the absence of a vagina, MRKH can also cause the

⁶² Blackless et al., 152.

⁶³ Sax, “How Common in Intersex?,” 176.

⁶⁴ Blackless et al., 156.

⁶⁵ “The earliest references to vaginal agenesis and proposed therapy can be found in Hippocrates’ work, ‘The Nature of Women.’ Other references can also be found in the Roman and Greek eras. The first contemporary description was in 1781. The description of congenital absence of the vagina with incompletely developed uterine remnants or a completely absent uterus as a specific syndrome can be traced to the work of 4 individuals. They were Mayer (1829), Rokitansky (1838), Küster (1910) and Hauser (1961-1973).” MRKH UK Support Group, accessed, October 27, 2008, <http://www.mrkh.org.uk/mrkh.html>.

⁶⁶ Intersex Society of North America, “How Common is Intersex,” 1. Blackless et al., list the frequency as 0.1694/1,000 on page 157 but note that this may be an underestimate. Their figure translates as 1: 5903 (according to my calculations).

uterus to be underdeveloped or missing. Nevertheless, these women have functional ovaries which stimulate feminizing puberty, though they do not menstruate.⁶⁷

Though included by Fausto-Sterling as a deviation from the Platonic ideal of male or female and listed by the Intersex Society of North America, some question the inclusion of vaginal agenesis as an intersex condition. An American medical website insists: “It is important to understand that young women with this syndrome are genetic females.”⁶⁸ Leonard Sax also argues against the inclusion of vaginal agenesis in intersex calculations. He writes, “Surgical correction for vaginal agenesis is conceptually no different from surgical correction for cleft palate.”⁶⁹ I would concede that vaginal agenesis does not represent the same kind of intersex condition as ambiguous genitalia but Sax’s comparison with cleft palate is overstated. It is because genitals have been granted such power to convey meaning and personal identity that vaginal agenesis differs from cleft palate not only in kind, but also in degree. The technological “fix” for cleft palate and vaginoplasty are also a poor comparison.⁷⁰

Surgical “success” for reconstruction of the vagina has been severely criticized by the intersex community. The results of a “successful” surgery will be lost if the patient does not keep up with regular maintenance of the neovagina which includes daily insertion of a dilator to keep the opening from permanently reducing in size. Adults choosing the procedure acknowledge the psychological difficulty of the practice but

⁶⁷ “Vaginal Agenesis: A Guide for Parents and Guardians,” accessed, October 27, 2008. http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/mrkh_parent.html

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Sax, “How Common in Intersex?,” 177.

⁷⁰ A few years before Sax’s article, Diamond and Sigmundson made the comparison with cleft palate: “However, unlike persons who have had neonatal surgery for cleft palate or meningomyelocele, many of those who have had genital surgery or been sex reassigned neonatally have complained bitterly of the treatment.” Milton Diamond and Keith Sigmundson, “Management of Intersexuality: Guidelines for Dealing with Persons with Ambiguous Genitalia,” *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 151 (Oct 1997): 1050.

rarely is the psychological well-being of the child considered. Susanne Kessler intimates that such procedures could be considered a form of child abuse and argues from this basis that vaginoplasties—and all other forms of intersex surgeries to “correct” non-life-threatening conditions—should be delayed until after puberty when the adolescent or adult can give informed consent.⁷¹

Given the limited success of vaginoplasties and recommendations that they be delayed or rejected altogether, it seems reasonable to at least consider vaginal agenesis under the rubric of intersex. Without serious medical intervention these (intersex) women are cut off from “normal” sexual relations and from the possibility of delivering children—both traditional markers of femininity.⁷²

Hypospadias is a condition of the penis where the urinary opening (meatus) is located off-center on the glans (mild), along the penile shaft (medium), or under the penis (severe).⁷³ A severe hypospadias is one way of naming an ambiguous genital when the presumed sex of the individual is male. Thus an XY individual with testes who has a urogenital opening underneath a phallus is considered a male with severe hypospadias. An XX individual with ovaries and the same external genitals would be considered a female with an enlarged clitoris (clitoromegaly). John Money refers to severe hypospadias as an ‘open gutter’ in the ‘female position.’⁷⁴ “In the most severe cases, the urethra is entirely absent.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Kessler, *Lessons*, 58-64.

⁷² Sax has argued that that these women “can and do go on to have successful term pregnancies” but it must be granted that these cannot occur without serious technological intervention. Sax, “How Common is Intersex?,” 177.

⁷³ Kessler, *Lessons*, 42.

⁷⁴ Money, *Sex Errors*, 49, 17.

⁷⁵ Kessler, *Lessons*, 42 quoting Steven Y. C. Tong, Karen Donaldon, and John M. Hutson, “When is Hypospadias Not Hypospadias?” *MJA* 164 (5 February 1996): 153-154.

Although hypospadias is estimated as occurring in one in every 200 male births, it is much more rarely (one in 10,000 births) a sign of an underlying intersex condition.⁷⁶

Fausto-Sterling and her colleagues list intersex rates which both include and omit hypospadias.

Kessler argues that surgeries for hypospadias are rarely medically necessary but are performed so that parents are not affronted by the shape of the boy's penis and so that the boy may urinate "like a man" (i.e., in the standing position). She counters that urinary positions are cultural tests for masculinity and should not be granted such weight when deciding whether to seek surgical correction. Howard Devore recounts the physical and psychological trauma of surgeries for hypospadias. He suffered sixteen surgeries in all, ten before the age of ten. He explains that he could have avoided at least twelve surgeries had his physicians and parents been content to allow him to urinate in a sitting position.

...I regularly get bladder infections. And I still have to sit to pee. I have never been without fistulae [holes in the penis where the surgery has broken down], and I've had the entire tube replaced twice, with large skin grafts. If they had just let me pee sitting down, neither I nor my family would have had to suffer all of that—the expense, the pain, the repeated surgeries, the drugs, the repeated tissue breakdowns and urine leaks. It would have been just fine to have a penis that peed out of the bottom instead of the top, and didn't have the feeling damaged. ...Such a large skin graft can't heal with the blood supply that is available in the genitals. I believe they know that, but it seems that genital appearance and the promise of normalcy are more important to young parents than a clear-headed acceptance of reality.⁷⁷

Kessler asks, given the limited results of genital surgeries, why infant intersex surgeries still continue. She suggests two reasons: "commitment to the concept of medical advancement and dimorphic genitals."⁷⁸ Here we see that it is the binary sex

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Howard Devore, "Growing Up in the Surgical Maelstrom," in *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*, edited by Alice Domurat Dreger (Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 1999), 80-81.

⁷⁸ Kessler, *Lessons*, 74.

system, combined with a belief in technological correction which has fueled current approaches to the management of intersex conditions.

It is curious that many of these writers criticize of social standards for masculinity (peeing like a man) yet fail to admit the challenge severe hypospadias presents for male fertility—an older form of validation of masculinity. As chapter 2 will show, the ability to produce offspring was the primary test of masculinity in the ancient world.

Naturally Occurring Sex Change: 5-alpha reductase deficiency syndrome (5-ARDs)

Last of all, we must mention one intersex condition which varies from most of the above in the level of change between the physical appearance of the child at birth and adult phenotype (physical appearance). 5-alpha reductase deficiency syndrome (5-ARDs) produces a baby with female or ambiguous genitals at birth whose body is transformed at puberty into that of a “normal” male. “5-alpha-reductase is an enzyme that converts the weaker testosterone into the more potent dihydrotestosterone (DHT).”⁷⁹ Lower levels of this enzyme allow genitalia in an XY individual to develop along the female pathway (as it would in an XY individual with Swyer Syndrome or streak gonads). Unlike Swyer’s, where testosterone levels never reach sufficient levels to masculinize the child, persons with 5-ARDs do experience masculinizing puberty.⁸⁰ At puberty, the testes descend and virilization causes “enlargement of the phallus, erection and ejaculation, deepening of the voice, development of masculine body structure and a male psychosexual orientation.”⁸¹ As adults, they resemble other men in most ways except that facial hair is

⁷⁹ Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group, “Related Conditions: 5-alpha-reductase Deficiency,” http://www.aissg.org/24_RELATED.HTM#Reductase.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Urology Science Research Foundation. “The Guevedoces of the Dominican Republic,” <http://www.usrf.org/news/010308-guevedoces.html>.

sparse, hairlines on the forehead do not recede, they do not have acne and their prostate remains small.⁸²

This rare condition has been documented in larger numbers in ethnic groups “ranging from Central America to Vietnam. Indeed, more than 50 families with over 100 affected individuals have been reported. However, no population or gene frequencies are available.”⁸³ Extensive study of the condition has been documented by anthropologists working in the Dominican Republic and among the Sambia of Papua New Guinea. In the absence of advanced medical technology in these communities, persons with 5-ARDs are integrated into the culture.

In the Dominican Republic, the colloquial term, Guevedoche or Guevedoces (literally, “eggs at twelve”), indicates the transformation of what were believed to be labia into descended testes.⁸⁴ “Such persons have a folk classification which permits them the flexibility to change dress and tasks, names and decorative motif, with alterations in sexual partners, albeit those of the ‘appropriate’ sex object at that stage of their lives.”⁸⁵

Among the Sambia, a baby with 5-ARDs, whose genitals appear ambiguous, is assigned not as male or female but as *kwolu-aatmwol*— “a person of transformation, a ‘female thing changing into a male thing.’”⁸⁶ Gilbert Herdt, the anthropologist responsible for documenting this phenomenon in Papua New Guinea, has argued that the *kwolu-aatmwol* constitutes a third sex within Sambian culture, complete with peculiar social and ethical attitudes and responsibilities.⁸⁷ Those not identified at birth

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Blackless et al., 153.

⁸⁴ Urology Science Research Foundation. “The Guevedoces.”

⁸⁵ Gilbert Herdt, “Introduction,” *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, Gilbert Herdt, ed. (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1994), 68.

⁸⁶ Ibid., “Preface,” 16-17.

⁸⁷ Ibid., “Introduction,” 69.

are raised as females and only discovered to be *kwolu-aatmwol* at puberty. Upon discovery they are identified as *kwolu-aatmwol* and required to transition out of female roles and into male roles within the culture.

Because the phenomenon is known, there is social space for a girl to transition to a boy. Sambian mythology includes a hermaphroditic ancestor—a religious help for those who undergo transition. Still, the change is not easy for those raised as females. Some girls have confessed that if they were able to remain as women, they would have chosen to do so.⁸⁸ Herdt explains that despite the mythology, *kwolu-aatmwol* are not admired within Sambian culture and speculates that this may add to the difficulty for cultural females to accept their new status at puberty, not only as males but as *kwolu-aatmwol*.⁸⁹

In Western culture, where gender identity is considered less flexible, and only two sexes are recognized in society, individuals with 5-ARDs who strongly identify as females are encouraged to pursue gonadectomies before puberty, and begin hormone replacement therapy so that they can acquire bodies consonant with their female gender identities. On the other hand, there are cases where the child “naturally migrates to a male role” but this is not an easy task within Western culture at this time.⁹⁰

HOW MANY INTERSEX PERSONS ARE THERE?

The reader will be able to recognize by now that the answer to this question depends upon one’s definition. Should intersex be defined as any deviation from the Platonic ideals of male and female, as Fausto-Sterling has argued? Or should a condition

⁸⁸ Ibid., 68-69.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁹⁰ Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group, http://www.aissg.org/24_RELATED.HTM#Reductase.

only be recognized as intersex if, as Leonard Sax has argued, “chromosomal sex is inconsistent with phenotypic sex, or in which the phenotype is not classifiable as either male or female.”⁹¹

Sax’s definition excludes late-onset congenital adrenal hyperplasia, vaginal agenesis, Turner’s syndrome, Klinefelter’s syndrome, and other non-XX and non-XY chromosome patterns. True intersex conditions, he writes, only occur in 0.018% of the population (or 1:55,556).⁹² Fausto-Sterling’s definition produces a frequency of 1.7% of all live births or 1 to 2:100.⁹³ This frequency rate may appear high, but it is significantly reduced from the 4% figure cited by Fausto-Sterling in earlier research.⁹⁴

A consensus statement, by an international team of almost fifty medical practitioners specializing in intersex, records a frequency rate of 1:4500 (approximately 0.22% of live births).⁹⁵ They do not list which conditions they include or exclude, but their estimate (0.22%) is very close to the figure Fausto-Sterling supplies for intersex conditions excluding LOCAH or intersex conditions excluding hypospadias.⁹⁶ She does not give a figure which subtracts both of these groups.

I am inclined to follow the moderate rate proposed by the LWPES/ESPE Consensus Group, though it may be best to represent the figure as a range, such as .02% to 1.7%. For the argument of this paper, it is enough to note that even with the most

⁹¹ Sax, “How Common is Intersex?,” 174.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 177.

⁹³ Blackless, et al., 151, 161.

⁹⁴ Julia Epstein attributes the 4% rate to John Money in ““Either/Or—Neither/Both: Sexual Ambiguity and the Ideology of Gender,” *Genders* (1990) : 131, note 6; but Money denies publishing this rate in his “Letter to the Editor,” *Sciences* (June/July 1993) : 4. What Money *does* say is that these conditions “are not exceptionally rare.” Thus, “[t]he reader who is engaged professionally in sex education and counseling, whether he be school teacher, doctor, pastor, social worker, psychologist, marriage counselor, or whatever, . . . sooner or later he will come across some of them in real life.” Money, *Sex Errors*, xvi. Fausto-Sterling cited the 4% rate in her 1993 article, “The Five Sexes,” though she has abandoned this figure for 1.7% in her more recent work, *Sexing the Body*, 2000.

⁹⁵ Hughes, et al., 1.

⁹⁶ Blackless et al., give the figure 0.228% (1:4386 by my calculations) on page 161.

conservative of numbers, given by Sax, there are at least “about 50,000 true intersexuals living in the United States” at this time.⁹⁷

Sax continues: “These individuals are of course entitled to the same expert care and consideration that all patients deserve. Nothing is gained, however, by pretending that there are 5,000,000 such individuals.”⁹⁸ But the truth is, there is much to be gained by greater numbers. One intersex advocate expressed frustration over the difficulty of wading through debates over frequency rates and questioned the point: “Just because organizations/donors/governments tend to give money/recognition to larger numbers doesn’t mean that numbers should legitimize conditions or feelings.”⁹⁹

A woman with Androgen Insensitivity responded to her comments:

Over and over and over again I hear from women with AIS and similar conditions such as Swyer, Turner, MGD, PGD, MRKH 5ARDS, etc. that they have been told by physicians who should know better that ‘you will never meet another person like yourself as long as you live.’ ... Rarity Feeds Freakishness. The knowledge that 1 in 1500 people have an intersex condition is EMPOWERING. ... Would it offer some comfort or consolation that this is the case with thousands of people and that it is, afterall, a naturally occurring element of nature?¹⁰⁰

One writer with the ISNA summarizes the debate:

Should a person’s rights depend on the frequency of his or her condition? No! But does frequency matter to individuals’ experiences of group identity (thus leading to an end of shame and secrecy)? Yes!¹⁰¹

The truth is: frequency rates do matter. It is easier to dismiss intersex conditions as “accidents” or “freaks of nature” the less frequently they occur. One can more easily argue that intersex is “not normal” or “not natural” when it is rare. One of the questions

⁹⁷ Sax, “How Common in Intersex?,” 177.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Intersex Society of North America, “Do Frequency Rates Matter?,” <http://www.isna.org/notde/972>, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 1.

of this paper is: What happens when we take intersex seriously, rather than dismissing it as an anomaly? What can we learn from the intersexed—about sex, gender and sexuality, and about human nature? Intersex is rare but it may not be as rare as we have been conditioned to think it is.

Given even the conservative rates of intersex mentioned above, one must ask why the average person is unfamiliar with the phenomenon. Intersex may be as common as schizophrenia, which occurs in 1% of births. It is at least as common as Down syndrome (0.125%) and more common than albinism (1:20,000).¹⁰² These other conditions are typically accepted as rare but regularly occurring phenomena while intersex is not. Why are people more likely to be familiar with albinism, Down syndrome and schizophrenia than intersex? The following brief history lesson will show that a decrease in cultural space for intersex, combined with increasingly sophisticated medical technologies have contributed to the virtual erasure of intersex from the consciousness of Western culture.

HISTORY OF INTERSEX: FROM THE MARGINS TO MEDICALIZATION

Classical Myths and Medical Models

The idea of persons of mixed sex goes back as far as culture can remember. The term hermaphrodite comes from the Greek and has its roots in two different myths.¹⁰³ In the first, Hermes (the son of Zeus; patron god of music, dreams and livestock) and Aphrodite (goddess of sexual love and beauty) conceive a child of mixed sex whom they

¹⁰² For rates on albinism see Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 53. Rates for schizophrenia and Down syndrome were drawn from Heather Looy, “Male and Female God Created Them,” 12. Looy cites M.W. Thompson and J. S. Thompson, *Genetics in Medicine 5th edition* (Toronto: W. B. Saunders Company, 1991).

¹⁰³ I will use the term hermaphrodite when discussing the history of intersex as is standard practice among historians in this field.

name after themselves, Hermaphroditos. In the second legend, their beautiful male child falls desperately in love with a water nymph who becomes joined to him in an eternal embrace. Plato translated these myths into a theory of origins, proposing that there were originally three sexes: male, female, and hermaphrodite. He speculated that the third had been lost over the generations.¹⁰⁴ Early Jewish commentators on the creation of Eve out of the rib of Adam proposed that the first human was a hermaphrodite and only in the separation of the woman from *the adam* (the human) did sexual differentiation come into being.¹⁰⁵

But hermaphrodites in the ancient world were not confined to the realm of myth or legend. Both Greek and Jewish societies developed theories to understand and laws to regulate persons of mixed sex in their communities. Aristotle speculated that a hermaphrodite developed in the womb when the mother contributed more matter than was necessary for one child but not quite enough for twins. In this scheme, a hermaphrodite was a malformed twin who “really” belonged to one of two sexes, not a third. Aristotle did not look to genitals or gonads to determine true sex; rather he followed Hippocrates’ theory of temperature believing the “heat of the heart” revealed the difference. Men were warm. Women were cool. Galen (the second century C.E. Greek physician whose medical influence reigned until the modern era) further developed Aristotle’s theory of heat but took issue with the two sex model.¹⁰⁶ Galen proposed a sliding scale of sex that combined the theory of male heat and dominance with the right side of the uterus and female coolness and passivity on the left side of the uterus.

¹⁰⁴ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 32-33.

¹⁰⁵ Genesis Rabbah 8.1 and Leviticus Rabbah 14.1; cited in *Eve & Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 77-78.

¹⁰⁶ Preves, *Intersex and Identity*, 34. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 33-34.

“Depending upon where on the grid an embryo fell, it could range from entirely male, through various intermediate states, to entirely female.”¹⁰⁷

Sharon Preves details how Galen’s theory of bodily heat and gender influenced medical theory as late as the seventeenth century. The seventeenth century surgeon, Ambroise Pare, explained the development of male secondary sex characteristics in pubescent girls (perhaps a sign of late-onset congenital adrenal hyperplasia?) as the result of excessive heat brought about by physical exertion in girls. Girls who jumped or played roughly raised their body temperature enough to “push out” their female organs (conceived as inversions of male genitals) in masculine form.¹⁰⁸ These medical explanations coexisted with folk-beliefs which blamed the conception of a hermaphrodite on the imagination of the mother during pregnancy.¹⁰⁹

Classical and Medieval Law

Physicians in the classical and medieval period were familiar with hermaphroditic bodies, and while they theorized about their origins, they did not attempt to alter them. The management of intersex was handled at the familial and legal level. Jewish scribes pulled from laws pertaining to men and women to regulate religious and domestic behaviors of hermaphrodites.

The Tosefta, for example, forbids hermaphrodites from inheriting their fathers’ estates (like daughters), from secluding themselves with women (like sons), and from shaving (like men). When they menstruate they must be isolated from men (like women); they are disqualified from serving as witnesses or as priests (like women); but the laws of pederasty apply to them.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 34.

¹⁰⁸ Preves, *Intersex and Identity*, 34.

¹⁰⁹ Epstein, 117.

¹¹⁰ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 33. See also Julie A. Greenberg, “Defining Male and Female: Intersexuality and the Collision between Law and Biology,” *Arizona Law Review* 41:2 (1999), 277.

Jewish and Christian religious perspectives on the hermaphrodite will be explored at greater length in the next chapter.

Roman and European laws varied. Under Romulus, hermaphrodites were in danger of capital punishment.¹¹¹ In the first century C.E. Pliny reports such “monsters” were often put to death by drowning but that “at the present day they are employed for sensual purposes.”¹¹² European laws varied by country and depended upon which medical theory of origins prevailed in the region.¹¹³ Punishments brought upon hermaphrodites seemed primarily to arise when they moved from one gender role to another, usually discovered through sexual activity or “cross-dressing.” Thus, a man who married a woman only later to conceive a child of his own and women who donned men’s clothing and sought the right to marry other women found themselves before civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Hermaphrodites who successfully “passed” as one of two prevailing genders and comported themselves appropriately were left relatively alone.¹¹⁴

Fausto-Sterling provides examples to illustrate the point:

Sir Edward Coke, famed jurist of early modern England wrote “an Hermaphrodite may purchase according to that sexe which prevaieth.” Similarly, in the first half of the seventeenth century, French hermaphrodites could serve as witnesses in the court and even marry, providing they did so in the role assigned to them by “the sex that dominates their personality.”¹¹⁵

She then summarizes legal tendencies before the 19th century:

...the individual him/herself shared with medical and legal experts the right to decide which sex prevailed, but once having made the choice, was expected to stick with it. The penalty for renegeing could be severe. At stake

¹¹¹ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 34.

¹¹² Epstein, 107, 133-134; citing Pliny, *The Natural History of Pliny*, 6 vols., trans. and ed. John Bostock and H. T. Riley (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855-57), 2: 136.

¹¹³ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 34.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34-36.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

was the maintenance of the social order and the rights of man (meant literally). Thus, although it was clear that some people straddled the male-female divide, the social and legal structures remained fixed around a two-sex system.¹¹⁶

The Victorian Era and Modern Medicalization

While hermaphrodites had been known to exist in the hidden corners of society for millenia, medical doctors in the 19th century began documenting larger and larger numbers of hermaphroditic patients. Alice Dreger explains how advances in gynecological science, greater willingness on the part of individuals to submit to medical examination, and growing concern about sex, gender, and sexual politics all collided to bring about a turning point in the history of hermaphroditism. Early feminist movements and public concern over growing numbers of homosexuals made “physicians sensitive to their patients’ sexual identities, anatomies, and practices.”¹¹⁷

In the face of rapidly increasing knowledge of bodily variations, scientists attempted to bring order out of chaos. Biologist Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire laid the foundation for the study of unusual births (a science he dubbed, *teratology*) in the hopes that it would also illuminate “normal” sex differences.

Saint-Hilaire divided the body into ‘sex segments,’ three on the left and three on the right. He named these zones the ‘profound portion,’ which contained ovaries, testicles, or related structures; the ‘middle portion,’ which contained internal sex structures such as the uterus and seminal vesicles; and the ‘external portion,’ which included the external genitalia. If all six segments were wholly male, he decreed, so too was the body. If all six were female, the body was clearly female. But when a mixture of male and female appeared in any of the six zones, a hermaphrodite resulted.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Dreger, “A History of Intersex: From the Age of Gonads to the Age of Consent,” in *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*, edited by Alice Domurat Dreger (Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 1999), 6. Dreger argues “it cannot be a coincidence that at the same time Michel Foucault and other historians find the emergence of the homosexual, I find the virtual extinction of the true hermaphrodite.” “Doubtful Sex,” 364.

¹¹⁸ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 37.

As we discussed above (under AIS, CAH, and ovo-testes), priority was eventually given to the “profound portion”—the gonads for determining sex, due to their part in reproduction and the initiation of secondary sex characteristics at puberty.¹¹⁹ It was Theodore Klebs who combined Saint-Hilaire’s classification system with the priority of gonads to coin new terminology in 1876: the pseudo vs. true hermaphrodite.¹²⁰

No matter how womanly a patient looked, no matter if she had a vagina, fine and round breasts, a smooth face, and a husband she loved, if she had testes, she would be labeled a male—in this case a “male pseudo-hermaphrodite” ... so strong was doctor’s belief in the Gonadal Definition of Sex and the primacy of the gonads that in Britain the “problem” of “women” with testes was sometimes “solved” by removing the testes from these women and in France by imploring these patients to stop their “homosexual” alliances with men. (As you might guess, incredulous hermaphroditic patients sometimes thought their doctors daft or cruel.) Commenting on [a French fashion model] labeled by her doctors as “frankly homosexual” because she passionately loved only men, a pair of French experts observed, “The possession of a [single] sex [as male or female] is a necessity of our social order, for hermaphrodites as well as for normal subjects.”¹²¹

Elsewhere, Dreger explains how the redefinition of hermaphroditism (as true or false) worked to keep chaos at bay:

By equating sex identity simply with gonadal tissue, almost every body could be shown really to be a “true male” or a “true female” in spite of mounting numbers of doubtful cases. Additionally, given that biopsies of gonads were not done until the 1910s and that Victorian medical men insisted upon histological proof of ovarian and testicular tissue for claims of “true hermaphroditism,” the only “true hermaphrodites” tended to be dead and autopsied hermaphrodites.¹²²

In the face of social and ethical confusion over sex and gender and sexuality, physicians attempted to bolster the traditional dichotomy by restricting and virtually eliminating the numbers of true hermaphrodites on medical record. The irony of the

¹¹⁹ Dreger, “Doubtful Sex.”

¹²⁰ Preves, *Intersex and Identity*, 26. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 38. Alice Domurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

¹²¹ Dreger, “History of Intersex,” 9.

¹²² Alice Domurat Dreger, “‘Ambiguous Sex’—or Ambivalent Medicine? Ethical Issues in the Treatment of Intersexuality,” *Hastings Center Report* 28:3 (1998), 26.

project should not go unnoticed. At the very time medical men were documenting larger numbers of persons with mixed sex characteristics, by redefining their terms, they were able to virtually eliminate that same number. Again, we are confronted with the reality of the social construction of sex for the intersexed.

20th Century: From Medical Management to the Disappearance of Hermaphrodites

The sex classification system offered by Theodore Klebs did not go uncontested. Doctors and patients alike found it difficult to continue to label persons who looked female on the outside with testes on the inside as “men.” By the 1920’s this disjunction led to the development of another philosophical category: gender as separate from sex. As medical technologies advanced, surgeons began offering “surgical ‘corrections’ to bring the biological sex into line with assigned gender.”¹²³ By the 1950’s Johns Hopkins University created the first multi-disciplinary team of specialists to address intersex. Headed by psychologist John Money, their goal became the elimination of intersex through medical intervention in early childhood.¹²⁴

John Money led the charge for early medical correction of intersex based on the belief that gender identity was malleable in early childhood given the right conditions. He supported this claim on the basis of the now highly publicized case of David Reimer (a.k.a. “John/Joan”), in which a non-intersexed, male child’s penis was ablated (i.e., removed) at eight months of age during a botched circumcision.¹²⁵ The family was

¹²³ Intersex Society of North America, “What’s the history behind the intersex rights movement,” 28. <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>. Milton Diamond credits Freud with the distinction between sex and gender in “Sex, gender and identity over the years: a changing perspective,” *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 13 (2004), 591.

¹²⁴ John Money, *Sex Errors*, 6.

¹²⁵ The Intersex Society of North America explains that David was born in 1965 and, while not intersex, did have a “medical problem involving his penis” for which circumcision was recommended at 8

eventually referred to John's Hopkins Hospital where they received counsel to surgically feminize the child and raise him as a girl. What made this case a perfect experiment was that the boy had an identical twin.¹²⁶

Money followed up with the family during childhood and published the success of the experiment in his widely acclaimed book, co-written with Anke A. Ehrhardt: *Man & Woman, Boy & Girl*.¹²⁷ They reportedly found a happy little girl who preferred stereotypical feminine clothing and behavior. The case seemed closed, at least for Money and Ehrhardt.¹²⁸

It was Milton Diamond, a younger sex researcher skeptical of Money's theory of gender plasticity, who followed up with the John/Joan case in later years. After years of trying to find and convince Reimer's doctors to come forward with follow-up information, he was finally able to rally H. Keith Sigmundson—one of John's therapists—to join him in challenging Money's dominant interpretive position.¹²⁹ At last the truth came out that John's sex reassignment had never taken. Though she tried to comply with the wishes of her parents, Joan knew she was different. John explains that his realization that he was a boy seemed to solidify between the ages of nine and eleven. At age twelve she rebelled against feminizing hormone therapy and at age fourteen succeeded in convincing her therapists and parents to assist her in transitioning to life as a male. He received a mastectomy at age fourteen and began phallic construction between fifteen and

months as "treatment." Intersex Society of North America, "Who was David Reimer (also, sadly, known as 'John/Joan')?," <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>, 26.

¹²⁶ Milton Diamond and H. Keith Sigmundson, "Sex Reassignment at Birth: A Long Term Review and Clinical Implications," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 151 (March 1997) : 298-304.

¹²⁷ John Money and Anke A. Ehrhardt, *Man & Woman, Boy & Girl* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).

¹²⁸ Kessler, *Lessons*, 7.

¹²⁹ See Fausto-Sterling for a lively narrative of the decades-long battle waged between Money and Diamond over their differing philosophies of gender, *Sexing the Body*, 66-71.

sixteen. He had his first sexual encounter at age eighteen and at twenty-five married a woman a few years older and adopted her children.¹³⁰

Diamond and Sigmundson relayed David Reimer's story under the pseudonyms "John/Joan," but David has since come forward himself to work with Diamond in disabusing the medical establishment (and public at large) of the success of his case. He does not want others to suffer the "psychic trauma" he has had to endure.¹³¹

Money used Reimer's case to argue that intersexuals should be given early genital surgery and that surgery, accompanied by unambiguous gender rearing would result in a well-adjusted, heterosexual male or female. But his efforts rebounded to undo the intended result. Some intersexed persons who had been treated according to Money's philosophy rejected their sex assignment and resented (to put it mildly) the medical treatment they had received. Still, most persons suffered in silence, believing what they had been told by doctors, that their conditions were so rare that they would never meet anyone in the world like themselves. Trained by parents, physicians, and psychologists to keep quiet about their abnormalities (out of genuine concern for the well-being of the patient) intersexuality did not surface as a voice until the 1990's.

1990's: Intersex Emerges out of the Closet

It was the 1993 publication of Anne Fausto-Sterling's article, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough," in *The Sciences* and *The New York Times* that motivated Cheryl Chase to do something.

¹³⁰ Diamond and Sigmundson, "Sex Reassignment," 299-300.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 299. See also Preves, *Intersex and Identity*, 96-97. Kessler explains that the popularity of Money's theory has made it difficult for the truth of Reimer's story to alter the way sex and gender are still taught in many social science and medical textbooks. Feminists in particular were eager to apply the insights of Money's theory to their own causes. Kessler, *Lessons*, 7.

In response [to Fausto-Sterling's article], Cheryl Chase wrote a letter to *The Sciences* announcing the founding of the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA). She founded the group because of her own attempts to recover her history of sex-reassignment in infancy and medically-induced shame, and because of the disinterest of most of her former care providers in what had happened to her. Soon Chase had brought together dozens of people with intersex. Though ISNA began as a support group, it quickly turned into an advocacy group because its members realized that they had suffered from similar problems. Like many of the early ISNA members, Chase drew on her political consciousness as a lesbian woman to recognize the degree to which intersex had been unnecessarily socially and medically pathologized. With the successes of the women's health movement and the queer rights movement as a backdrop, people with intersex began agitating for openness and reform.¹³²

Similar movement sprang up all over the globe.¹³³ Kessler explains,

Although there are some differences among the intersex advocacy groups, most members criticize the way their intersexuality was and is handled and argue that there needs to be a break in "the vicious cycle in which shame [about variant genitals] produces silence, silence condones surgery, and surgery produces more shame (which produces more silence)."¹³⁴

With the goal of ending "shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries for people born with an anatomy that someone has decided is not standard for male or female," ISNA now focuses their work to influence the medical profession to change standard treatment for intersex.¹³⁵

Despite resistance, their efforts are beginning to produce positive results.¹³⁶

Diamond and Sigmundson published their guidelines for the "Management of

¹³² Intersex Society of North America, "What's the history behind the intersex rights movement?," <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>, 29.

¹³³ Simultaneous groups have sprung up in Canada, Europe, Asia, Australia, Japan and New Zealand. "In Germany, a group of intersexuals, using some of the same strategies as ISNA, established a peer support and advocacy group. The initial name of the group, Intersex Support Network Central Europe, was later changed to Genital Mutilation Survivor's Support Network and Workgroup on Violence in Pediatrics and Gynecology, reflecting the fury of its political evolution." Kessler, *Lessons*, 79.

¹³⁴ Kessler, *Lessons*, 79-80; quoting *Hermaphrodites with Attitude*, 1, no. 1 (winter 1994).

¹³⁵ Intersex Society of North America, "What is ISNA's mission?," <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>, 15.

¹³⁶ Kessler explains how some physicians at Johns Hopkins Medical Center had tried to dismiss intersex advocates arguing that those who participate in ISNA are a "self-selected group brought together

Intersexuality” in 1997 emphasizing “the key belief that the patients themselves must be involved in any decision as to something so crucial to their lives.”¹³⁷ Since 1997 Diamond has repeatedly called for a moratorium on infant surgeries among the American Academy of Pediatrics. His efforts were aided by the publication of Kessler’s *Lessons from the Intersexed* and Dreger’s *Intersex in the Age of Ethics* in 1998 with the result that in 2000 and 2001 the American Academy of Pediatrics and the British Association of Pediatric Surgeons did update their standards of care to reflect some of the recommendations of these groups. Still, Diamond laments that neither the British or American pediatric societies have called for a complete halt to infant surgeries.¹³⁸

In October of 2005, a group of fifty experts from ten countries met in Chicago to work to produce a consensus statement for the treatment of intersex to be published in medical journals worldwide. ISNA distributed their own *Clinical Guidelines* and *Handbook for Parents* to participants at the conference.¹³⁹ The consensus statement was published in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood* in May of 2006.¹⁴⁰ While the statement does not argue that all non-life-saving surgical interventions should be delayed until the child reaches the age of consent, it does advise greater caution and the benefits of delaying surgery when possible.¹⁴¹ In addition to summarizing the current medical definitions and the most up-to-date management strategies, the consensus statement also

through their negative experiences,” thus not representative of many who may be satisfied with treatment. Kessler, *Lessons*, 87.

¹³⁷ Diamond and Sigmundson, “Management of Intersexuality,” 1046.

¹³⁸ Diamond, “Sex, gender and identity over the years,” 600. While European and North American physicians have yet to end surgery on intersex infants, Colombia, South America, outlawed the procedure in 1998. According to Diamond, the “Constitution guarantees free development of one’s own personality, which implies a right to define one’s own sexual identity.” *Ibid.*, 601.

¹³⁹ Barbara Thomas, “Report on Chicago Consensus Conference October 2005,” www.AISSG.org, 2-3.

¹⁴⁰ Hughes, et al., 1-10.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

recommends a change in language from intersex to Disorders of Sex Development (DSDs) as an umbrella term and more precise terminology for individual conditions which avoid sex and gender labels.¹⁴²

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

From Hermaphrodite to Intersex to Disorders of Sex Development (DSDs)

While the moves away from hermaphroditic terminology and gendered labels for intersex conditions (e.g., from “testicular feminization” to Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome) were met with little resistance, the shift from intersex to DSD has not gone uncontested. Diamond and others have argued that “Variation in Sex Development (VSD) [is] a term that is without judgment and neither prohibits or ordains medical intervention.”¹⁴³

Nevertheless, the shift to DSDs is gaining ground. Even the Intersex Society of North America employed the new terminology in their *Clinical Guidelines* and *Handbook for Parents* (noting objections by certain contributors).¹⁴⁴ Barbara Thomas, a German woman with AIS who participated in the Chicago Conference, expresses frustration at the new nomenclature but concedes its pragmatic value:

‘disorder’ has unfortunate overtones of ‘disturbed’ in German translation, however, given the reluctance of health insurance firms to deliver goods to intersex customers, the more PC [term] ‘variation’ is not helpful when campaigning for better care.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Ibid., 1.

¹⁴³ Hazel Glenn Beh, William S. Richardson and Milton Diamond, “Letter to the Editor: Variations of Sex Development Instead of Disorders of Sex Development,” *Archives of Diseases in Childhood* 91 (July 27, 2006).

¹⁴⁴ Consortium, *Clinical Guidelines*, Acknowledgements.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas, 3.

Why I prefer the term Intersex to Disorders of Sex Development (DSDs)

Given the shift in language approved by so many within the medical community, it is fair to ask why I continue to use the label intersex instead of DSD. One of the reasons intersex was rejected by physicians is that it carries with it associations of “identity politics and sexual connotations.”¹⁴⁶ Disorders of Sex Development does not automatically flag the same concerns. Nevertheless, as the rest of my paper will show, sex, gender, and sexuality while distinct, cannot easily be disentangled from one another. Theologians must acknowledge and attend to the interconnectedness of these ideas.¹⁴⁷

What the shift in nomenclature does illustrate is the climax of the narrative of the medicalization of intersex. This short history shows how the hermaphrodite began as a legendary creation of the gods, was tolerated at the margins of societies for millennia, only to be surgically eliminated in the last hundred years. But the sexual revolution is overcoming the medical establishment. Through lessons learned from LGTBQ activists, intersex persons are coming out of the closet and demanding better medical treatment and the end of secrecy and shame within wider society. Their voices are beginning to be heard in the medical arena and they are working hard to raise awareness in society at large.

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Reis, “Divergence or Disorder? The Politics of Naming Intersex,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 50:4 (Autumn 2007): 535-43.

¹⁴⁷ Susannah Cornwall makes a similar argument and suggests using the compound “intersex/DSD” as a “visual reminder of the uncertainty of the term and its resonances. ... Much more than either/or, intersex/DSD is at once both and neither, a perpetually-debatable term for a perpetually-debated group of phenomena.” Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*, 19.

FROM MEDICAL MANAGEMENT TO SOCIAL CHANGE:
QUESTIONING THE BINARY SEX MODEL

Multiple Sexes

Anne Fausto-Sterling's article, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough," was the catalyst which emboldened Cheryl Chase to launch the Intersex Society of North America. Fausto-Sterling shares the concern of ISNA to end unwanted genital surgeries, but her goals call for even greater reform—reform of our very concepts of sex and gender. Fausto-Sterling calls us to abandon the notion of two sexes and fling the gate wide for the multiplication of sexes. While the language she used in 1993 (Klebs' five sex schema including true and pseudo-hermaphrodites) has been abandoned, her critique of the binary sex model remains.

Fausto-Sterling lays the blame for the abuse of the intersexed on the belief in a two sex system. Rather than calling for better care within the two sex model, she posits an alternative solution:

But what if things were altogether different? Imagine a world in which the same knowledge that has enabled medicine to intervene in the medical management of intersexual patients has been placed at the service of multiple sexualities. Imagine that the sexes have multiplied beyond currently imaginable limits. It would be a world of shared powers. Patient and physician, parent and child, male and female—all those oppositions and others would have to be dissolved as sources of division. A new ethic of medical treatment would arise, one that would permit ambiguity in a culture that had overcome sexual division. The central mission of medical treatment would be to preserve life. Thus hermaphrodites would be concerned primarily not about whether they can conform to society but about whether they might develop potentially life-threatening conditions... that sometimes accompany hermaphroditic development. In my ideal world medical intervention for intersexuality would take place only rarely before the age of reason; subsequent treatment would be a cooperative venture between physician, patient, and other advisers trained in issues of gender multiplicity.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes," 472.

Historians of intersex are quick to concede that physicians and parents advocating for early medical correction of intersex have done so out of genuine concern for the well-being of children/patients. Nevertheless, Fausto-Sterling claims that these same physicians failed to do their homework.

...modern investigators tend to overlook a substantial body of case histories... before surgical intervention became rampant. Almost without exception, those reports describe children who grew up knowing they were intersexual (though they did not advertise it) and adjusted to their unusual status...in any event, there is not a psychotic or a suicide in the lot.¹⁴⁹

Her description of intersexed persons and that of John Money could not be more different. He calls Fausto-Sterling's proposal "extreme":

Without medical intervention, the fate of many hermaphroditic babies is to die. Before contemporary medical interventions, many children with a birth defect of the sex organs were condemned to grow up as they were born, stigmatized and traumatized. It simply does not make sense to talk of a third sex, or a fourth or fifth, when the phylogenetic scheme of things is two sexes. Those who are genitally neither male nor female but incomplete are not a third sex. They are a mixed sex or an in-between sex. To advocate medical nonintervention is irresponsible. It runs counter to everything that this book stands for, which is to enhance health and well-being to the greatest extent possible.¹⁵⁰

The question of course remains: Who gets to determine what it is that "enhances health and well-being to the greatest extent"? Some intersexed persons may be content with their medical treatment. Diamond and Sigmundson remind readers that "humans can be immensely strong and adaptable." Some have adjusted to medical treatment because they cannot recover what they lost. Some are "living in silent despair but coping." Others "have complained bitterly of the treatment."¹⁵¹ Those who are not content and have found voices to complain have argued that intersex, as a naturally occurring phenomenon is not

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Money, *Sex Errors*, 6.

¹⁵¹ Diamond and Sigmundson, "Management of Intersexuality," 1050.

the problem. What is the problem is a two-sex system which leaves no room for naturally occurring variations from the standards of male or female.

In place of the binary sex model, Fausto-Sterling argues that we should view sex as a continuum. “The implications of my argument for a sexual continuum are profound. If nature really offers us more than two sexes, then it follows that our current notions of masculinity and femininity are cultural conceits.”¹⁵² I would counter that it would be more accurate to say that if nature offers us more than two sexes then we may be justified in adding to our current cultural constructs more sexes than male and female and more genders than masculine and feminine. In some ways Western culture has already done this at the level of gender. We have language and conceptual space for “tom-boys” and “sissies” though the latter is more often a category of derision than the former.¹⁵³ The problem of course, which Fausto-Sterling and others have outlined, is where to draw the lines? Three sexes? Four? Five? Twenty? David Hester suggests there are “literally hundreds of possible sexes that humans can inhabit.”¹⁵⁴ We are left with the challenge of who defines male, female, and in-between and other.

Gilbert Herdt, in his work *Third Sex, Third Gender*, shows how alternative sexes/genders have been documented in a number of societies at different times throughout history. But he explains that his use of “third” is not to be taken literally;

¹⁵² Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 31.

¹⁵³ There is an ironic inversion of assumptions when one considers the history of these terms. “Tom-boy” comes from “tommy” the eighteenth century term for female lesbian transvestites, but most tom-boys today are not always assumed to be lesbians. The same is not true for the effeminate male. Randolph Trumbach, “London’s Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture,” *Third Sex, Third Gender*, 112.

¹⁵⁴ Hester, “Intersexes and the End of Gender,” 219.

rather, the notion of the third serves to undermine the absolute contrast which arises within a binary system.¹⁵⁵

The Elimination of Gender

Suzanne Kessler is even more radical in her proposal. She recommends we do away with the categories of sex and gender altogether.¹⁵⁶ In her earlier work with Wendy McKenna, Kessler argued that it is gender, not sex, which is the more salient force in contemporary culture. In everyday interactions, humans do not respond to persons' genitals but to their display of gender through clothing, hairstyles, shaving, verbal and non-verbal communication. How we "do" gender is much more important for everyday life than what exists underneath our clothing.¹⁵⁷ Kessler's work reveals the circular logic at the root of the two sex system: Human bodies come as one of two sexes. Two sexes imply two genders. When bodies do not fit clearly into either sex category, the belief in two genders is used to advocate a medical fix in order to bring bodies back in line with the belief in two sexes. But what if we refuse to "fix" intersex? According to Kessler, both our categories of sex and gender will begin to unravel.

The consequences of refusing to alter the body in accordance with gender ideals are obvious. A world populated with flat-chested, hairy women with penis-sized clitorises and large-breasted, hairless men with micro-penises would be a world of blended gender, and eventually, blended gender is no gender.¹⁵⁸

She explains how gender ideals, once impossible for most, are descending from the realm of the forms into everyday lives thanks to the ever-increasing skills of cosmetic

¹⁵⁵ Herdt, "Preface," *Third Sex, Third Gender*, 19-20.

¹⁵⁶ Virginia Ramey Mollenkott makes a similar proposal in *Omnigender*, esp. pages 164-185. Regarding intersex, she writes, "In short, intersexual people are the best biological evidence we have that the binary gender construct is totally inadequate and is causing terrific injustice and unnecessary suffering." Mollenkott, 51.

¹⁵⁷ Kessler and McKenna.

¹⁵⁸ Kessler, *Lessons*, 117.

surgeons. Perfect bodies can be purchased by intersexed and non-intersexed alike provided the price is right.¹⁵⁹ But she warns that making cosmetic genital surgery available could lead to greater intolerance for variations from the norm.¹⁶⁰

Surgical solutions for variant genitals need to be seen in the context of a cultural tide that is shrinking rather than expanding the range of what is considered normal for all parts of the body. Endocrinologists are prescribing a regimen of growth hormone for children who are deemed too short. Orthodontists are diagnosing denture abnormalities and providing “necessary” corrections for virtually every middle-class child’s teeth. “Imperfections [are] remediable today with the early help of a skilled surgeon.”¹⁶¹

Kessler exhorts her readers by saying “[i]f we want people to respect particular bodies, they need to be taught to lose respect for ideal ones.”¹⁶² But losing respect for the ideals of gender may carry consequences for which we are not prepared.

Kessler finds the eradication of gender liberating, not only for the intersexed but for anyone who finds gender rules oppressive. Rather than trying to change the rules of the gender system, as many feminists have done, she argues that we simply dispense with the idea that sex is tied to genitals and allow gender to evolve or dissolve altogether.

By subverting genital primacy, gender will be removed from the biological body and placed in the social-interactional one. Even if there are still two genders, male and female, how you ‘do’ male and female, including how you ‘do’ genitals, would be open to interpretation. Physicians teach parents of intersexed infants that the fetus is bipotential, but they talk about gender as being ‘finished’ at sixteen or twenty weeks, just because the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 111.

¹⁶⁰ “The analogy to noses is obvious. People electing to alter theirs choose the small upturned one, characteristic of the privileged class, rather than a variety of ‘ethnic’ ones. Given that pattern, what will happen if it becomes fashionable to alter one’s genitals? Will this mean that everyone—female and male—will want large phalluses like the privileged gender, or will it mean that males, evoking their privilege, will restrict large phalluses to males and demand that more females have their clitorises reduced? Will women start to feel inadequate about yet another body part, in this case a body part that had been off limits, by virtue of our culture’s puritanical silence about things ‘down there’? All of this is worth pondering as we play with the idea of usurping control of genital surgery to undercut gender.” Ibid., 119.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 157-158. For a similar critique of medical fixes for “normal” deviations from the norm see Carl Elliott, *Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003).

¹⁶² Kessler, *Lessons*, 118.

genitals are. Gender need not be thought of as finished, not for people who identify as intersexed, nor for any of us. Once we dispense with ‘sex’ and acknowledge gender as located in the social-interactional body, it will be easier to treat it as a work-in-progress.

This is assuming, though, that gender is something worth working on. It may not be. If intersexuality imparts any lesson, it is that gender is a responsibility and a burden—for those being categorized and those doing the categorizing. We rightfully complain about gender oppression in all its social and political manifestations, but we have not seriously grappled with the fact that we afflict ourselves with a need to locate a bodily basis for assertions about gender. We must use whatever means we have to give up on gender. The problems of intersexuality will vanish and we will, in this way, compensate intersexuals for all the lessons they have provided.¹⁶³

Intersexuality (as well as hetero- and homo- and bi-sexuality) only make sense when sex is tied to genitals.¹⁶⁴

Third Sex: For Adults Only

It may come as a surprise to the reader that the Intersex Society of North America does not advocate for a third sex category, nor the elimination of gender—at least when it comes to the raising of children. Whereas Fausto-Sterling calls for a few good parents to brave social disapproval in raising their children as unabashed intersexuals, the ISNA is more cautious in its proposals.¹⁶⁵ Those at ISNA give two reasons why they do not recommend raising children in a third gender or no gender. First, they recognize that someone has to decide where to draw the boundary lines and that this venture, attempted in the past, is fraught with difficulty. “Second, and much more importantly, we are trying

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁶⁴ “One can imagine that just as a heterosexual woman today can legitimately claim not to be attracted to men with excessive body hair, in a newly configured system she could claim not to be attracted to men with breasts and a vagina. What then would heterosexual mean? In what sense could a woman with a vagina who is sexually gratified by being penetrated by a ‘woman’ with a large clitoris (that looks and functions like a penis) be said to be a lesbian? If gendered bodies fall into disarray, sexual orientation will follow. Defining sexual orientation according to attraction to people with the same or different genitals, as is done now, will no longer make sense, nor will intersexuality.” *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁶⁵ Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes,” 472.

to make the world a safe place for intersex kids, and we don't think labeling them with a gender category that doesn't exist would help them."¹⁶⁶

Diamond and Sigmundson concur and urge physicians to advise parents in similar fashion with one exception: as children grow they should be given the option to choose whether or not to identify themselves as intersex.¹⁶⁷ While some intersex persons are perfectly content within a two-sex/gender system, others are not.¹⁶⁸

In our society intersex is a designation of medical fact but not yet a commonly accepted social designation. With age and experience, however, an increasing number of hermaphroditic and pseudohermaphroditic persons are adopting this identification. ... With increasing maturity, the designation of intersex may be acceptable to some and not to others. It should be offered as an optional identity along with male and female.¹⁶⁹

Questions remain whether intersex should become an option in our current society—at the legal, religious and practical levels.¹⁷⁰ Julia Epstein summarizes:

The law assumes a precise contrariety between two sexes, whereas medical science has for several centuries understood sex termination to involve a complex and indefinite mechanism that results in a spectrum of human sexual types rather than in a set of mutually exclusive categories.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Intersex Society of North America, "Does ISNA think children with intersex should be raised without a gender, or in a third gender?," <http://www.isna.org/faq/printable>.

¹⁶⁷ Kessler sees a connection between self-identification as intersex and medicalization. She quotes Morgan Holmes, an intersexed member of ISNA Canada. "'Was I intersexed before I was medicalized?' [She] compares herself to a woman friend with a three-and-a-half-inch clitoris that escaped 'correction.' Holmes's friend refuses the intersex label for herself, claiming that this would be an additional burden, making her even more of an outsider than her lesbianism already does. I suspect that her rejection of the label has more to do with an identity fit. She was not diagnosed; she was not 'surgicalized;' she does not feel like an intersexual. Holmes's own argument confirms this: 'It is partly in the naming that bodies become intersexed.'" Kessler, *Lessons*, 89; quoting Morgan Holmes, "Homophobia in Health Care: Abjection and the Treatment of Intersexuality," a paper presented at the Learned Societies CSAA meetings, Montreal (June 1995). Kessler also notes the irony that the intersexual identity is connected to surgical experience despite physician's assertions that early surgical intervention will allow the child to grow up without questions of gender identity. *Lessons*, 86.

¹⁶⁸ Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*, 18.

¹⁶⁹ Diamond and Sigmundson, "Management of Intersexuality," 1047-1048.

¹⁷⁰ Greenberg, 265-328.

¹⁷¹ Epstein, 101.

Third Sex and Alternative Sexualities

One of the biggest obstacles to the creation of a third sex category in contemporary society is the link between a biological third sex and alternative sexualities. In his cross-cultural and historical account of third sexes, Gilbert Herdt illustrates how, in Western society, the figure of the hermaphrodite became conflated with the sexual deviant so that in modern period the homosexual was labeled a “hermaphrodite of the soul.”¹⁷² His anthology is entitled, *Third Sex, Third Gender*, but it would have been more true to the materials to add one more phrase, *Third Sexuality*, to accurately describe the contents. Of course, Herdt’s inclusion of alternative sexualities is intentional as he believes “cross-cultural variations in sexual and gender patterns have been downplayed when it comes to discussions of ‘normal’ reproductive sexuality and kinship.” He lays the blame for this neglect upon “intellectual, social and morally defined strictures of sexual dimorphism.”¹⁷³ Thus, according to Herdt, the binary sex model is dependent as much upon a heterosexual ethic as it is upon scientific observance of sex differences. His work echoes the arguments of Judith Butler who insisted that “gender identity” and the binary model upon which it is built is a “regulatory ideal” resulting from “compulsory heterosexuality.”¹⁷⁴

Fausto-Sterling’s longer treatise, *Sexing the Body*, documents how the “specter of homosexuality” has haunted sex and gender studies from the beginning.¹⁷⁵ Despite her caveat that “each person experiences [intersex] differently,” Dreger still makes the sweeping generalization that “intersex is, and always will be, about sex, that is, sexual

¹⁷² Herdt, “Introduction,” *Third Sex, Third Gender*, 23.

¹⁷³ Ibid., “Preface,” 12.

¹⁷⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 1990, 1999, 2006), 24.

¹⁷⁵ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, esp. 71-73. See also Epstein, 100-101.

relations.”¹⁷⁶ Dreger does overstate her case, as the testimony of intersex woman Sally Gross illustrates. Gross has described her own experience of intersex, and her lack of sexual desire as indicating that she was one of “nature’s celibates.”¹⁷⁷ The sexual experiences of intersex persons are as varied as the sexualities of any other human being. One cannot claim an unified “intersex sexuality.” Even so, the connection between sexual politics and sex differentiation is a close one.

It cannot be disputed that a new openness toward homosexuality in the last decade has led to a greater willingness on the part of physicians to improve the standard medical treatment of intersex. Diamond and Sigmundson argued for greater openness to alternative sexual expression for the intersexed in 1997 and their recommendations were heeded by the international consensus group in 2005.¹⁷⁸ Thus, the consensus group concluded, “homosexual orientation (relative to sex of rearing) or strong cross-sex interest in an individual with DSD is *not* an indication of incorrect gender assignment.”¹⁷⁹ It seems that social acceptance of variations of sex development is more closely intertwined with social acceptance of variations of sexual orientation than many would like to admit.

IS CHRISTIANITY TO BLAME?

Fausto-Sterling and others have argued that the abuse of intersex by the medical establishment over the last two hundred years has resulted from the oppressive binary sex model dominant within Western culture and that this binary sex model is the result of a

¹⁷⁶ Dreger, “Introduction to Part 2,” *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*, 69.

¹⁷⁷ Gross, “Shunned by the Church.”

¹⁷⁸ “Certainly the full gamut of heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and even celibate options—however these are interpreted by the patient—must be offered and candidly discussed.” Diamond and Sigmundson, “Management of Intersexuality,” 1047-1048.

¹⁷⁹ Hughes, et al., “Consensus Statement,” 1.

heterosexual ethic. She does not lay the blame on the Judeo-Christian tradition directly but comes very close when she indicts Western religious sensibilities and Victorian sexual mores.¹⁸⁰ Gordene MacKenzie is less subtle. In her book, *Transgender Nation*, she lays the blame for the binary model squarely at the feet of the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹⁸¹

Is this a fair critique? Does Christianity require a two sex system? Christian theologians certainly function under the assumption that there are but two sexes, male and female, and two genders which follow, naturally, from each sex. This belief is grounded in the accounts of the creation of Adam and Eve found in the book of Genesis and reinforced throughout the Scriptures through simple description (heterosexual marriages and genealogies), ethical legislation to protect the boundaries of heterosexual marriages (do not covet your neighbor's wife, punishment for adultery), and theological analogies based on the image of heterosexual marriage (Zion as the daughter/bride of YHWH, the Church as the Bride of Christ).

Mainstream Christian tradition has reinforced this binary sex/gender paradigm through its value of heterosexual marriage and the alternative pathway of male or female celibate religious life. And yet, there is evidence of a third option in corners of the Christian tradition. As the next chapter will show, Christian language about eunuchs, grounded in Jesus' recognition of three types of eunuchs, created space for those who did

¹⁸⁰ "I do not pretend that the transition to my utopia would be smooth. Sex, even the supposedly 'normal,' heterosexual kind, continues to cause untold anxieties in Western society. And certainly a culture that has yet to come to grips—religiously and, in some states, legally—with the ancient and relatively uncomplicated reality of homosexual love will not readily embrace intersexuality. No doubt the most troublesome area by far would be the rearing of children. Parents, at least since the Victorian era, have fretted, sometimes to the point of outright denial, over the fact that their children are sexual beings." Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes," 472.

¹⁸¹ Gordene Olga MacKenzie, *Transgender Nation* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), 14.

not fit neatly into the sex categories of male or female. Monasteries were founded for eunuchs in the middle ages and eunuchs emerged as a recognized third gender in the Byzantine Christian Empire. Marginal though the eunuch has always been, it at least existed within Christian culture and thought. But this is no longer true. From myth, to margin, to medical erasure, intersex is believed to be a thing of legend, not a presence among us. As a result, the eunuch no longer exists in contemporary theology and church life.

Alice Domurat Dreger believes it is no coincidence that when traditional sexual mores were being challenged by alternative sexualities one finds the disappearance of the “true” hermaphrodite in Western culture.¹⁸² She documents how medical doctors attempted to create clarity out of ambiguity by refusing to acknowledge intersex in the public sector.

Western Christians stand at a similar crossroads today. While some “welcoming and affirming” churches readily employ arguments from the existence of intersex persons to justify the validity of transsexualities, homosexualities, and bisexualities, conservative Christians may be tempted to follow in the footsteps of Victorian physicians by attempting to shore up traditional categories of sex and gender in response.¹⁸³ I will argue that these are not the only options. The Scriptures offer a third way for recognizing a third gender.

In the next chapter we will explore the category of the eunuch, its place within the biblical canon, Christian history, and theology. I will argue that by recovering the concept

¹⁸² Dreger, “Doubtful Sex,” 364.

¹⁸³ See Ann Thompson Cook, *Made in God’s Image: A Resource for Dialogue about the Church and Gender Differences* (Dumbarton United Methodist Church, Washington, DC. 2003). Cf. Colson, “Blurred Biology.”

of the eunuch, theologians will find fresh avenues for rethinking the meanings of sex and gender for theological anthropology and a starting place to address the challenge of intersex.

What I am proposing is not the deconstruction of the entire narrative of sex, gender, and sexuality found within the Christian tradition. What I am proposing is the recovery of a legitimate margin. Recovering the concept of the eunuch and acknowledging the presence of the intersexed in our communities does not have to lead to the eradication of gender or the rejection of the Christian value of heterosexual complementarity. It does, however, require theologians to reconsider theological edifices they have constructed upon binary models of sex and gender. Two such edifices will be addressed in the chapters that follow. Chapter four will assess the value of sex and gender for theological notions of personhood and *imago Dei*. Chapter five will critique current constructions of relationality that have been built upon the model of heterosexual marital relations. Finally, in chapter six, I will propose what I believe is a more balanced model for theological anthropologies of sex and gender.

CHAPTER 2

EUNUCHS: BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR INTERSEX

In this chapter we turn away from the most recent medical, political and sociological arguments surrounding intersex and roll back the clock several millennia in order to examine alternate ways in which persons who do not neatly fit into a binary model of sex and gender have been understood. In many ways the ancient world was much more rigid in defining and protecting the borders between men and women than contemporary North American culture. Yet despite this great fear of gender blending, the ancients were more open to recognizing that their binary model needed supplements in order to deal with human bodies as they occurred in the real world. One such supplement was the language of the eunuch.

The eunuch is of particular importance for this study, not only because it provided an alternative gender category in the ancient world but especially because it was used by Jesus as a model for Christian living. Matthew 19:12 reads:

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.

In this chapter we will discover that the term eunuch, much like the term intersex, was used in the ancient world as an umbrella concept—a word to cover a range of phenomena wherein humans did not measure up to the ideal for either sex, male or

female. We will excavate the pre-Christian history of the eunuch in order to place Jesus' statement in proper historical context. We will then trace its transformation at the hands of early Christians. In Eastern Christendom, eunuchs retained public recognition for over a millennium. Western Roman Christians were much less comfortable with the physicality of eunuchism and reinterpreted the eunuch from a visible caricature of gender ambiguity into an icon of manliness.

I will argue that, in the history of Christian thought in the West, Jesus' statements about eunuchs have not been fully appreciated. Roman ideals of "masculine splendor" prevented many early Christians from accepting the radical challenge that the eunuch posed to their cultural assumptions about sex and gender.¹ Jesus' language was tamed so that the eunuch came to represent non-married men; a partial, but much less radical challenge to social structures and personal identity based on sex, gender, and sexuality.

Jesus' first type of eunuch provides a biblical door through which theologians may pass in order to explore the radical challenges posed by intersex to our current concepts of human personhood, identity, image of God, sex, gender, and sexuality. The eunuch may also function as a window through which intersex persons can find themselves already recognized as valued members of the Christian story. In the contemporary context, space for the intersexed needs to be recovered both theoretically and practically. This chapter will show that already in the midst of the Christian story, the grand narrative beginning with Adam and Eve, there has been room for others. Whether contemporary Christians can recover language and space for intersex persons in our day is a question we have yet to answer.

¹ Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 19.

WHAT WAS A EUNUCH?

Biblical Context

Jesus' words to his disciples in Matthew 19:12 sound utterly foreign to modern ears. They follow on the heels of a discussion about the legality of divorce prompted by a question from some Pharisees. When asked if it was lawful to divorce one's wife for "any and every reason," Jesus responds with a Scriptural quotation:

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."²

The Pharisees challenge Jesus' interpretation of Genesis by arguing that Moses made provisions for certificates of divorce. But Jesus is unmoved. He replies:

Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.³

Jesus' disciples surmise that marriage, without the option of divorce, especially in a culture where one's spouse was more often chosen by others, was not a good option.⁴ In light of Jesus' strict rule, they conclude in verse 10; "it is better not to marry."

Jesus does not applaud their deduction; rather, he says:

Not everyone can accept this teaching, 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 others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.⁵

² Matt. 19:4-6

³ Matt. 19:8-9

⁴ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 471.

⁵ Matt. 19:11-12

Scholars have debated the meaning of “this teaching” (literally “this saying”). Does it refer back to Jesus’ teaching on the indissolubility of marriage in verses 3-6, the exception clause for adultery in verse 9, or forward to his statement on eunuchs in verse 12? Modern commentators tend to soften “this teaching” about divorce; and late antique and medieval Christians tended to agree with the disciples that it was better not to marry; however, the natural flow of the text suggests that Jesus is correcting the conclusion of his disciples.⁶ Davies and Allison draw attention to the number of qualifications in the text: “not all,” “those to whom it is given,” “he who is able”...

In other words, Matthew uses the saying on eunuchs to confirm celibacy as a calling, but his emphasis—in contradiction to his disciples—is upon its special character.⁷

Given the wider context, it is understandable why some modern translations have abandoned the language of the eunuch altogether, opting for dynamic equivalents such as those found in the New American Bible:

Some are *incapable of marriage* because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have *renounced marriage* for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it.

In this context, the eunuch did represent the non-married; nevertheless, such translations are inadequate because they also hide the radical nature of the eunuch and the debates which followed as early Christians attempted to understand and apply Jesus’ teaching. Translations, like that above, are also motivated by a desire to prevent what many see as misapplications of the text. Origin, compelled by his desire to follow Jesus’ instructions perfectly and protect himself from scandal in his teaching ministry to both

⁶ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol. III* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 20-21; and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 499.

⁷ Davies and Allison, 21.

sexes, made himself a literal eunuch by castrating himself.⁸ Though Origen is the most famous, his application of Jesus' saying was hardly unique. There was a substantial enough number of individuals taking Jesus' words literally that the Church Fathers, as early as the Council of Nicaea (325), saw the need to address the issue. They declared that self-castration would, henceforth, disqualify an individual from ordination to the priesthood, while involuntary castration would not, of itself, bar a man from holy orders.⁹

Nevertheless, most biblical commentators, past and present, believe that Jesus' words should not be taken literally. Understood this way, Jesus is saying no more than the apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 7 where he recommends that the unmarried remain unmarried as he is (v. 7-8) in order to avoid trouble (v. 28), so that they may devote themselves entirely to the Lord (v. 32-35), and for their own personal happiness (v. 40).

But why, we must ask, does Jesus not say what Paul said, or what the New American Bible says? Why does Jesus use the provocative language of the eunuch? Is there something more to the eunuch than an inability or unwillingness to marry, something that is essential to our understanding of Jesus' instruction to his disciples? I will argue that there is. The language of the eunuch, while not opposed to the simple translation "remain unmarried," is far more complex and far richer when understood in the context of the ancient world.

⁸ Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004), 115.

⁹ Council of Nicaea 325, canon 1: "If anyone in sickness has undergone surgery at the hands of physicians or has been castrated by barbarians, let him remain among the clergy. But if anyone in good health has castrated himself, if he is enrolled among the clergy he should be suspended and in future no such man should be promoted. But, as it is evident that this refers to those who are responsible for the condition and presume to castrate themselves, so too if any have been made eunuchs by barbarians or by their masters, but have been found worthy, the canon admits such men to the clergy." Quoted in Hester, "Eunuchs and the Postgender Jesus," 33-34 footnote 80. See also Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 13; Piotr O. Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati: A Cultural History*, John A. Broadwin and Shelley L. Frisch, trans. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2001), 170-171.

Historical Context

The term “eunuch” is Greek, from *eunoukhos*, and is derived from the ancient practice of having an individual as “the one who has [responsibility for] the bed” (*ho tēn eunēn ekhōn*); “holding,” “guarding,” “keeping” watch over the bedchamber of the king.¹⁰ Eunuchs were guardians of sacred spaces, guardians of *haram*. In Semitic languages “the word *haram* refers variously to a sacred place, a sanctuary, or a royal palace, a place that one is generally forbidden to enter.”¹¹ Piotr Scholz explains how “for historical reasons [it] has come to be applied mostly to the apartments in oriental palaces allotted to females.”¹² Yet eunuchs had wider responsibilities in the Ancient East and Ancient Near East.

This etymology emphasizes the duties of eunuchs, rather than their physical nature, an important point for our understanding of the term. Not all eunuchs were castrated men (*castrati*),¹³ nor were they always “natural eunuchs,” people born with ambiguous or poorly formed genitalia¹⁴—whom the Jews called “eunuchs of the sun” (*saris khama*) indicating that they were discovered to be eunuchs at the moment the sun shone upon them, i.e., from the day of their birth.¹⁵ The Hebrew term, *saris* can probably be traced to *sar* which, in Babylonian (an older Semitic language) means “king.”¹⁶ The Hebrew, *saris*, can be translated as “eunuch” or “official” and retains the courtly nature

¹⁰ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 16.

¹¹ Scholz, 23.

¹² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 82; this he infers from sources where particular men were described both as *eunouchos* and as *spados*.

¹⁴ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 15.

¹⁵ Davies and Allison, 22. Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 501. See also Alfred Cohen, “Tumtum and Androgynous,” *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* 38 (1999): 74.

¹⁶ Scholz, 76.

of the eunuch in the Ancient Near East. Context usually determines which English translation is preferred.¹⁷

In the 6th century B.C.E., Babylon fell to the Persians who are the oldest and most useful source for information on eunuchs in the Middle East.¹⁸ It is said that at the height of the Achaemenid Dynasty, which lasted from the rule of Cyrus II, “the Great,” in 550 B.C.E. until the conquest of Alexander the Great in 330 B.C.E., more than 3,000 eunuchs could be found at court.¹⁹ Scholz explains that “the question whether eunuchs in the ancient Middle East were always castrated has never been resolved.”²⁰ What we do know is that by the time the Persian Empire had passed through the Greeks into the hands of the Romans, despite the fact that Romans despised castration, many Roman emperors, and elite householders, depended upon castrated eunuchs.²¹ “Even in Judaea, where the practice of castration was frowned upon and outlawed, Herod the Great (37 B.C.–A.D. 4) found it impossible, as Josephus Flavius (A.D. 37-95) relates, to manage his affairs without eunuchs.”²²

Eunuchs handled everything from powerful administrative functions and military command to cup-bearing and guarding the intimate spaces of their masters and

¹⁷ In Genesis 37, Joseph is sold to Potiphar, who is called a *saris* in the Hebrew, *eunoukhos* in the LXX, but “official” or “officer” in most English translations. We know that Potiphar had a wife so that, whatever his physical condition, he was certainly not prohibited by his office or by his physical state from marriage.

¹⁸ China also has a long history of castrated eunuchs in the service of the emperor, but Persian practices seem to have had the greatest impact on our area of study. See Scholz, chapter 5 “The Emperor of China and His Eunuchs.” Despite the fact that the Chinese practiced “full” or “double” castration (the removal of both the penis and testes), China had only a two percent mortality rate for castration, while other regions lost three out of four victims to death (Scholz, 16). Ringrose finds evidence of the “doubly castrated” in 10th century Byzantine literature. These were called *curzinasus* “from the name Khwarizm, which refers to a region in Central Asia where physicians knew how to perform this complex and risky surgery.” Doubly castrated eunuchs were scarce in Constantinople, fetching a very high price (Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 15).

¹⁹ Scholz, 81.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 112-123. See also Kuefler, 61.

²² Scholz, 83.

mistresses. Cut off from their families of origin, raised to see the family of their master as their own family, and prevented from fathering children of their own, eunuchs owed their entire identity, complete loyalty, to their masters. Their inability to procreate barred them from claiming power in their own name and also from producing heirs who might challenge the dynastic authority of the sacred king or emperor.²³ Their gender ambiguity also enabled them to mediate between men and women, elite and public, sacred and secular.²⁴ Thus, Kathryn Ringrose has aptly labeled eunuchs “perfect servants.”²⁵

Eunuchs were elite slaves, entrusted with any number of important duties, but they were also considered “luxury items” and “status symbols” in the Roman Empire.²⁶ The price for a *castrato* was many times more than that of an ordinary slave. Pliny the Elder, a historian writing during the first century C.E. (around the same time as the writing of the Gospel of Matthew), complains of the exorbitant price paid for one particularly beautiful *castrato* named Pæzon:

...when Lutorius Priscus bought of Sejanus, the eunuch, Pæzon, for fifty million sesterces, the price was given by Hercules! rather to gratify the passion of the purchaser than in commendation of the beauty of the slave.²⁷

The association of eunuchs with the bed chamber, while it may have begun with the responsibilities of guard or attendant, did not stop there. *Castrati* were also valued for their beauty and sexual allure. It was believed that by castrating a boy before the age of twenty, one could preserve his youthful beauty. Scholz explains that this beauty “was more highly esteemed in antiquity than that of women...”

²³ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 5. Scholz, 115.

²⁴ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 82-85.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

²⁶ Scholz, 113-114.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 114; citing Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny*, trans. John Bostock and H. T. Riley (London: George Bell & Sons, 1890), 7.128f.

Specifically, these ideals of beauty derived from the exaltation of the androgyne and the hermaphrodite. We can trace them back to the influence of the oriental aesthetic, which also helped to shape the Hellenistic idea of the beautiful.²⁸

Nero was infamous for becoming enamored of one such boy. He met Sporus when the latter was a child and was struck by Sporus' resemblance to Nero's late wife, Poppaea Sabina. Nero had Sporus castrated to preserve this beauty, "married" him, assigned him a dowry, dressed him in the clothes of an empress and did not hesitate to kiss him amorously in public.²⁹ The second century historian, Cassius Dio, recounts that crowds at the wedding shouted "all the customary good wishes, even to the extent of praying that legitimate children might be born to them."³⁰ Suetonius, a writer who lived from 70—120 C.E., lamented: "the world would have been a happier place had Nero's father Domitius married that sort of wife."³¹ It was not until 342 C.E., when Christianity had spread through the ranks of Roman authority, that marriages of men to eunuchs were outlawed.³²

The sexuality of eunuchs was highly debated in the ancient world. They were trusted to care for women of elite households because they were believed to lack sexual desire, yet there is evidence that some of these women preferred eunuchs for their own sexual pleasure, because they could do so without fear of pregnancy.³³ It is quite possible that, although such activities were considered scandalous and did result in severe

²⁸ Scholz, 117.

²⁹ Ibid., 117-118.

³⁰ Kuefler, 100-101.

³¹ Scholz, 118; Tranquillius Gaius Suetonius, 'Nero,' in *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves, revised by Michael Grant (London: Penguin Press, 1989), 28.1f.

³² Kuefler, 101-102.

³³ Scholz, 120; Kuefler, 96-102.

penalties when discovered,³⁴ non-procreative sexuality was considered less of a peril to the empire than offspring who might threaten the powers that be.³⁵

Despite the growing dependence upon eunuchs in every area of domestic and administrative life, the presence of eunuchs in Roman households provoked much anxiety.³⁶ Roman men were anxious about the affairs to which their eunuchs were attending. They worried whether they could trust eunuchs with their money, their women, their reputation, their power, their food. But they were also anxious about what eunuchs said about them as men. Peter Brown explains: “In the Roman world, the physical appearance and the reputed character of eunuchs acted as constant reminders that the male body was a fearsomely plastic thing.”³⁷ Galen, the medical authority of the day, had argued that “lack of heat from childhood on could cause the male body to collapse back into a state of primary undifferentiation. No normal man might actually become a woman; but each man trembled forever on the brink of becoming ‘womanish.’”³⁸ Brown goes on:

It was never enough to be male: a man had to strive to become ‘virile.’ He had to learn to exclude from his character and from the poise and temper of his body all telltale traces of ‘softness’ that might betray, in him, the half-formed state of a woman. ...a man’s walk... the rhythms of his speech... the telltale resonance of his voice. Any of these might betray the ominous loss of a hot, high-spirited momentum, a flagging of the clear-cut self-restraint, and a relaxing of the taut elegance of voice and gesture that made a man a man, the unruffled master of a subject world.³⁹

³⁴ Kuefler, 98.

³⁵ Shaun F. Tougher, “Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview, with Special Reference to their Creation and Origin,” in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, Liz James, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 170.

³⁶ Kuefler, 96.

³⁷ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Eunuchs represented what happened when men, the rightful masters of the world, lost their masculinity. The master became the servant. The man became womanish. The ambiguity of a eunuch's body did not merely symbolize the loss of virtue and power, it explained it.⁴⁰

Eunuchs were entrusted with the most intimate and powerful responsibilities and yet suffered the reputation of being untrustworthy on account of their physical condition. They were simultaneously considered asexual and unable to restrain themselves from sexual passions. The physical ambiguity of eunuchs was translated into the moral realm in areas well beyond sexuality. Eunuchs suffered the same aspersions of character as did women in the ancient world. They were “carnal, irrational, voluptuous, fickle, manipulative and deceitful.”⁴¹ Women and eunuchs “were assumed to lack the ability to control their physical, emotional and sexual appetites.”⁴² Self-control was believed to be a masculine virtue, visible in the hardness of men's bodies. The etymological link between *virtus* (virtue) and *vir* (man, male) is debated; nevertheless, the linguistic association remained strong among Latin speakers. Lactantius, a fourth-century writer and tutor of Constantine I (who ruled from 306-337), preserved “a well-known, if invented, etymology”:

Thus man [*vir*] was so named because strength [*vis*] is greater in him than in woman; and from this, virtue [*virtus*] has received its name. Likewise, woman [*mulier*] ... is from softness [*mollitia*], changed and shortened by a letter, as though it were softly [*mollier*].⁴³

Thus, when eunuchs were disparaged for being “soft,” their critics were commenting on much more than a lack of muscle mass resulting from lower levels of testosterone. To be

⁴⁰ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 51.

⁴¹ Kuefler, 35.

⁴² Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 36.

⁴³ Kuefler, 21. citing Lactantius, *De opificio Dei* 12.16-17.

soft or effeminate was to be weak, not only physically but morally.⁴⁴ Virtuous eunuchs were considered anomalies; they were against nature.⁴⁵

In addition to their presence in the sacred spaces of kings, emperors, and upper-class households, eunuchs were also prominent in certain religious contexts. In the Roman era, ritual castration was a part of the cult of Cybele, which was derived from prehistoric fertility religions, worship of the *Magna Mater* (Great Mother), and integrated into Roman pantheon as the *Mater Deum* (Mother of the Gods).⁴⁶ While the myth suffered innumerable permutations in the course of nearly two millennia, central themes remained the same.

...love between Cybele and Attis, leading to the death of Attis following his remorse at his unfaithfulness to Cybele, and culminating in his resurrection in the fruitful womb of the *Mater Magna*.⁴⁷

Central to worship of the *Mater Deum* was the presence of eunuchs, though there are various explanations for the phenomenon. In several Roman versions, the god/dess Cybele is originally conceived as a hermaphrodite, Agdistis/Cybele. “Since the gods feared the power of the hermaphrodite Agdistis/Cybele, they ordered Dionysos to castrate him.”⁴⁸ During the process of castration, parts of his severed genitals fell to the ground and engendered the beautiful Attis, with whom Cybele later fell in love. In one version

⁴⁴ Kuefler, 24-25.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 35. Virtuous females we also consider against nature. See also Gillian Cloke, ‘*This Female Man of God: Women and spiritual power in the patristic age, AD 350-450*’ (New York: Routledge, 1995), 214-215.

⁴⁶ Scholz, 93-94.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 99. Kuefler does a splendid job outlining the related versions of this religious myth. A goddess associated with fertility, both agricultural and human, along with eroticism, stood at the center. She was the Phrygians, Cybele; Egyptian Isis, Syrian Astarte, Babylonian Ishtar, Carthaginian Tannit (known in Roman times as Caelestis), and “a host of Greek goddesses including Rhea, Demeter, Aphrodite, and Hera, and thus also with Roman Ceres, Venus, and Juno.” Her consort was known as Phrygian Attis, Egyptian Osiris, Syrian Tammuz and Babylonian Dumuzi, Greek Adonis and Dionysus and Roman Bacchus. “We should not think of all these pairs of gods and goddesses as the same cult, to be sure, but Roman writers of late antiquity did tend to consider them as ethnic and local variations on a general mythological theme.” Kuefler, 246-247.

⁴⁸ Scholz, 105.

Attis was then betrothed to the daughter of a local king. Out of jealousy, Cybele drove Attis mad to the point of emasculating himself. When the wound led to his death, Cybele begged Zeus to resuscitate him but Zeus refused.⁴⁹ In Ovid's version, Attis cheated on Cybele with a nymph. Cybele destroyed the nymph, driving Attis to madness. He emasculated himself in penance for his unfaithfulness.⁵⁰ Ovid explains: "This madness set an example and the soft acolytes toss their hair and cut off their worthless organs."⁵¹

Kuefler admits that we do not know to what extent (if at all) sacred prostitution (involving female priestesses and eunuch priests) was a part of the cult. Evidence is unclear but accusations of their sexual activities abounded, especially in Christian sources.⁵²

From a Jewish religious perspective, eunuchs were quintessential foreigners, the epitome of "other." Castration was forbidden within Judaism. Animals who had been castrated could not be offered on the altar (Lev. 22:24). Castrated humans were excluded from the assembly of Israel (Deut. 23:1) and banned from the Israelite priesthood (Lev. 21:20). At best, they could not fulfill Jewish obligations to marry and have children; at worst, they were associated with the power structures of oppressive regimes, pagan religious cults, and illicit sexual activities.⁵³ Indeed, it is probably their association with ancient fertility religions that stands behind the exclusion of *castrati* from the assembly of the LORD in Deuteronomy 23:1.⁵⁴ This passage specifies both types of emasculation

⁴⁹ Ibid., 105-106.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 98-99.

⁵¹ Ibid., 99; Ovid, *Fasti* 4.179ff; 212ff.

⁵² Kuefler, 250-252.

⁵³ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 722. See also Cohen, 70 for contemporary Jewish commentary on the obligation to marry.

⁵⁴ Gordon McConville, "Deuteronomy," *New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition*, D. A. Carson, et al., eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 221.

(crushing the testicles and cutting off the penis) but goes on to speak of forbidden marriages and foreign peoples: Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Egyptians, and their descendants (Deut. 23:2-8).

Despite all of the marks against eunuchs, the prophet Isaiah predicted a time when even these would be included with God's people.

³ Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." ⁴ For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—⁵ to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. ⁶ And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."⁵⁵

Isaiah corroborates the close connection between the eunuch and the foreigner. There may also be a play on words in the prophecy above. Eunuchs were those who "kept" or "guarded" the bedchamber and the sacred spaces of the king, but in this passage it is the eunuchs who "keep" or "guard" the Sabbath, the sacred time of the divine King, who will no longer be excluded from God's people.⁵⁶

Jesus' favorable treatment of eunuchs in Matthew 19:12 may have been one more tactic used to associate himself with the messianic predictions of Isaiah.⁵⁷ Indeed the

⁵⁵ Isaiah 56:3-7

⁵⁶ Both the Hebrew (*smr*) and the Greek (*phulassō*) terms have "to keep, guard" as primary lexical meanings, with "to observe or obey" as the metaphorical alternative.

⁵⁷ The gospel writer quotes Isaiah explicitly in Matt. 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; 15:7. Isaiah is mentioned by name in the first gospel more than in any other New Testament book.

baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by the apostle Philip was heralded as an indication of the inclusion of foreigners into God's people.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, despite the prediction of Isaiah, its fulfillment in Acts 8, and Jesus' positive view of eunuchs, Christians continued Jewish prejudices against eunuchs. On the whole, the eunuch continued to be understood as the quintessential foreigner—pagan and sexually immoral.⁵⁹ These associations may explain why Christians reacted so strongly against castration in the Latin West.⁶⁰

But there is another reason why Jews and Christians were so mistrustful of eunuchs. In addition to being ethnically other, religiously other, sexually other, and morally other, eunuchs did not fit into traditional Roman, Jewish, or Christians ideals regarding gender. In the Talmud, eunuchs are derided for unmanly characteristics. They are “crudely and pejoratively described as having no beard, smooth skin, and lanky hair.”⁶¹ Boys who were castrated before puberty developed unique physical traits, distinct from men and women.

Those who are young might be mistaken for adolescent boys, albeit slightly unusual adolescent boys, with fine, fair skin, faces that are just a bit broad, and tall thin bodies with narrow shoulders and graceful carriage. Older eunuchs often show signs of poor health. Their faces are prematurely lined, and youthful fairness has become pallor. Their bodies are stooped from osteoporosis. Even so, they sport a thick, luxuriant head of hair...⁶²

The fourth century Roman poet, Claudius Mamertinus, eloquently portrayed the gender ambiguity of eunuchs as “exiles from the society of the human race, belonging

⁵⁸ Kuefler, 259.

⁵⁹ Kuefler shows how such prejudices were extended, not only to the products of the East imported to the West—castrated slaves—but also to Easterners in general who were slandered for being effeminate, i.e., morally weak. *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁶¹ Davies and Allison, 25; citing *b. Yeb.* 80b.

⁶² Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 1.

neither to one sex nor the other.”⁶³ A few decades after him, Claudian disparaged eunuchs as those “whom the male sex has discarded and the female will not adopt.”⁶⁴ In the 3rd century, Severus Alexander went so far as to call them “a third sex of the human race.”⁶⁵ Augustine complains not only about the paganism and sexual sins of the *galli* but also their gender transgressions. They are “effeminate [molles] consecrated to the Great Mother, who violate every canon of decency in men and women” visible “in the streets and squares of Carthage with their pomaded hair and powdered faces, gliding along with womanish languor.”⁶⁶ According to Augustine, a eunuch priest was “neither changed into a woman nor allowed to remain a man.”⁶⁷

Eunuchs blurred the great divide between the virtuous virile and the *molles mulier* (*soft women*). Their very existence threatened legal, religious, and ethical systems built upon the separation of the sexes. Kuefler recounts debates over the legal status of eunuchs and explains that the rights of eunuchs were granted and withheld depending upon who was in power.⁶⁸ While such debates are difficult to understand from a modern point of view, one should not forget that legal processes, such as *testifying* in court and creating a last will and *testament* are etymologically dependent on *testis*, the male organ. Gen. 24:9 and 47:29 recount the practice placing one hand on the genitals

⁶³ Kuefler, 36.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁵ Shaun Tougher, “Social Transformation, Gender Transformation? The court eunuchs, 300-900,” *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith eds. (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), 71; citing Severus Alexander, *Historia Augusta*, XXIII.4-8.

⁶⁶ Kuefler, 253; citing Augustine, *De civ. D.* 7.26.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 249; citing Augustine, *De civ. D.* 7.24.

⁶⁸ Kuefler, 33.

(euphemistically translated “under the thigh”) when taking an oath.⁶⁹ Eunuchs and women simply did not have the anatomical equipment to take oaths, bear witness or make bequests.

Eunuchs were legally other, morally other, sexually other, socially other, religiously other, and ethnically other. They were, to quote Claudius Mamertinus once again, “exiles from the society of the human race.”⁷⁰

Returning to the Biblical Context: Childlikeness, Christian Perfection, and Angels

Given such a background, it is a wonder that Jesus was willing to use the term eunuch at all! But what would Jesus’ Jewish audiences have heard? Would they have envisioned officials in elite, pagan households, whether Persian, Greek, or Roman? Sexual consorts of the upper-echelons of Roman society? Passive male sexuality? Gender transgressors? Cultic castration?

Matthew records Jesus’ words in the context of divorce, marriage, and sacrifices for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. This setting does not emphasize the political or cultic contexts of eunuchism but speaks of the relation of the eunuch to social bonds created by sex, gender, and sexuality. But Jesus’ statements on the eunuch also precede other parables of the kingdom.

Matthew 19:14 declares that the Kingdom of God will be inherited by those who are childlike. In this literary context, one wonders at the significance of the child. Did children represent those unfettered by the concerns of marriage and the pain of divorce?

⁶⁹ Scholz, 78-79.

⁷⁰ Kuefler, 36.

Did those who had not yet reached puberty represent those without gender or the innocence associated with a lack of sexual desire?⁷¹

The verses which follow shift attention from this life to the next and raise the bar for ideas of Christian perfection. When asked which good works are necessary for gaining eternal life, Jesus answered that one must obey the commandments and love one's neighbor as oneself. But when pressed for more, Jesus adds in verse 21: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Apparently, the disciples wanted to know what kind of "treasure" Jesus was talking about:

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."⁷²

It is difficult to know how Jesus' audience interpreted his words about three types of eunuchs only a few verses earlier, but we do know that the Gospel writer either preserved this original context or set these sayings alongside one another because he believed they were related. The broad themes of this passage—the question of what one could do above and beyond the standard commandments, in order to be "perfect," and the eschatological order of things—found fertile soil in the ascetic minds of early Christians.

⁷¹ "Before reaching puberty and becoming an adult male or female, a child is sometimes referred to as a 'neuter' in terms of the development of secondary sex characteristics..." Scholz, 6. In Greek, the word for child (*teknon*) is neuter. Tertullian connects the childlikeness which inherits the kingdom of heaven to the virginal state in "On Monogamy," chapter 8. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second, American Edition*, A. Cleveland Coxe, rev. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 65.

⁷² Matt. 19:27-29

We know that in the early church, “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom” came to be understood as those who were willing to leave behind the burdens and earthly joys of family, in the hopes of everlasting reward. While Matthew only lists siblings, parents, and children, early Christians soon added “wife” as the most pivotal renunciation of all.

The associations and responsibilities of family life (marriage, sexuality, children, inheritance, ownership of property) came to be viewed as the evil powers of this “present age.”⁷³ And Jesus had taught that these would be left behind in the age to come. A few chapters later, in Matthew 22:30, the gospel writer records Jesus’ teaching that “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.”

The connection between non-married persons, eunuchs, and angels is an important one. Eunuchs came to be associated with angels on account of their (assumed) sexual continence, their freedom from the obligations of marriage, and their gender status.⁷⁴ Byzantine iconography depicts angels as beardless and genderless.⁷⁵ Hagiographical accounts describe eunuchs and angels being confused for one another on account of similar physical features and dress. Both acted as mediators and messengers for the sacred king, bridging the divide between the sacred and the profane.⁷⁶ Eunuchs were angelic, not only in appearance but also in voice. Because women were prohibited from singing in church, boys were castrated to ensure soprano singers in Eastern and Western Christendom—a practice that can be dated at least as far back as the 4th century

⁷³ Brown, 99-100.

⁷⁴ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, translated by James E. Crouch. Edited by Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 73. See also, Shaun Tougher, “Holy eunuchs! : masculinity and eunuch saints in Byzantium,” *Holiness and masculinity in the Middle Ages*, P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis eds. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004).

⁷⁵ Scholz, 190.

⁷⁶ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 161.

C.E. and which was not abandoned until the last century.⁷⁷ The voice of the “last angel of Rome” Alessandro Moreschi (1858-1922) was preserved by one of the earliest sound recordings of the 20th century.⁷⁸

Whether intended by Jesus or not, these interpretations of the early church radically altered the way eunuchs have been understood in Western culture. Rather than as the elite slaves of the emperor and castrated (but sexually active) priests of Cybele, eunuchs came to signify non-castrated but sexually continent priests and the castrato-singers of the Church—perfect servants of the King of Kings. Free from the fetters and distractions of family, innocent and asexual as children and angels, with angelic voices that raised audiences to the heavens—eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom soon became the new model of Christian perfection.

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE EUNUCH IN WESTERN AND EASTERN CHRISTENDOM

Peter Brown, in his detailed study, *Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, argues that sexuality and its denial carried “profoundly different” meanings in the early centuries compared to the meanings given in middle ages and modern period (with which we are more familiar).⁷⁹ Sexuality also carried various meanings in particular regions.⁸⁰ It will be impossible to cover all of the nuances of each group in this volume, so we will highlight a few significant differences as they relate to our own study.

⁷⁷ Scholz, 273.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁷⁹ Brown, preface, xv.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xiv.

Eunuchs and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity

Paul

Brown explains how Jesus' words about becoming eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven were interpreted through the lens of Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, wherein he presents married sexuality as a concession for those who cannot control their burning passion (I Cor. 7:5-9). Brown highlights Paul's concern that married persons are divided in their loyalties (I Cor. 7:32-34) and provides evidence that the "undivided heart" was a traditional Jewish and early Christian metaphor for holiness.⁸¹ Brown writes, "Ascetic readers of Paul in late antiquity did not mis-hear his tone of voice."⁸² Despite Paul's affirmation of the sacramental value of marriage in Ephesians chapter 5, the early Christian belief that perfection depended upon a rejection of marriage was rooted in Paul's epistles and the saying of Jesus in Matthew 19:12.

But the Pauline legacy included another radical text, a baptismal formula recorded in Galatians 3:28 which declares: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Along with the symbol of the eunuch in Matthew 19 and the devaluation of married sexuality in I Corinthians 7, this text also brought into question the significance of sex and gender for Christians. What remained to be debated in the centuries which followed were the ramifications of such notions. Did baptism and the rejection of marriage undo all societal roles based on gender? Some Christians believed that they did.

Brown believes that these notions stood at the root of some of the "problems" Paul was attempting to address in the Corinthian church. Women were removing their

⁸¹ Ibid., 36.

⁸² Ibid., 56.

veils—symbols of their female subordination, coverings for their sexual allure—in order to prophesy in the Spirit (I Cor. 11). But the Corinthians were not the only group to apply these texts in a practical way that symbolically dissolved gender markers in church. There is evidence of similar practices in the church of Carthage toward the end of the 2nd century C.E. These Christians encouraged their continent women to stand in church without veils as living symbols of Christian hope. Their conquest of sexuality stood as a pictorial promise of the sanctification of all believers. “I am not veiled because the veil of corruption is taken from me; ...I am not ashamed, because the deed of shame has been removed far from me.”⁸³ Virgins were lifted above the shame associated not simply with sexual activity, but above the shame of their very gender.

Tertullian (160?-220)

Tertullian would have none of it. In his treatise, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, he demanded that after puberty, women, even virgins, remain covered. Hope for the redemption of human sexuality was for the next life, not this one. In this life, “A girl above shame was, quite bluntly a ‘sport of nature, a third sex.’”⁸⁴ Brown argues that Tertullian was the first, but hardly the last, to argue that humans, even Christians, could never overcome the “facts of sex.”⁸⁵

On the other hand, Tertullian did believe that humans would shed sex distinctions in the life to come, becoming like the angels:

I have to return after death to the place where there is no giving in marriage, where I have to be clothed upon rather than to be despoiled—where, even if I am despoiled of my sex, I am classed with angels—not a male angel, nor a female

⁸³ Ibid., 81; quoting *Acts of Judas Thomas* 10.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 81; quoting Tertullian *On the Veiling of Virgins* 7.6.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 81.

one. There will be no one to do aught against me, nor will they find any male energy in me.⁸⁶

It is difficult to untangle Tertullian's legacy given that he changed positions over the course of his life. He both affirms and denies the significance of sex differences. He provides examples of the worst of Christian misogyny and yet, at the end of his life, after joining the Montanists, he concedes female participation in ritual leadership.⁸⁷ This ambivalence can also be found in his comments on eunuchs.⁸⁸

Tertullian ridiculed his opponent, Marcion, for being "no better than a eunuch" and yet, he is one of the few writers willing to speak of Jesus as a eunuch. Tertullian exhorted his followers by saying that Jesus "'stands before you, if you are willing to copy Him, as a voluntary eunuch in the flesh.' Christ in fact 'opens the kingdoms of the heavens to eunuchs, as being Himself, withal, a eunuch.'"⁸⁹ Kuefler notes that Tertullian's words about Jesus as a 'eunuch in the flesh' are ambiguous, leaving open the possibility of Jesus as a physical, not merely spiritual, eunuch.⁹⁰

Tertullian's legacy is mixed on account of shifts in his own opinions over time. His authority for later Christian teachers was also undermined on account of his association with the Montanist sect, and while Kuefler claims that later Latin writers "never... referred to Jesus as a eunuch"⁹¹ many of Tertullian's ideas lived on in later

⁸⁶ Kuefler, 229. *Tert. Adv. Valent.* 32.5 "non angelus, non angela."

⁸⁷ Kuefler, 228-230.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 266-267.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 266. *Tert. De monogamia* 5, 3. Kuefler has changed some of the traditional translations for *spadones* from "virgins" to "eunuchs" in order to reflect the literal meaning of *spado* rather than its metaphorical application. Kuefler, 387, endnote 95. S. Thelwall's translation reads: "Christ... stands before you, if you are willing (to copy Him), as a voluntary celibate of the flesh" (ch. 5). And "the Lord Himself opens 'the kingdom of the heavens' to 'eunuchs' as being Himself, withal, a virgin; to whom looking, the apostle also—himself too for this reason abstinent—gives the preference to continence" (ch. 3). Tertullian, "On Monogamy," 60, 62.

⁹⁰ Kuefler, 266.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 267.

writers. Unfortunately for the history of Christianity, it was his misogyny, rather than his emphasis on the sexless eschatological life, that is most often remembered. Kuefler speculates that it was Roman ideals about gender which persuaded Western Christians to preserve the former and ignore the latter.

Notions of male superiority and female inferiority were too deeply embedded in Roman cultural values for a religious philosophy arguing for their eradication to have succeeded in the West, even if that eradication had roots in earliest Christianity. Admitting the possibility of gender ambiguity in the soul while condemning it in the body was a means of rendering the genderless ideal of earliest Christianity quaint but harmless.⁹²

This focus on the life to come can be found most profoundly in the works of Origen, whose “towering genius...dominates all accounts of the further development of notions on sexuality and the human person in the Greek world.”⁹³

Origen (185-254)

Origen was keenly aware of the passing nature of the present form of human life. He learned as a teenager, somewhere between the ages of sixteen or seventeen, to give priority to spiritual family, rather than the fleeting ties of blood, when his father was martyred. This perspective is crucial for understanding Origen’s teaching on human persons, sex and gender distinctions, as well as his own self-castration. Matthew Kuefler explains:

In an age that idealized the willingness to shed one’s own blood for the sake of religion in the glorification of martyrs, self-castration may not have seemed either too strange or too demanding. ...Moreover, in the same way that martyrdom was admired by Christians because it showed courage greater than most were capable of and lent to those willing to suffer it a charismatic authority unequalled by others, men willing to castrate themselves might

⁹² Kuefler, 230.

⁹³ Brown, xiv.

have been respected and obeyed precisely because their behavior was atypical.⁹⁴

Most historians explain Origen's self-castration as an attempt to protect himself from slander on account of his willingness to include women among his disciples.⁹⁵ But Peter Brown believes that Origen would have known that castration performed after puberty would not necessarily relieve him of sexual desire or sexual ability. He writes,

What Origen may have sought, at that time, was something more deeply unsettling. The eunuch was notorious (and repulsive to many) because he had dared to shift the massive boundary between the sexes. He had opted out of being male. By losing the sexual 'head' that was held to cause his facial hair to grow, the eunuch was no longer recognizable as a man. ...Deprived of the standard professional credential of a philosopher in late antique circles—a flowing beard—Origen would have appeared in public with a smooth face, like a woman or like a boy frozen into a state of prepubertal innocence. He was a walking lesson in the basic indeterminacy of the body.⁹⁶

For Origen, the loss of male sexual identity in this life was no bother, considering that he believed human souls were sexless before being placed in bodies and that bodies and souls would be transformed in the future so that the limitations of sex differentiation would be shed once again.⁹⁷ “This body did not have to be defined by its sexual components, still less by the social roles that were conventionally derived from those components. Rather, the body should act as a blazon of the freedom of the spirit.”⁹⁸

Brown explains that chastity was a sign of human freedom, resisting the pressures of the world.⁹⁹

To reject sexuality, therefore, did not mean, for Origen, simply to suppress the sexual drives. It meant the assertion of a basic freedom so intense, a sense

⁹⁴ Kuefler, 263-264.

⁹⁵ Eusebius criticized Origen for believing he could shield himself from such scandal by the act. Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 113; Eusebios of Ceasarea, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 1, p. 8, l. 2. Brown, 168.

⁹⁶ Brown, 169.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

of identity so deeply rooted, as to cause to evaporate the normal social and physical constraints that tied the Christian to his or her gender.¹⁰⁰

Virginity was the state of souls before their relocation in bodies. Therefore, to remain a virgin was to recall this past and speed up its future.¹⁰¹

Origen challenged his students to believe in the possibility of their sanctification; a sanctification rooted in future glory but capable of powerful work in the present life. “Resolve to know that in you there is a capacity to be transformed.”¹⁰² Among early Christian writers, Origen’s optimism is exceptional. As we look forward, and westward, we will find that others were much less confident that the heavenly future could make a difference in this life.

Sexual Renunciation in the West

Ambrose (337?-397)

Ambrose followed Origen’s dualism, reading Pauline language about the war between flesh and spirit through the lens of mind and body.¹⁰³ Sexuality was central to Ambrose’s notion of the flesh that was “put off” in baptism. The Christian was clothed with Christ in baptism, Christ who was born of a virgin and lived a continent life. According to Ambrose, baptism and the virginal life enabled those born from the taint of the sexual act to be remade in the image of Christ, a foretaste of heavenly glory.¹⁰⁴

For Ambrose, the eunuch represented the virginal man or woman. He wrote to convince Christians of his day that physical castration was not the proper application of Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:12.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 171.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 169.

¹⁰² Ibid., 162; quoting Origen, *Dialogue with Heraclides* 150; from H. E. Chadwick, trans., *Alexandrian Christianity*, 446, see also 430-436.

¹⁰³ Brown, 348.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 350-351.

And there are eunuchs who have castrated themselves... [but] by will and not by necessity, and therefore great is the grace of continence in them, because it is the will, not incapacity, which makes a man continent. For it is seemly to preserve the gift of divine working whole... The case is not the same of those who use a knife on themselves, and I touch upon this point advisedly, for there are some who look upon it as a state of virtue to restrain guilt with a knife... but then consider whether this tends not rather to a declaration of weakness than to a reputation for strength. ...No one, then, ought, as many suppose, to mutilate himself, but rather gain the victory: for the Church gathers in those who conquer, not those who are defeated. ...For why should the means of gaining the crown and of the practice of virtue be lost to a man who is born to honor, equipped for victory? How can he through courage of soul castrate himself?¹⁰⁵

Ambrose's words provide us with more evidence that Christian self-castration was still practiced and honored in the 4th century.¹⁰⁶ Given his emphasis on the sexual as representative of sinful flesh, it may not be so surprising to find that Christians were willing to castrate themselves to ensure their participation in the Kingdom of God. An inability to control their sexual drive any other way may have led some to desperate measures. Others prayed for God to deliver them from their sexual organs. “[H]oly men dreamt of being castrated by angels.”¹⁰⁷

Jerome (347-420)

Like Ambrose, Jerome was also indebted to Origen. Jerome's earlier writings (from the 380's C.E.) were modeled on Origen's view of human persons (i.e. sex and gender were passing phases, inconsequential to the sexless spirit). Jerome allowed himself the companionship of educated women who were committed to sexual continence and the study of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, he did not think that many men could live as he lived—in close, chaste association with women. Unlike Origen, and the

¹⁰⁵ Kuefler, 268-269, endnote 104. Ambrose *De viduis* 13.75-77.

¹⁰⁶ Kuefler, 269.

¹⁰⁷ Tougher, “Holy eunuchs!,” 94.

Desert Fathers (whose harsh seclusion Jerome had abandoned after only two years), he was not convinced that the sexual urge could be conquered in this life.¹⁰⁸

Like Origen before him, Jerome associated the life of virginity with the life of angels¹⁰⁹ and even suggested that the virginal state removed the distinctions of sex: “Observe what the happiness of that state must be in which even the distinction of sex is lost. The virgin is no longer called a woman.”¹¹⁰

But in 393, Jerome’s hero was condemned of heresy. Origen’s works had come under attack. His views of the sexless eschatological life were believed to undermine Christian claims of the resurrection of the body.

Jerome was forced to choose. He could no longer base his *persona* as a spiritual guide to noble ladies on so unpopular a figure. After 395, he came down firmly on the side of views that stressed the lasting differences between men and women.¹¹¹

In 398 Jerome defended his belief in the resurrection and sex distinctions.

...I will openly confess the faith of the Church. The reality of a resurrection without flesh and bones, without blood and members, is unintelligible. Where there are flesh and bones, where there are blood and members, there must of necessity be diversity of sex. Where there is diversity of sex, there John is John, Mary is Mary. You need not fear the marriage of those who, even before death, lived in their own sex without discharging the functions of sex. When it is said, “In that day they shall neither marry, nor be given in marriage,” the words refer to those who can marry, and yet will not do so. ...but where there is sex, there you have man and woman. ...Who can have any glory from a life of chastity if we have no sex which would make unchastity possible? ... Likeness to the angels is promised us, that is, the

¹⁰⁸ Brown, 266, 373.

¹⁰⁹ “...I want you to be what the angels are. It is this angelic purity which secures to virginity its highest reward...” Jerome, *The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary, Against Helvidius* 23, translated by W. H. Fremantle, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.vi.v.html>.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22. In the same section of this treatise Jerome writes: “She who is not subject to the anxiety and pain of child-bearing and having passed the change of life has ceased to perform the functions of a woman, is freed from the curse of God: nor is her desire to her husband, but on the contrary her husband becomes subject to her, and the voice of the Lord commands him, ‘In all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice.’ Thus they begin to have time for prayer. For so long as the debt of marriage is paid, earnest prayer is neglected.”

¹¹¹ Brown, 379.

blessedness of their angelic existence without flesh and sex will be bestowed on us in our flesh and with our sex. ...Moreover, likeness to the angels does not imply a changing of men into angels, but their growth in immortality and glory.¹¹²

While Jerome maintained that there would be no sexual activity in heaven, despite the ability of men and women to marry and engage in sexual functions, he says nothing in this treatise about gender distinctions such as the hierarchy of male over female. It may be that this hierarchy was also to be left behind given that Jerome understood marriage as one of the primary agents of female servitude.¹¹³ The eunuch, understood as exemplar of the virginal life, continued to represent a freedom, if not from sex distinctions, at least from some of the gender distinctions associated with marital life in that day.¹¹⁴

After the condemnations of Origen, Western Christian writers were much more careful to make a distinction between “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom” and real, physical eunuchs. Matthew Kuefler, in his study of “masculinity, gender ambiguity and Christian ideology in late antiquity,” explains how Latin Church fathers employed the rhetoric of manliness and unmanliness to defend their view of a true eunuch. “[U]nmanly eunuchs [were those] who castrated their bodies and manly eunuchs [were those] who castrated their spirits but left their bodies intact.”¹¹⁵ Jerome could speak of the eunuch as a sort of “shorthand” for Christian perfection. “When you make yourself a eunuch for

¹¹² Jerome, *To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem*, 31, translated by W. H. Fremantle, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.vi.viii.html>.

¹¹³ In his letter to Pammachius, written between 393 and 394, Jerome quotes Ambrose (“On Widows”) who spoke of good marriages as still enjoining servitude of the wife to her husband, but Jerome argues, “‘Ye are bought’ says the apostle [Paul], ‘with a price’ be not therefore the servants of men.’ You see how clearly he defines the servitude which attends the married state.” Jerome, Letter XLVIII. *To Pammachius*, 14. translated by W. H. Fremantle, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.v.XLVIII.html>.

¹¹⁴ Kuefler is wise to point out the unequal application of this ideal in the Roman world. “It must be admitted that for early Christians, ‘no more male or female’ often meant ‘no more female.’ But if the genderless ideal in earliest Christianity was understood mostly as a call for women to become men, the idea that women might chose to abandon their gender identity and all its limitations and restrictions was still a challenge to the sexual hierarchy.” Kuefler, 226.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 267-268.

the kingdom of Heaven's sake,' Jerome wrote to one man, 'what else did you seek to achieve than the perfect life?'"¹¹⁶

Augustine (354-430)

Augustine sat under the teaching of Ambrose and was baptized by the latter when he finally converted to Christianity. Like Ambrose and Jerome, he associated true Christianity with the virginal life. The virtue of marriage consisted of a hierarchically ordered household within a hierarchically ordered city overseen by a hierarchically ordered Church. Differences between the sexes and class distinctions formed the basis for these hierarchies.

Within his massive corpus, Augustine does not elaborate on Jesus' teaching about eunuchs in Matthew 19:12. When he did speak about eunuchs Augustine was almost always railing against the *galli*, castrated priests of the cult of Cybele prominent in the city of Carthage where he had spent more than ten years of his life. He despised the *galli* not only for their religious beliefs and their sexual exploits, but also for their transgression of gender boundaries. He called them "effeminate [molles] consecrated to the Great Mother, who violate every canon of decency in men and women" visible "in the streets and squares of Carthage with their pomaded hair and powdered faces, gliding along with womanish languor."¹¹⁷ According to Augustine, a eunuch priest was "neither changed into a woman nor allowed to remain a man."¹¹⁸

Gender transgression was something that Augustine would not tolerate. When confronted with Christian ascetics who called themselves "eunuchs for the sake of the

¹¹⁶ Kuefler, 268. Jerome, *Epist.* 14.6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 253; citing Augustine *De civ. D.* 7.26.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 249; citing Augustine *De civ. D.* 7.24.

kingdom” and wore their hair long to display their disregard for gendered comportment, Augustine responded with rhetorical force:

How lamentably ridiculous is that other argument, if it can be called such, which they have brought forward in defense of their long hair. They say that the Apostle forbade men to wear their hair long, but, they argue, those who have castrated themselves for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven are no longer men. O astonishing madness! ... They have heard, or at least have read, what was written: ‘For all you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female.’ Yet they do not know that this was said according to the concupiscence of carnal sex, because in the interior man, where we are renewed in the newness of our minds, there is no sex of this sort. There, let them not deny that holy people are men because they do nothing of a sexual nature.¹¹⁹

These monks knew of Paul’s words that long hair was a “disgrace” to men. They knew that anything conceived as gender transgression would be considered a disgrace for men but they assumed disgrace willingly: “We assume this disgrace, because of our sins.”¹²⁰

Augustine was more than ready to make use of feminine metaphors (i.e., the bride of Christ) for the spiritual life of priests, bishops and monks; nevertheless, he was careful to uphold gender distinctions in hierarchy and comportment in the public sphere. The feminine spirituality of bishops before God only worked to bolster their masculine authority in the church and over the city.¹²¹

Gender distinctions were an important part of the ordered fabric of society, and yet, Augustine was willing to look ahead to a time when the ways of this world would give way to the order of the world to come. Augustine attempts to explain Jesus’ teaching in Luke 14:26 (“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife,

¹¹⁹ Kuefler, 274. endnote 131. Augustine, *De opera monachorum* 32. Kuefler comments on this passage saying, “We should not miss the fact that Augustine was opposing what was apparently a developed exegetical tradition. He complained that these long-haired monks also compared themselves to the men called Nazirites among the ancient Hebrews.” Kuefler, 274.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 275, endnote 132. Augustine, *De opera monachorum* 31.

¹²¹ Ibid., 139-142.

and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”) by an appeal to Matthew 22:30 (“For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.”) and Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11 (“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female;” “but Christ is all, and in all.”).

Hence it is necessary that whoever wishes here and now to aim after the life of that kingdom, should hate not the persons themselves, but those temporal relationships by which this life of ours, which is transitory and is comprised in being born and dying, is upheld; because he who does not hate them, does not yet love that life where there is no condition of being born and dying, which unites parties in earthly wedlock.¹²²

Marriage was seen as part of the earthly system, bringing about birth in response to death. But in the next life, marriage, sexual activity, and the birth of children would be abandoned. Augustine asks husbands if they look forward to having their wives with them in heaven. He explains that a good husband will look forward to sharing the heavenly life with his wife but not as respects her being his wife.

Were I to ask him again, whether he would like his wife to live with him there, after the resurrection, when she had undergone that angelic change which is promised to the saints, he would reply that he desired this as strongly as he reprobated the other. Thus a good Christian is found in one and the same woman to love the creature of God, whom he desires to be transformed and renewed; but to hate the corruptible and mortal conjugal connection and sexual intercourse: i.e. to love in her what is characteristic of a human being, to hate what belongs to her as a wife.¹²³

In this passage, Augustine highlights the fundamental humanity of women, a humanity that is revealed in the next life, when gender distinctions, marriage and sexuality fall by the way side. Unlike Tertullian, Augustine does not highlight the fact

¹²² Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount*, Part 1, Chapter XV, 40, translated by William Findlay, Revised and Annotated by D. S. Schaff, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf106.v.ii.xv.html?scrBook=Matt&scrCh=22&scrV=30#v.ii.xv-p7.1>.

¹²³ Ibid, 41.

that men might actually lose “what belongs to them as husbands.” But even while Augustine was willing to speak about gender distinctions losing their value in the life to come, he was far from willing to allow a blurring of the sexes in the present time.

Augustine shows us how even the gender ambiguity of hermaphrodites was smoothed over in the ancient world.

As for Androgynes [*androgyni*], also called Hermaphrodites [*hermaphroditi*], they are certainly very rare, and yet it is difficult to find periods when there are no examples of human beings possessing the characteristics of both sexes, in such a way that it is a matter of doubt how they should be classified. However, the prevalent usage has called them masculine, assigning them to the better [*melior*] sex.¹²⁴

It is ironic that Augustine claims that castrated males are “neither changed into a woman nor allowed to remain a man”¹²⁵ while at the same time arguing that hermaphrodites should be classed as men. Augustine cites grammatical gender as the reason for this classification but Kuefler gives a more complete explanation.¹²⁶ Here we must remember that androgynes/hermaphrodites were defined as having the sexual characteristics of both sexes—not deficient genitals of one sex. Within the androcentric economy of the ancient world, it was really only the male genitals that mattered.¹²⁷ Unlike eunuchs, some hermaphrodites were capable of begetting children—an act which proved they were manlier than castrated eunuchs could ever be.¹²⁸

Along with others in the West, Augustine argued that the only positive value of the eunuch was as an exemplar of the virtue of virginity. Gender distinctions were an essential part of life in the present order of things, even if, in the eschaton, a common

¹²⁴ Kuefler, 23; quoting Augustine, *De civitate Dei*. 16.8.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 249; citing Augustine, *De civ. D.* 7.24.

¹²⁶ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*. 16.8.

¹²⁷ Kuefler, 22-24. On the other hand, if the phallus was less pronounced, failed to work properly or the individual preferred the female role in sex and society, the rights of the male could be withdrawn from the hermaphrodite and “he” would be assigned as a “she.”

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

humanity would be all that mattered. Similar to Tertullian’s affirmation of a sexless soul, Augustine’s presentation of a sexless resurrection—or an eschatological life that focused on a shared humanity and downplayed sex distinctions, while at the same time affirming sex distinctions in the present eon—protected the power structures of the present age, “rendering the genderless ideal of earliest Christianity quaint but harmless.”¹²⁹

Kuefler summarizes the Western tradition, saying that Latin Church fathers “offered a host of alternative meanings for the ‘eunuchs who have made themselves that way for the kingdom of Heaven.’”¹³⁰

...Spiritual eunuchs might be virgins, continent persons, men or women in sexless marriages, or widows. The variety of interpretations, all related to sexual renunciation, and the willingness of the Church fathers to refer to women as well as men as spiritual eunuchs, merely highlights the real exegetical imperative behind the statements: eunuch must mean anything but a castrated man. (We must assume that the extension of the image of castration to women, according them an identity as eunuchs, was a much less dangerous gender ambiguity than the gender ambiguity of physically castrated men.)¹³¹

Augustine’s views dominated the exegetical tradition to follow in the Western part of the Christian Empire. However, things in the East differed in the fact that physical eunuchs remained a part of public life in Byzantine Christianity. Though in the early days of the Byzantine Empire, Eastern Church Fathers tended to display the same sort of disdain for eunuchs as those in the West, over the course of several centuries opinions about eunuchs changed significantly for the better.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 230.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 268.

¹³¹ Ibid., 268.

Eunuchs in the Early East

Peter Brown explains that although Christians in the East and West both understood the eunuch as the exemplar of the ascetic, virginal life, the theological tradition of the East did not view sexuality as the centerpiece of human sinfulness. Desert monastics, formative of the spirituality in the Eastern Christian Empire, viewed sex not as an evil in itself but as that which tied the believer to the power structures of the world.¹³²

John Cassian (360-435)

John Cassian was a Roman Christian who receives the credit for bringing much of the wisdom of the Eastern Desert monastics to the West. He attempted to refute Augustine's views on concupiscence and the bondage of the will. Whereas Augustine "had placed sexuality irremovably at the center of the human person," Cassian believed that sexual fantasies and temptations actually revealed more dangerous vices lodged within the soul: "anger, greed, avarice, and vainglory."¹³³ In his view, the sexual drive was received as a gift of God, natural because it is present in all men and a gift because it is a tool to help Christians learn holiness.

Despite differences of opinion on the nature of sexuality and human sin, Cassian agreed with other Western Christian Fathers that Jesus' words about eunuchs were not to

¹³² Brown argues that for the desert monastics, it was the belly, the drive for food, that was seen as more dangerous than the sexual drive. The symbols of the new humanity were those who could build a city in the desert, deprived of food. Brown, 217-218. Given this perspective, the Desert Fathers did not interpret the sin of Adam and Eve in a sexual light. Rather, they interpreted it as "ravenous greed." "...greed, and in a famine-ridden world, greed's blatant social overtones—avarice and dominance—quite overshadowed sexuality." Ibid., 220. The Desert Fathers also learned through their practical experience of famine, that the sexual drive was diminished when the belly was not fed. Thus, they found that through fasting sexual desire could be overcome, even in this life. Ibid., 224-225.

¹³³ Ibid., 421-422.

be taken literally. We do not cut off “our hands or feet or our genitals”... but the “body of sin.”¹³⁴

Basil of Caesarea (330–379)

Basil represents the standard opinion of physical eunuchism in the earlier Eastern tradition. Kathryn Ringrose, who has written an exhaustive study of eunuchs in the Christian East, explains that in a letter Basil sent to Simplicia he set down what was to become “a standard part of the repertoire used by authors critical of eunuchs.”¹³⁵

The tone of the letter is angry and negative, ...and was aimed at a group that he clearly dismissed as less than human. St. Basil says that the eunuch is damned by the knife and that although he is chaste, his chastity will go unrewarded. He claims that eunuchs cannot make moral judgments because their ‘feet are twisted’.¹³⁶ Backward feet were a sign of being in league with the forces of evil, particularly the Devil. Finally, St. Basil claims that eunuchs did experience sexual passion and that they raved with intemperate passion in general, but this passion could not achieve fruition. St. Basil’s writings were widely cited by later commentators as the definitive ‘word’ on eunuchs...¹³⁷

Because of the desire of the early Fathers to associate eunuchs with the life of continence, away from more literal interpretations, they read these values back into their interpretations of Matthew 19:12.

Gregory of Nazianzos (329-389)

Gregory of Nazianzos commented on Matthew 19:12 explaining that the first type of eunuch represented those

born without sexual desire. The second group, those who are ‘castrated by others,’ refers to men who have been taught celibacy by others. The third group, those who choose celibacy on their own, have the spiritual power to

¹³⁴ Kuefler, 269 note 106 John Cassian, *Conlationes* 12.1, cf. 1.20.

¹³⁵ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 116.

¹³⁶ St. Basil, *The Letters*, no. 115, l. 24.

¹³⁷ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 116.

teach it to themselves. Castrated eunuchs have no place at all in Gregory of Nazianzos's gloss.¹³⁸

Elsewhere, however, Nazianzos describes eunuchs as “womanlike and, among men, are not manly, of dubious sex.”¹³⁹

John Chrysostom (347-407)

Chrysostom shared Basil's negative assessment of eunuchs. He is remembered for having a lengthy political battle with Eutropios, a powerful court eunuch, while the former was patriarch of Constantinople and for having preached a sermon against the latter from his pulpit in the Hagia Sophia.¹⁴⁰ Chrysostom argued that physical eunuchs would gain no reward for their celibacy. Only those who castrate themselves metaphorically, exerting effort to live the continent life, would be rewarded.

While Chrysostom argued that “virginity made plain that ‘the things of the resurrection stand at the door’,”¹⁴¹ literal castration was the “Devil's work.” Castration “injures God's creation and allows men to fall into sin.” In this context, Chrysostom probably means sexual sin.¹⁴²

Chrysostom distanced Jesus' statement from literal eunuchs and also worked hard to defend the case that Daniel and his friends should not be understood as eunuchs of the Babylonian court, despite the fact that they were chosen for their beauty and given responsibilities which paralleled those given to eunuchs in the Byzantine Empire.¹⁴³ For Chrysostom, physical eunuchs could not be representatives of holiness.

¹³⁸ Ibid.; Gregory of Nazianzos, *Discours*, ch. 16, para. 305.

¹³⁹ Kathryn M. Ringrose, “Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium,” *Third Sex, Third Gender*, 89; citing Gregory of Nazianzos, *In Praise of Athanasius*, PG, vol 35, col. 1106.

¹⁴⁰ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 25, 90.

¹⁴¹ Brown, 442; John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 73.1.6.

¹⁴² Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 115; Chrysostom, *Homily XXXV on Chapter XIV of Genesis*, p. 599.

¹⁴³ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 90-91. Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*.

Summary of Eunuchs in the Early East

Katherine Ringrose explains that “The low esteem in which eunuchs were held in Late Antiquity and early Byzantium is reflected in the near absence of eunuchs from church offices in the early centuries of the Byzantine Empire.”¹⁴⁴ Monasteries also regularly set down rules that boys, eunuchs, and beardless men, were not to be admitted. It was believed that the androgynous beauty of eunuchs and boys would tempt other monks into sexual sin.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, despite this predominantly negative picture of eunuchs—as those outside the means of holiness—eunuchs were not represented in such negative lights in Late Antique hagiography.

These texts present eunuchs as sexually continent and scholarly... [they] have noble character, are kind to colleagues and servants, are good-tempered, and exhibit personal integrity. They are characterized as sincere, brotherly, pious, without malice, careful of what they say, abstemious of food and drink, unwilling to take bribes or play favorites, and generous in their philanthropy. In many cases these eunuch saints are fictional characters, but the characterization remains useful.¹⁴⁶

Eunuchs in Middle and Late Byzantium

Changing Attitudes toward Eunuchs

Over the course of a few centuries, historians of Byzantine literature have found a change in attitudes toward eunuchs. Ringrose dates it to about the eighth century, “when eunuchs begin to appear in prominent religious positions.”¹⁴⁷ In the eighth and ninth centuries, eunuchs were found even among the patriarchs of the Byzantine church.

¹⁴⁴ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 117.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 112-113. See also Shaun Tougher, “‘The Angelic Life’: monasteries for eunuchs,” in *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization*, Elizabeth Jeffreys, ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 2006), 238-252.

¹⁴⁶ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 117.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 118. See also Shaun F. Tougher, “Social Transformation, Gender Transformation?,” 79.

Religious historians praised eunuchs as church leaders as well as holy eunuchs in imperial service. Saints Nikephoros and Niketas Patrikios are remembered as holy eunuchs of the tenth century, they are of particular interest because they were castrated by their parents as young children who brought them to be trained as servants of the imperial household. Both eunuchs eventually left the court to serve the church. Niketas had a successful political career and served as a military commander. He eventually left these posts to become a monk and is remembered for his ability to heal men “tormented by sexual desires.”¹⁴⁸

Ringrose suggests that such men represent the “normality of castration” during this period.¹⁴⁹ It was not unusual for parents to castrate their own boys as infants or young children with the hopes that they would be able to make a career as a eunuch of the court or church. Such children were then trained, not only in particular tasks associated with their duties but also acculturated “into patterns of behavior considered to be ‘normal’ for [eunuchs].”¹⁵⁰ Ringrose argues that these patterns of behavior (e.g., expectations regarding their dress, manner of walking, speed of talking, and facial expressions), accompanied by physical features distinctive of eunuchs, explain how eunuchs came to be understood as a third gender, if not a third sex within Byzantine culture.¹⁵¹

Parents who castrated their children were not prosecuted by the state despite the fact that castration was against the law in the Byzantine Empire.¹⁵² On the other hand, it was considered an offense to castrate an adult. Castrating an adult was understood as

¹⁴⁸ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 86.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4, 75.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

changing his nature. Castrating a child on the other hand was simply a method for retaining the values natural in children: “his beauty, his lack of sexuality, his lack of aggressive behavior, his willingness to serve.”¹⁵³ As in the West, boys were also made into eunuchs to preserve their “angelic voices.” A monastery was founded near the Hagia Sophia in order to train young castrati singers for service there and at other churches.¹⁵⁴ Children were not looked upon as “‘unripened’ men and women but... unformed, malleable beings... the idea that society molds a male child into a model of perfect masculinity is very well established in Greek society.”¹⁵⁵

Symeon Metaphrastes (10th century)

The growing acceptance of eunuchs at court, in monasteries¹⁵⁶ and in churches brought about a change in the way some Byzantine exegetes read the Scriptures. Unlike Chrysostom, who had a negative perspective on eunuchs and was careful never to suggest that Daniel and his companions were “cut men,” Symeon Metaphrastes saw no difficulty in Daniel and his friends living as both court eunuchs and holy men. Throughout his commentary on the Book of Daniel, Metaphrastes reworks the material to show the similarities between Daniel and court eunuchs of his own day. A ninth-century Byzantine icon of Daniel presents him as “beardless, reclining on a couch and wearing Persian court dress. To Byzantine eyes the iconography would clearly identify him as a court eunuch.”¹⁵⁷ Ringrose highlights the contrasts between Metaphrastes’ and Chrysostom’s

¹⁵³ Ibid., 59.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 122.

¹⁵⁶ Ringrose notes a shift in monastic practice. Despite the fact that boys, beardless men and eunuchs were not permitted on Mt. Athos, one tenth-century monastic document includes an exception clause, provided the “superiors of the Mountain give their consent.” Ringrose, 112. See also Tougher, “The Angelic Life.”

¹⁵⁷ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 99.

commentaries on the Book of Daniel to illustrate the significant shifts in attitudes toward eunuchs in the intervening centuries.¹⁵⁸ Still, this shift was not universal.

Photios I (810-893)

Eunuchs continued to be treated harshly, especially when their behavior accorded with negative assumptions about their character. In the ninth century, the patriarch Photios accused the eunuch, John Angourios, the head of the imperial department of finances, of laughing in church. His letter employed standard critiques of eunuchs to denounce his behavior:

To John the patrician descended from Angourioi. Those who are wise among the Greeks liken you to Attis, calling you one of the *galli*. Our wise men confine you in the women's quarters and consider and call you androgynous. Whence [from the women's quarters] you have overstepped the rules on either side and intruded yourself upon the mysteries of God's church, turning everything upside down and through your corrupt nature, making the most fertile and prolific church of Christ fruitless and useless.¹⁵⁹

Photius employs the standard comparison between physical and spiritual fruitfulness as well as the comparison of eunuchs to women. Later in this same letter he likens the eunuch to the "Devil's gateway," a phrase employed by Tertullian to speak of women as the daughters of Eve.

Ringrose shows how, over the course of centuries, the Byzantine perspective on eunuchs changed considerably. While in Late Antiquity, eunuchs were almost universally judged as morally bankrupt, between the eighth and eleventh centuries, eunuchs could also be described as the holiest of God's servants.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 92-100.

¹⁵⁹ Photios I, *Epistolae*, vol. I, p. 95, letter 50; quoted in Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 76-77.

¹⁶⁰ Shaun Tougher notes changes in the number of eunuchs employed at court and the shift toward castrating citizens of the empire rather than foreigners but he is less certain of a drastic shift in opinions about eunuchs throughout the empire. He argues that positive and negative pictures of eunuchs can be

Theophylaktos of Ohrid (1050-1126)

One of the most interesting works on eunuchs appears from the pen of a twelfth century bishop, Theophylaktos of Ohrid. He took up the issue in an entire treatise entitled, *Defense of Eunuchs*. Theophylaktos' gloss on Matthew 9:12 reflects the commentary of Gregory of Nazianzos. The first type of eunuch are those either,

lacking sexual desire or without functioning genitalia. Those who are made eunuchs by men are those who have learned celibacy from others. Those who are 'eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' are those who have been able to teach themselves celibacy.¹⁶¹

Noticeably absent is any mention of castration. Ringrose explains this by referencing his *Defense of Eunuchs* where he notes that there are good and bad eunuchs. Thus, castration has no bearing on chastity. The castrated man, though it may be easier for him than others, must learn celibacy, either from others, or directly from the Spirit.¹⁶² Given this exegesis, even a eunuch must learn to become a eunuch.

When Theophylaktos does discuss castration he also makes distinctions. Castration done to an adult man is wrong. He likens it to murder and argues that it is "against nature." Ringrose suspects that his "real objection" may be that

it represents a voluntary change in a man's gender assignment after he has passed puberty. Given prevailing ideas about acculturation and gender hierarchies, Theophylaktos probably found this culturally unacceptable.¹⁶³

found in early, middle, and late Byzantium and that multiple gender stereotypes and gender identities continued to exist side by side, even "in the writings of a single individual." Tougher, "Social Transformation, Gender Transformation?," 82.

¹⁶¹ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 121. Theophylaktos of Ohrid, *Enarratio en evangelium Matthaei*, ch. 19, v. 12; *PG* 125, col. 352.

¹⁶² Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 121.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 122.

On the other hand, castration done at a young age, to help a child “fulfill God’s plan for his life” is “praiseworthy.” This kind of castration, rather than being “against nature” allows a person to live “beyond nature.”¹⁶⁴ Ringrose explains

...in the Late Antique and Byzantine contexts, men who gave up their reproductive powers were thought to acquire expanded spiritual and intellectual powers as a kind of compensation. Consequently, eunuchs, and especially those castrated in childhood, were often thought to have access to realms outside mundane space and time. ...they were sometimes depicted as able to penetrate heavenly realms...¹⁶⁵

The bishop defines a eunuch more narrowly than most in the ancient world as one whose testicles have been either crushed or surgically removed, “excluding people who were ‘born lacking in desire,’ those born with defective genitalia and those who practice voluntary celibacy.”¹⁶⁶

Theophylaktos makes use of a number of arguments about nature. He argues that it is natural for a gardener to cut down plants that do not produce fruit. Thus, it seems natural, or at least not “against nature” to cut off testicles for those men who have rejected the desire to produce offspring. “We do not charge those who remove a sixth finger. You cannot say the one who does this does so against nature.”¹⁶⁷

Theophylaktos refutes those who argue that castration ruins the moral character of a man. Instead of suggesting that eunuchs are tarnished by association with women—thus acculturated into the weaknesses of women—he states the contrary. By close association with godly empresses, “they might draw themselves in the glory of the divine

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 67-68.

¹⁶⁶ Ringrose, “Living in the Shadows,” 105.

¹⁶⁷ Theophylaktos, *Defense of Eunuchs*; quoted in Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 49.

image and become a likeness of the Divine word and propriety...”¹⁶⁸ The assumption here is that eunuchs are influenced by whomever they serve, for good or for ill.

Theophylaktos turns a number of assumptions about eunuchs on their head. Instead of speaking of eunuchs as “against nature,” he argues that good eunuchs live “beyond nature.”¹⁶⁹ He even creates a new etymology. Instead of “the guardian of the bed chamber” (*ho tēn eunēn ekhōn*), he proposes that eunuch come from *eunoos*, “well-” or “high-minded.”¹⁷⁰ At the core of the bishop’s defense of eunuchs is the argument that there is more than one type of eunuch. There are good eunuchs and there are bad eunuchs. Each must be judged for his own merit rather than the state of his body.¹⁷¹

Summary of Eunuchs in the Ancient World

Before Jesus’ words about eunuchs in Matthew 19:12, eunuchs were considered the epitome of “other”—to Greeks, Romans, and especially Jews. They were foreigners, pagans, morally suspect, sexually illicit, neither male nor female, “exiles from the society of the human race.” But Jesus’ positive evaluation of eunuchs in the context of his teaching on marriage transformed the discussion of eunuchs into a declaration of the virtues of the virginal life. The metaphorical eunuch became the new icon of Christian perfection. East and West shared this theological assumption, but while the East eventually permitted physical eunuchs in prominent places in politics and the church, Western Christendom tended to employ literal eunuchs only as castrati singers in the churches. There is no Western treatise comparable to Theophylaktos of Ohrid’s *Defense of Eunuchs*.

¹⁶⁸ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 70.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16, 198.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

Both East and West show Christian writers attempting to distance Jesus' statement about eunuchs from the practice of castration and gender ambiguity. Both East and West drew from ancient wells of gendered prejudice which associated manliness with perfection. Therefore, if the eunuch was to represent Christian perfection, the eunuch had to be transformed from a symbol of gender ambiguity and effeminacy to an alternative version of manliness. In the West, this manliness was defended as metaphorical eunuchism—the virtuous virginal life—described in masculine language of warfare against the Devil and the Devil's agents: women, eunuchs, prepubescent boys and vices lodged deep within the soul. Eastern Church Fathers shared many of these assumptions; however, as eunuchs became more prominent in Byzantine life and proved themselves as “perfect servants,” Byzantine writers became increasingly willing to ascribe virtue and holiness to literal eunuchs. By the 12th century, Theophylaktos of Ohrid was able to defend the position that there are two alternative paths to masculine perfection.

... two different ladders, each leading to a different conception of full masculine perfection. It is clear that the older pattern of classical Graeco-Roman society, in which young aristocratic males were acculturated with great care to ensure that they would become proper men, has now been adapted to an ecclesiastical context that emphasizes early childhood rearing and may include physical mutilation to ensure celibacy.¹⁷²

Rather than using the category of the eunuch to overturn the importance of manliness for ecclesiastical privilege, Theophylaktos and others expanded the category of manliness to include eunuchs. The narrative represents an ironic twist. It maintains the association of perfection and masculinity, even if physical manliness becomes less important in the process. Cultural construction of gender (i.e., the equation masculinity with perfection) became more important than the “hard facts” of biological masculinity.

¹⁷² Ringrose, “Living in the Shadows,” 105-106.

Whereas Origen could make himself a eunuch in order to display his sexless spirit, Theophylaktos presented castration as an alternative path to spiritual (i.e., masculine) perfection.¹⁷³ Thus, both East and West distanced the eunuch from its origins as a representative of androgyny, reconstructing the eunuch as a model of manliness. Perfection, even within the Christian tradition, continued to be construed as a ladder of ascent toward manliness.

INTERSEX AS EUNUCH: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

Given the diverse history of the eunuch, it is fair to ask whether it is even helpful to recover such a concept when beginning to think about intersex in our own day. Susannah Cornwall dismisses the connection between eunuchs and intersex.¹⁷⁴ Meanwhile, some intersex Christians look to Matthew 19:12 as the starting point for exploring their intersexuality from a biblical framework.¹⁷⁵ Is the eunuch a valid lens for intersexuality? The answer must be yes and no.

Intersex and “natural eunuch” are not univocal terms. As ancient writers do not give descriptions of the genitals of those they classified as “natural eunuchs,” it is difficult to assess where they would have drawn the boundary lines.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, from their discussions of eunuchs, we are able to argue that people in the ancient world were more familiar with variations of sex development than contemporary readers and that they supplemented their binary model of human sex/gender with the marginal category of the eunuch.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 105.

¹⁷⁴ Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*, 10.

¹⁷⁵ Intersex Support Group International, “Director’s Page,” <http://www.xyxo.org/isgi/director.html>. Personal correspondence with Jane Spalding, January 12, 2011.

¹⁷⁶ Kathryn Ringrose, personal correspondence via e-mail, July 19, 2009.

Some intersex conditions, like Klinefelter's syndrome, bring about physical characteristics almost identical to descriptions of castrated eunuchs found in the ancient world. Mr. Cameron, an intersex man with Klinefelter's syndrome, describes himself as tall and explains how testosterone stops the growth of long bones in arms and legs, so that those with lower levels of testosterone grow taller than the average man.¹⁷⁷ He goes on to detail his bodily features and his experience of feeling "caught between the sexes":

It is only fairly recently that I have discovered the term 'intersexed' and how it relates to my body. I like the term because I prefer more choices than male or female. ...It wasn't until I was 29 years old that a label was put on my physical differences, differences I never quite understood. I had large nipples on smallish breasts, peanut-size testicles, and cellulite-type hairless fatty tissue over most of my body. I was told at an infertility clinic that I had an extra X chromosome and a karyotype of XXY-47. This is commonly known as Klinefelter's syndrome. I was informed that I was genetically sterile and that my 'sex glands' produced only 10 percent of what was considered normal testosterone levels for a male. I was advised to immediately start testosterone replacement therapy... The medical journals called my condition 'feminized male.' I had always felt caught between the sexes without knowing why.¹⁷⁸

Mr. Cameron's experience of Klinefelter's Syndrome is strikingly similar to ancient descriptions of eunuchs.

Other intersex conditions produce bodies that probably would have been classified under other ancient terms. Persons with ambiguous genitals resulting from oovotestes, partial androgen insensitivity, and severe forms of congenital adrenal hyperplasia would probably have been classified as "hermaphrodites" or "androgynes" whereas those

¹⁷⁷ Cameron, 93.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 90-96.

with complete androgen insensitivity would more likely have been labeled “barren women”—another term of shame in the ancient world.¹⁷⁹

Where the category of eunuch differs from the hermaphrodite or the barren woman is that it remained a term of “in-between-ness.” As Augustine explained, hermaphrodites could be labeled as men. Barren women remained women—although they suffered shame from their inability to perform the duties of their sex. The category of the eunuch also differs from the others in that it developed into a publicly recognized third gender, especially the Byzantine East. Though eunuchs had been derided for their non-conformity to male and female gender stereotypes, they developed their own gendered traits which enabled them to contribute to society as “perfect servants” of the imperial household, or “perfect servants” of God.¹⁸⁰ Eunuchs did not forever remain in the “shadows.”¹⁸¹

The ability of eunuchs to stand as a public challenge to the two-sex, two-gender paradigm of the ancient world, while it is not identical to the challenge of intersex, certainly illuminates the possibility of carving out public recognition of intersex even within a Christian culture holding to the goodness of heterosexual complementarity. Contemporary Christians need not emulate the ways in which a third category was employed in the Byzantine East but they can certainly look learn from those willing to supplement the sex/gender binary model in order to make space for all human beings.

¹⁷⁹ Isaiah 54:1-8 uses the motif of the barren woman to speak of “shame,” “disgrace,” “humiliation,” “reproach,” “deserted,” “distressed,” “rejected,” “abandoned” and one who provoked the “anger” of her husband. See also the story of Hannah in I Samuel 1:1-2:10.

¹⁸⁰ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*.

¹⁸¹ At the same time, one could argue that the ability of eunuchs to function publicly may have been a result of the transformation of the eunuch from a symbol of gender ambiguity to an alternative “manliness.” Ringrose, “Living in the Shadows,” 105-107.

The history of the interpretation of the eunuch should also stand as a warning. The power structures of the ancient world were built upon a hierarchical chain of gendered being. Men were at the top. Women were at the bottom. Eunuchs were somewhere in between. Early Christian men reinterpreted the eunuch as the manly Christian, trading in old, Roman versions of masculinity such as sexuality and violence for the new Christian virtues of continence and martyrdom. Nevertheless, these virtues continued to be presented as manly. The subject had changed but the rhetoric—the hierarchical gendered power structure—did not.

Given this interpretive shift, it is essential to understand Jesus' language about eunuchs in their original context. The physicality of eunuchs, naturally born and castrated, forced Christian writers in the ancient world to wrestle with questions of the nature and significance of sex, gender, and sexuality for what it means to be human and what it means to be Christian. Intersex today forces contemporary theologians to do the same.

By analyzing Jesus' statement about natural eunuchs through the lens of intersex, one can draw several conclusions. First, Jesus was not afraid of eunuchs. He was not disgusted by them. He did not ridicule them as did Jews, Romans and Greeks; nor did he speak of them as "proof of the fall." David Hester notes an important contrast.

Jesus heals the blind, the paralyzed, the possessed, the fevered, the leprous, the hemorrhaging, even the dead, in every case restoring them to full societal membership. In the case of the eunuch, however, there is no implication whatsoever of 'illness' or social 'deformity' in need of restoration. Instead, the eunuch is held up as the model to follow.¹⁸²

Out of his great compassion for outcasts, Jesus took up the shameful identity of the eunuch and turned it upside down into an identity for his disciples—a personal

¹⁸² Hester, "Eunuchs and the Postgender Jesus," 38.

identity that did not conform to the gender ideals of the ancient world. Just as Jesus transformed the cross from a symbol of defeat into a symbol of victory; he brought eunuchs in from outside and raised them up from shame and suspicion to become icons of radical discipleship.

In the metaphor of the eunuch, Jesus presented, for the first time in Jewish literature, the possibility of renouncing marriage for the sake of the kingdom, but he did not do so within a patriarchal framework. He did not call for the “strong men,” men who did not need women, to come follow him. Rather, he challenged their most valued identity, the identity of masculinity within a patriarchal world. He called them to leave the power of the *paterfamilias*, to reject the honor associated with the husband, father, grandfather, and to take up shame instead—the ambiguous, scandalous reputation of the eunuch.

Those who renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom would no longer be defined by traditional gender markers. They would not be fathers or mothers, husbands or wives. Nor would they be potential spouses and parents, as young virgins were assumed to be. Their primary identity would not be a gendered identity. Or, if it was, it was to be a confused gender identity. They would embrace service, an unmanly trait. They would leave behind power, prestige, wealth—prerogatives of the male—in order to embrace another kind of life—“a life hidden with Christ in God.” They would become “exiles from the human race,” “strangers and aliens in a foreign land.”

In calling his disciples to learn from eunuchs, Jesus was calling his disciples to learn from those whose gender identity was not secure, to learn that gender identity is not an ultimate value in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus was undermining the power structures

of the day: family ties, inheritance of wealth and property, gender privilege. Many early Christians found that some of these were easier to renounce than others. The history of the church reveals that many found it easier to abandon sexual pleasure than masculine power and privilege. Christians today may find the reverse to be true. That the eunuch was reworked into a masculine metaphor is a tragedy yet to be corrected.

It is true that contemporary readers may find Jesus' words about eunuchs difficult to understand. But Jesus' teaching should certainly be read as "good news" for the intersexed. Many intersex persons have testified to feeling like "exiles from the human race"—the very phrase used by Claudius Mamertinus, to describe the social condition of eunuchs.¹⁸³ An intersex woman with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome described her own experience by saying:

The world has tried to make us feel like freaks. We have felt like freaks. I felt like a freak most of my life, but look at me. I'm just a human being just like everybody else. ...I really have a place in the world. I really am a human being, a very valid human being. It's just wonderful. I am very proud to come out as an AIS person...¹⁸⁴

Kathryn Ringrose explains that "Biological and medical lore treated eunuchs as neither fully male nor fully female... In his ambiguity, the eunuch challenged the church's definition of humanity."¹⁸⁵ Today, intersex continues to challenge current theological constructions of humanity.

In this chapter, we have seen how the category of the eunuch was constructed as a supplement to the binary model of human sex and gender. The eunuch emerged as a symbol of the sexless spirit, Christian perfection, the angelic life, and life in the

¹⁸³ Kuefler, 36.

¹⁸⁴ Sharon E. Preves, "For the Sake of the Children: Destigmatizing Intersexuality," *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*, 62, 61.

¹⁸⁵ Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 67-68.

resurrection—when distinctions of gender would be shed and men and women would relate to one another according to a common humanity, an identity hidden in Christ. As an icon of the continent life, the eunuch also stood as a corrective to the exaltation of sexuality—whether for procreation or pleasure. In this way eunuchs also challenged the centrality of sexuality for human personhood and human fulfillment.

These contributions will be developed in light of current constructions of human persons with regard to sex and gender in chapter four and regarding sexuality in chapter five. Chapter six will return to develop the notion of identities hidden in Christ in light of Christological and eschatological contributions. But before we move on to theological critique and construction, we must recover one more piece to the puzzle—the historical development of anthropology in Western philosophy and theology as they relate to sex, gender, and sexuality.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: FROM SUBSTANCE DUALISM TO RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY AND THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE SEXES

Having heard the voices of some intersexed persons who are calling for recognition and inclusion in the community *as intersex*, and after discovering that intersex conditions were known and accommodated in early and medieval Christian society—recognized and honored by Jesus, and ascending to positions of leadership in the church, the state, and aristocratic households—we now turn to philosophical and theological accounts of what it means to be human and how the image of God has been construed as relating to sex, gender, and sexuality. In this chapter we will review the history of theological anthropology, paying close attention to how answers to the questions “What is the human?” and “What is the image?” relate to the sexes, how many sexes *are* or *should be* recognized by society and how Western philosophers and theologians have thought about the sexes as participating in full humanity and *imago Dei*. In order to do this, we will trace the development of Western theology in three movements: from its inception in the classical period, through the Protestant and Victorian reformations in the modern period, and into current, postmodern reconstructions of the human.¹ In each period we will examine the connections between

¹ As a theologian writing in the United States of America, the history I recount is that of Western Christianity. It is only in the postmodern period that Western theologians are learning to appreciate the contributions of non-Western (non-white, non-middle and upper-class, non-male) contributions and critiques of Western theological construction.

ontology (*What* is the human with its sex?) and cosmology (*Whence* the human and the sexes?), evaluating the philosophical and theological accounts constructed on the answers to these questions.

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD: SUBSTANCE DUALISM AND A SINGLE SEX

Classical Greek Ontology

When asked, “What is the human?” Classical Greek philosophers proffered various answers. Plato argued that the human was a rational, immortal soul which had fallen from the realm of the forms, was imprisoned in a body, and which must strive for release from the body through the cultivation of reason and the rule of reason over the passions of the body. Aristotle, on the other hand, argued that the soul is the “form” of the body such that the two are not so easily separable.² Nevertheless, Aristotle also identified three types of soul which make up the human: the vegetable (nutritive) soul, animal (sensitive) soul, and human (rational) soul.³ Thus, while both philosophers disagreed about the relation of body and soul, both located reason in the soul as the primary difference between humans and animals. While Aristotle conceded that animals have the first two types of soul, and that humans and animals both have bodies, humans are ultimately differentiated from animals on account of the possession of a *rational* soul. Their contributions laid the foundation for the Western conversation about human sex differentiation for the centuries that follow.

² Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 166-167.

³ *Ibid.*, 170.

Plato's Cosmologies

Plato gives several accounts of the origin of the sexes. In the *Timaeus*, he argued that women came into existence after men failed to cultivate reason and virtue. These lesser men—souls which had failed to develop the mind in order to control the passions of the body—were reincarnated as women.⁴

In the *Symposium*, however, Plato places a long discourse in the mouth of the poet, Aristophanes, a contemporary and colleague of Socrates, to explain the creation of the sexes. According to Plato's Aristophanes,

In the first place... the original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word "Androgynous" is only preserved as a term of reproach. In the second place, the primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; and he had four hands and four feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike...

...Now the sexes were three, and such as I have described them; because the sun, moon, and earth are three; and the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon, which is made up of sun and earth...

Terrible was their might and strength, and the thoughts of their hearts were great, and they made an attack upon the gods ...dared to scale heaven, and would have laid hands upon the gods...⁵

Fearing that they had created humans as too powerful, the gods debated annihilating them until Zeus proposed a plan to "humble their pride and improve their manners." Thus, Zeus declared, "men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us." So, Zeus divided the spherical creatures in half and

⁴ Plato, *Timaeus*, 42c, 90e; in *Plato: Complete Works*, John M. Cooper, ed. (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 1245, 1289.

⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, I, 14, translated by Benjamin Jowett, <http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/ancient-greece/plato-concept.asp>; or following the Stephanus reference numbers, this dialogue can be found in *Symposium* 189d-193b, *Plato: Complete Works*, 473-476.

turned the parts of generation round to the front, for this had not been always their position ... and after the transposition the male generated in the female in order that by the mutual embraces of man and woman they might breed, and the race might continue; or if man came to man they might be satisfied, and rest, and go their ways to the business of life: so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man.⁶

Thus, heterosexual coupling was explained on the basis of the reuniting of originally androgynous humans. Homosexual coupling was simply the reuniting of the two parts of the original male or the original female, each of which had two sets of male genitals or two sets of female genitals, respectively. Each was reunited with the “true other half” of itself. Thus, Plato plants the idea that there is really one person in the world who will complete another.⁷

Despite assigning males the place of honor as creatures of the sun, while women were creatures of the earth and androgynes creatures of the moon, Plato did not always emphasize the differences between the sexes. At one point in the *Republic* he writes,

But if it appears that they differ only in this respect that the female bears and the male begets, we shall say that no proof has yet been produced that the woman differs from the man for our purposes, but we shall continue to think that our guardians and their wives ought to follow the same pursuits.⁸

⁶ Ibid., I, 15.

⁷ Unlike modern day preferences for heterosexual coupling, Plato presents the pairing of male with male as the pairing of the best with the best. Ibid., I, 16.

⁸ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: The Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 54; citing Plato, *Republic*, 454e, in *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 693. His note here is helpful: “Plato of course does not maintain this view of sexual equality in other contexts, as in the *Laws* or the myth of the origin of women in the *Timaeus*. I have profited greatly in understanding the context of Plato’s arguments on this subject from Monique Canto, ‘The Politics of Women’s Bodies: Reflections on Plato,’ in Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 339-353. Whereas my reading emphasizes Plato’s rejection of the biology of reproduction as a relevant political difference, Canto makes the positive case that Plato is arguing for a ‘communal’ account of procreation that neutralizes the effects of difference; raising children communally, as is proposed elsewhere in the *Republic*, is a continuation of this political strategy. The highly contextual quality of Plato’s view of women generally is made clear in Gregory Vlastos, “Was Plato a Feminist?” *Times Literary Supplement*, March 17-23, 1989, 276, 288-289.

Thomas Laqueur in, *Making Sex: The Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, explains that these pursuits were those which benefited the common life of the republic (e.g., “equal participation in governance, gymnastic exercises, and even war”) and that it was Plato’s emphasis on the communal nature of child rearing that allowed him to underplay reproductive differences.⁹

If something characteristic of men or women can be found which fits one or the other for particular arts and crafts, by all means assign them accordingly. But no such distinction exists, he maintains, and what Aristotle would take to be the critical difference between bearing and begetting counts for nothing.¹⁰

It may be possible to account for Plato’s ambivalence about sex differences by looking to his emphasis on the soul as the seat of human personhood. For the soul existed without the body. Stronger, more rational, more virtuous souls were given male bodies. Weaker, less rational, less virtuous souls were reincarnated as women. Still, the goal of all souls was to leave the body, with its sex, behind. While this may be more difficult for women than for men, Plato argued that women should nevertheless be given similar opportunities to reunite themselves (i.e., their souls) with the forms.¹¹

Summing up the significance of Plato’s cosmology for Western philosophy and theology, Rosemary Radford Ruether writes:

The soul is seen as sharing the same life principle of the cosmos, itself derivative in part from the eternal or divine substance of the Ideas. Later Greek philosophy will identify the eternal Ideas of Plato with the governing divine Mind of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and the cosmic *Logos* of Stoicism. So the life principle of the soul becomes more explicitly a sharing in the life principle of God.¹²

⁹ Laqueur, 54.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Chris Matthews, “Plato on Women,” *Philosophical Misadventures* (2007-2009), 1, <http://www.philosophicalmisadventures.com/?p=30>.

¹² Ruether, “*Imago Dei*, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics,” 273.

Aristotle's Metaphysics

Aristotle reasoned from the ground up; from the diversity of the material, temporal world to the immaterial, the eternal, the One. Because he posited an eternal universe, his "One," his "god," was not a creator but the goal toward which all material, temporal things aspire.¹³

For Aristotle the soul was not a separate rational substance but the life, the actualization of the potentialities of particular bodies.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is the *nous*, the mind, the rational part of the soul which is separable from the body, eternal, immortal, and like Ultimate Reality. But this mind is not a personal existence. When separated from the body, it can have no personal knowledge.¹⁵ Even while Aristotle attempts to distance himself from Plato's formulation of substance dualism, he falls into an alternative substance dualism of his own. And because Christians would emphasize, with Plato, a conscious, personal existence after death, the Platonic version of substance dualism was taken up by many early Christian writers in their attempts to prove the reasonability of life after death.

Aristotle's God is pure mind, contemplating its own thoughts. It is loved but does not love. It is self-sufficient, while all else are driven by love and imitation of it. To be rational, to be virtuous are good because they lead to happiness, which is what God experiences all the time.¹⁶

¹³ Norman Melchert, "Aristotle," *The Great Conversation: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy, Second Edition* (Mountain View, CA; London; Toronto: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1995), 166.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

Aristotle and Galen: Biological Implications of Greek Cosmologies

Aristotle's account of the closer relationship of soul and body may explain the greater emphasis he placed on sex distinctions. Rather than challenging souls to work toward reunion with the forms, Aristotle believed that the soul is the form of the body. While Plato philosophized "from above" in the *Timaeus*, asserting that less rational souls were reincarnated as women, Aristotle spent most of his time reasoning "from below," from particulars to universals. The weakness of women's bodies was taken as evidence of the weakness of women's souls. And since the soul is the seat of reason, women's lesser bodily strength must correspond with lesser strength of soul or mind. Thus, Aristotle surmised that by virtue of their physical and rational powers, men were suited to rule over women and children and slaves. In fact, Aristotle was so concerned about rule and roles that some have concluded that gender roles were more important to Aristotle than the physical data of biological sex. Laqueur notes that "Aristotle, who was immensely concerned about the sex of free men and women, recognized no sex among slaves. ...in other words, slaves are without sex because their gender does not matter politically."¹⁷

Rather than giving an account of the cosmological origins of the sexes, Aristotle's account is biological. Women are born when something goes wrong with the pregnancy. They are "misbegotten" or "mutilated" males.¹⁸ Androgynous persons are given a similar

¹⁷ Laqueur, 54. "But within the same tradition of the one sex, and in widely varying contexts, such differences could matter a great deal and were duly regulated. Sperma, for Aristotle, makes the man *and* serves as synecdoche for citizen. In a society where physical labor was the sign of inferiority, sperma eschews physical contact with the catemenia and does its work by intellection. The *kurios*, the strength of the sperma in generating new life, is the microscopic corporeal aspects of the citizen's deliberative strength, of his superior rational power, and of his right to govern. ...Conversely, Aristotle used the adjective *akuros* to describe both a lack of political authority, or legitimacy, and a lack of biological capacity, an incapacity that for him defined woman. She is politically, just as she is biologically, like a boy, an impotent version of the man, an *arren agonos*." Laqueur, 54-55.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, II, 3, http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/aristotle_genanimals02.htm.

explanation; they are misbegotten twins. Aristotle believed that the father's sperm provides the soul which then guides the formation of matter (the contribution of the mother). In the case of androgynes or hermaphrodites,¹⁹ the mother provides too much matter for the growth of one child and not enough for twins. The excess matter creates excess genitalia.²⁰ In this scheme, a hermaphrodite, rather than harkening back to one of the original three human sexes, was a malformed twin who "really" belonged to one of two sexes, not a third.

Unlike modern physicians, Aristotle did not look to genitals or gonads to determine true sex; rather he followed Hippocrates' theory of temperature, believing the "heat of the heart" revealed the difference. Men were warm. Women were cool.

Galen, the renowned physician of the first century CE, whose medical influence lasted well into the modern period, built upon but also challenged Aristotle's biological account. Galen continued Aristotle's emphasis on heat while rejecting Aristotle's formula that the male produced seed (containing the soul/form) while the woman contributed only matter.²¹ Galen believed that both the male and the female contributed seed and that these seeds engaged in a power struggle *in utero* in order to determine which would prevail. He combined the theory of male heat and dominance with the right side of the uterus and female coolness and passivity on the left side of the uterus. If the hot male seed prevailed

¹⁹ While Piotr Scholz argues for a difference between androgyny ("a mystical manifestation of the existence of God") and hermaphroditism ("nothing more than the fantasy of a perverted sexuality," i.e. bisexuality), I follow the majority of scholars who employ androgyne and hermaphrodite synonymously. Scholz, 13.

²⁰ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 33.

²¹ "The physical part, the body comes from the female, and the Soul comes from the male, since the Soul is the essence of a particular body" Aristotle, 2.4.185. "We should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature" (4. 6. 461). Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*. From Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, Emily Toth, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation, Revised and Expanded* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 45-46.

the seed would settle on the right side of the uterus, the strong side. If the cool female seed prevailed, the seed would settle on the left, the weak side. Masculine women were conceived left of center while effeminate males were conceived right of center. Hermaphrodites were conceived when the seeds of male and female combined in the middle, neither prevailing over the other.²² Galen's horizontal sex spectrum (from weak left to strong right) corresponded with the vertical sex/gender hierarchy which existed on the societal level.

Sex Hierarchy in the Classical Period

In the classical world, sex and gender were understood as a ladder of ascent toward perfection. At the top were manly men—understood as the pinnacle not only of male perfection but of human perfection. At the bottom were women and children. Unmanly men, hermaphrodites, and eunuchs were somewhere in the middle. Male children could ascend the ladder as their bodies naturally matured and as they carefully crafted their bodies and their actions according to standards of male perfection. Peter Brown explains,

It was never enough to be male: a man had to strive to become 'virile.' He had to learn to exclude from his character and from the poise and temper of his body all telltale traces of 'softness' that might betray, in him, the half-formed state of a woman... [how he walked, the] rhythms of his speech...the telltale resonance of his voice. Any of these might betray the ominous loss of a hot, high-spirited momentum, a flagging of the clear-cut self-restraint, and a relaxing of the taut elegance of voice and gesture that made a man a man, the unruffled master of a subject world.²³

²² Sharon Preves details how Galen's theory of bodily heat and gender influenced medical theory as late as the seventeenth century. The seventeenth century surgeon, Ambroise Pare, explained the development of male secondary sex characteristics in pubescent girls [perhaps a sign of late-onset congenital adrenal hyperplasia?] as the result of excessive heat brought about by physical exertion in girls. Girls who jumped or played roughly raised their body temperature enough to "push out" their inverted female organs so that they became masculine. Preves, *Intersex and Identity*, 34. See also Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 33-34.

²³ Brown, 11.

Women, too, could move up the ladder toward manly perfection, but they could only move so far. Sainthood, virtuous women were venerated in manly terms. Gillian Cloke quotes the biography of “Melania the Younger, who performed ‘manly deeds’ and was received by the Fathers of Nitria ‘like a man’: since ‘she had surpassed the limits of her sex and taken on a mentality that was manly, or rather angelic.’”²⁴

Eunuchs were caught somewhere in the middle. They had a virtual arrested development, preserving the beauty and sexual allure of a pre-pubescent boy as well as his angelic voice but unable to attain full masculine perfection of body, mind, or virtue. This hierarchical structure of the sexes was seen as corresponding to the structure of the universe, especially as it was developed in what some have called the “last great system of Greek speculative philosophy:”²⁵ the cosmology of Plotinus.

Plotinus’ Cosmology

Though his name is less familiar to most than Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus’ work may have been more influential on the Western church up until Aquinas’ rediscovery of Aristotle in the 13th century. His name is often lost under the general category of neoplatonism, the reformation of Plato’s thought by later writers. Plotinus himself lived in the third century C.E., from 204-270. He was a philosophical mystic who used ascetic practices and philosophical contemplation in order to dispose himself to the ecstatic—God’s self-manifestation which leads to union with the divine. Like Plato and Aristotle he

²⁴ Cloke, quoting the *Life of Melania the Younger*, prologue and 39, in ‘*This Female Man of God*,’ 214.

²⁵ “The Philosophy of Plotinus,” Center for Applied Philosophy: The Radical Academy, 1998-99, 2001-2003, <http://www.radicalacademy.com/philplotinus.htm>.

wondered at the nature of the world, its mixture of physical and spiritual, eternal and temporal, and attempted to reconcile these opposites through his cosmology.²⁶

Plotinus proposed that God is not separate from creation, but the pinnacle of Being, from which all that exists emanates in lesser degrees. God is One but the Many emanate from the One in a great chain of being.²⁷

To explain the emanations Plotinus compared them to the superabundance of a flowing river, and a beam of light. Just as a beam of light, as it goes farther from its source, grows weaker and finally vanishes into darkness, so it is with the emanations which, after leaving the “One,” lose their unity and finally vanish into matter and evil.²⁸

It was this hierarchical understanding which provided the philosophical and theological defense of the caste system of the Medieval period as well as the “hierarchical ordering of husband, wife, children, and servants.”²⁹

Substance Dualism and a Single Sex

Given this hierarchical understanding of human nature (and all reality), Thomas Laqueur has argued that there was only one sex recognized in the ancient world, the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “The idea of the Great Chain of Being arose as a solution to the ancient One-and-Many problem. Presupposing that the universe is ultimate, the Greeks asked whether it was ultimately a unity or diversity. Some, like Parmenides, denied the reality of diversity and change, while others following Heraclitus argued that all is in flux. Eventually, the Great Chain of Being was developed as a means of unifying the diversity of the world with the One from which all originates. The many were united in the One by means of the Chain of Being, which held everything in its place.” Alan D. Myatt, “On the Compatibility of Ontological Equality, Hierarchy and Functional Distinctions,” a paper presented at the 61st annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, New Orleans (November 20, 2009), 7. Available at <http://www.myatts.net/papers/>.

²⁸ “The Philosophy of Plotinus.”

²⁹ Myatt, 8. “In the Middle Ages this concept translated into the division of society into ‘Three Estates,’ each stratified according to the Chain of Being. The first estate consisted of clerics, church officials beginning with the Pope, Archbishops, Bishops, and Priests. The second estate included ruling classes of kings, nobility and knights, while the peasants and merchants made up the lower estate. Any violation of the established authority within each state was seen as a threat to the creation order and subversive to the state and to the stability of Christian culture. Any attempt to leave one’s place in the chain was therefore an act of rebellion. It is critical to note that in the family there was a hierarchical ordering of husband, wife, children and servants. Each was subordinate to the previous due to their immutable places on the Chain of Being.”

male, and a true male was a rare specimen. Most people existed as more or less perfect males, in other words, more or less perfect humans. Aristotle's famous dictum that a woman was a "misbegotten" or "mutilated" male supports such an argument as did ancient anatomical texts. Laqueur shows how medical texts from the ancient world all the way up through the Renaissance maintained that female reproductive organs were simply the inversion of male organs in the way they diagrammed and named female reproductive structures.³⁰ Women were men, turned inward, physically but also socially.

Hermaphrodites were imperfect men and imperfect inverted men.

The male existed as the only true sex, the only true human. Women, eunuchs, and hermaphrodites had lesser bodies and lesser souls. Their souls were defective in reason and virtue, for virtue was believed to be derived from *vir* (the male). Nevertheless, despite their status as lesser humans, women, eunuchs and hermaphrodites were usually³¹ granted human status and were believed to at least possess some measure of (rational) soul, no matter how deficient. Therefore, if each pursued virtue and reason, they could hope to progress through various stages of reincarnations to release from the body and its sex, finally participating in the sexless realm of the forms.

³⁰ After reproducing picture after picture of female anatomy drawn as versions of the male in Renaissance medical textbooks, Laqueur concludes: "The absence of precise anatomical nomenclature for the female genitals, and for the reproductive system generally, is the linguistic equivalent of the propensity to *see* the female body *as* a version of the male. Both testify not to the blindness, inattention, or muddleheadedness of Renaissance anatomists, but to the absence of an imperative to create incommensurable categories of biological male and female through images or words. Language constrained the seeing of opposites and sustained the male body as the canonical human form. And, conversely, the fact that one saw only one sex made even words for the female parts ultimately refer to male organs. There was in an important sense no female reproductive anatomy, and hence modern terms that refer to it—vagina, uterus, vulva, labia, Fallopian tubes, clitoris—cannot quite find their Renaissance equivalents." Laqueur, 96.

³¹ Notwithstanding the regular exposure of hermaphroditic babies before the time of Pliny, as well as the regular exposure of infant girls. Of course, slaves—male, female, eunuchs, or hermaphrodites—were also on shaky ground when considering their status as fully human. See Epstein, 107, 133-134.

Substance dualism provided ambivalent results for the sexes. The possession of a soul did not protect women, eunuchs, and hermaphrodites from the status of “lesser men,” because their inferior bodies were interpreted as evidence of inferior souls. Nevertheless, the possession of a soul did secure them some measure of humanity and suggested the possibility of release from the prison of the sexed body at some future date.

The One Sex Model and Early Christian Theology

Although substance dualism (humanity as the combination of body and soul) is familiar to most Western Christians, the idea of one sex sounds foreign to modern ears and distant from the biblical record. But this distance, I will argue, appears for the modern reader as a result of the fact that the one sex model was significantly altered in the course of Western history. The early Church Fathers, schooled in Greco-Roman philosophy, perceived no such distance.

It is important to see how the second creation account, found in Genesis chapter two, can be read as supporting the idea that the male is the perfect human while the female is something secondary or other.³² The second creation account identifies the male as *ha adam* (the human). Even after the woman is brought to the man and one finds for the first time the gendered words, *ishshah* for the woman and *ish* for the male, the male in the narrative continues to be referred to as *ha adam* (the human), who has an *ishshah* (a woman or wife); rather than an *ish* who has an *ishshah*.

The early Christian Fathers certainly recognized this and found it very easy to accept the pagan beliefs, circulating in Greece and Rome, that the male is the perfect human while women, eunuchs, and hermaphrodites are imperfect, mutilated,

³² Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 42.

misbegotten, or inverted humans. We find Aristotle's famous dictum: that a woman is a "misbegotten male" repeated 1,600 years later in Thomas Aquinas (13th century C.E.) as he wrestled with the nature of woman. Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that women's bodies are defective.

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence; such as that of a south wind, which is moist, as the Philosopher observes (*De Gener. Animal.* iv, 2). On the other hand, as regards human nature in general, woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of generation.³³

Joseph Magee attempts to defend Aquinas by explaining that "Aquinas' words which are usually translated as 'defective and misbegotten' are in Latin *deficiens et occasionatus*, which can mean 'unfinished and caused accidentally.'" He notes that "Some have argued that, because of this alternate reading, Aquinas is free of the negative connotations which attach to some translations of his works." Magee also highlights Aquinas' concession that "Aristotle's point that woman is 'misbegotten,' but only considered as an individual and only with respect to the body or matter, and not the soul."³⁴ For Aquinas, as for many of the Fathers who preceded him, the soul maintained the common humanity shared by the sexes and was identified as proper location of the image of God in humans.

Early Christians reasoned that because God does not have a body, whatever likeness exists between humans and the divine cannot be located in the body. Therefore,

³³ *ST Ia* q.92, a.1, Reply to Objection 1. Joseph M. Magee, "Thomistic Philosophy Page," 8/28/99 <http://www.aquinasonline.com/Questions/women.html>.

³⁴ Magee.

they turned to concepts of the soul to tease out the meaning of the *imago Dei*.³⁵

Following Plato and Aristotle, early Christians identified reason and virtue with the soul.

God as “all-wise” and “all-good” was imaged in the rationality and virtue of humans.

Irenaeus divided reason and virtue, identifying reason with “image” and virtue with “likeness.” Thus, he argued that after the fall humans retained a marred image (i.e., distorted rationality) but lost their likeness to God (i.e., humans were no longer naturally virtuous). Colin Gunton assesses the significance of this theological move:

In his famous distinction between image and likeness there began the process of making reason both a chief ontological characteristic and criterion of difference between human and non-human. By the time of Aquinas the tendency had hardened into a dogma. Perhaps most revealing is his citation of John of Damascus: ‘being after God’s image signifies his capacity for understanding, and for making free decisions and his mastery of himself.’³⁶

Here we find the image of God being defined in almost identical terms to Greek philosophers’ definitions of the soul: reason, freedom, and the ability to rule. The challenge for our discussion of the sexes, of course, is that women, eunuchs, and some hermaphrodites were believed to possess these characteristics in lesser measures than men, if at all. Their lesser souls seemed to indicate that they were lesser images of God if they were images of God at all.

The Fathers debated whether women could really be considered images of God. Frederick McLeod, in his investigation, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition*, explains that the Fathers were “ambivalent” about the relation of women to the image of God.³⁷

³⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 7.7.12.

³⁶ Colin Gunton, “Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the *Imago Dei*,” *Persons, Divine and Human*, Christoph Schwobel and Colin E. Gunton, eds. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 48.

³⁷ McLeod, 192.

In our investigation of ‘image,’ the Antiochenes were found to have divided into two camps on how to interpret the scriptural statement about ‘man’ having been created in God’s image and likeness. Diodore, Chrysostom, and Theodoret looked upon image as applying to men *qua* males. They believed that God has entrusted males with total power to rule over the material universe as God’s viceroys. While women share in this power, they were regarded as subordinate to men. Diodore, Chrysostom, and Theodoret frequently liked to cite Paul’s statement that man *qua* male ‘is the image and glory of God but woman is the glory of man’ (I Cor 11:7). The most they would say is that women are ‘images of the image.’ Yet, while following the same literal, rational hermeneutical principles of exegesis, Theodore, and perhaps, Nestorius, understood image as referring to how human nature—in a general sense—plays a unitive, revelatory, and cultic role within creation. It is not clear, however, what they thought about women as images of God and, if so, how they regarded women as functioning as such.³⁸

There are several important items to note in the above quotation. First, is the connection between the image and participation in God’s rule. Greek philosophers “knew” that women were not suited to rule. Christian theologians looked to Genesis 3:16 to substantiate their cultural assumptions that women were not designed to rule. In this passage, after the sin of Eve and Adam, God says to the woman “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Early theologians believed that God, as the supreme Ruler, could not be properly imaged in one over whom another ruled.

But the subjugation of women was justified, not simply on exegetical grounds, nor always as a result of sin. Many early Christian theologians believed that women were unsuited to rule by nature (i.e., ontologically inferior). According to Cyril of Alexandria, “the female sex is ever weak in mind and body.”³⁹

³⁸ Ibid., 191.

³⁹ McLeod quotes Walter Burghardt’s summary of Cyril’s opinion of women’s inferiority to men: “The inferiority is not purely a question of physical size or physical strength. What is more momentous, woman falls short of man in ‘natural ability.’ She has not the strength to achieve the virtue of which the male is capable. She is of imperfect intelligence. Unlike her male complement, she is dull-witted, slow to learn, unprepared to grasp the difficult and the supernatural; for her mind is a soft, weak, delicate thing. Briefly, ‘the female sex is ever weak in mind and body.’” McLeod, 197; quoting Walter Burghardt, *The*

Some argued that this defectiveness was part of woman's created nature, while others explained women's weakness as result of the fall. Still it is important to recognize the unequal effects of the fall upon the sexes. Following Romans 5:12-20, the Fathers taught that the whole human race fell into sin on account of Adam's transgression, resulting in the mortality of all, men and women. But women experience additional results of the fall on account of the sin of Eve. Reading Genesis through the lens of I Timothy 2:11-15, Chrysostom wrote:

A woman once taught and overturned everything. For this reason, he said: "Let her not teach." What then about the women coming after her, if she incurred this? By all means [it applies to them]! For their sex is weak and given to levity. For it is said here of the whole nature. For he did not say that "Eve" was deceived, but "the woman," which is a term for her sex in general, rather than a term for her. What then? Did the whole female nature come to be in [a state of] deviation through her? For just as he said of Adam, 'In the pattern of the transgression of Adam who is a type of him who is to come,' so also here the female sex has transgressed, not the male's. What therefore? Does she not have salvation? Most certainly, he said. And how is that? Through that of [having] children. Thus he was not speaking [here only] of Eve.⁴⁰

Thus, while the sin of Adam affected men and women, the sin of Eve affects only women. Women are thus "doubly fallen," a theological position which has undergirded the perpetual subordination of women in the Church.

One should note the substance metaphysics (i.e., ontology) undergirding the theological interpretation above. Chrysostom appears to posit a human nature (represented by Adam) as well as women's nature (represented by Eve); but says nothing of the fall of Adam as a representative of men *qua* male. Nevertheless, thanks to Chrysostom's belief in Platonic substance dualism, women are not fallen beyond

Image of God in Man According to Cyril of Alexandria (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1957), 128-129.

⁴⁰ Chrysostom, PG 62:545; quoted in McLeod, 203.

redemption. Women remain accountable to the demands of holiness despite their doubly-fallen nature.

In external contests, which involve corporeal labors, only men are accepted as suitable. But as the entire contest here is one of the soul, the race-course is open to each of the sexes, and the spectators sit [in judgment] of each. But it is not only men who are to strip [for this kind of contest], lest women raise a specious argument [for not doing this] by appealing to their weakly nature. Nor do women alone show themselves as brave, lest mankind be steeped in shame. But there are many from both sides who have been proclaimed by the herald and crowned as victors, so that from their labors you may learn that “in Christ Jesus there is not male nor female.” For neither nature nor bodily weakness, nor age nor anything else can incapacitate those running in the race of piety.⁴¹

He expands upon this in his commentary on Galatians,

“For there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free man, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ.” Do you see that the soul is common? For by saying that we have become sons of God through faith, he is not content with this but seeks to find something more: the ability to submit more clearly to a closer unity to Christ. And when he says, “You have been clothed with him,” he is not satisfied with this statement. But in interpreting it, he moves to a closer [explanation] of such a connection. He says that “You are all one in Christ,” that is, you all have the same form, a unique being, that of Christ.⁴²

Chrysostom appeals to substance dualism in order to preserve the possibility of women being conformed to the image of Christ; for “the soul is common” and it is the soul that enables both women and men to be clothed with Christ, being united with the “form...of Christ.” Whether Chrysostom believed that women become male in their conformity to Christ is not clear from his commentary. What is clear is that the common humanity which allows for both men and women to be conformed to the image of Christ is located

⁴¹ Chrysostom, PG 61:656; cited in McLeod, 208. McLeod makes an interesting comment on Chrysostom’s exegesis, noting that “Paul has used the masculine article for ‘one’ in the quotation cited from Galatians. Its antecedent is not ‘form’ which is feminine, nor a ‘unique being’ which is neuter, but ‘we are all one in Christ.’ Literally, it means that we are all ‘one man’ in Christ.” Footnote 39, pg. 208.

⁴² Chrysostom PG 61:656; in McLeod, 208.

not in the body but in the soul—a soul that is “neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free man, neither male nor female.”

Rosemary Radford Ruether notes that in the Eastern tradition, especially in the work of Gregory of Nyssa, “the image of God was as identified with the soul, which was seen as spiritual and asexual.”⁴³ According to Nyssa,

In the original creation there was no subordination but also no gender, sex, or reproduction. Gendered bodies arose as a result of the Fall, which resulted in both sin and death and the necessity of sex and reproduction.⁴⁴

Like his Eastern brothers, Augustine emphasizes the soul as the seat of the person,⁴⁵ but unlike Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine does not look to the sexlessness of the soul as an indication of equality in Eden. He declares both substances, soul and body, “good” because they are created by God; and yet, in order to secure the continuation of the person after death, he gives priority to the soul. “[W]e must regard the human being as the combination of both substances, at least prior to death.”⁴⁶ It is the death of the body that reveals the priority of the soul. In a similar way, Augustine emphasizes the goodness of both sexes while, at the same time, noting a hierarchy of essence and function. Men rule and women obey, just as the soul rules and the body obeys. Unlike Nyssa, Augustine does not see this subordination as a result of sin; rather he believed the subordination of women was a part of original creation.

Augustine locates this distinction in the natural propensities, ordinary attentions of the mind. For in book 7, chapter 7 of *On the Trinity*, (the same passage where he

⁴³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Christian Anthropology and Gender,” in *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jurgen Moltmann*, edited by Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg and Thomas Kucharz (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 243.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; citing Nyssa, *De Opif. Hom.* 16.

⁴⁵ Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 167. Shults quote Augustine’s *On the Doctrines of the Church* (1.27), where he identifies the self as the soul: “I, that is, my soul...”.

⁴⁶ Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 168; Augustine, *City of God* 19.3.

argues that a woman is not the image when spoken of as a woman, as a “help-meet,” but only when united to her husband, who can be said to be the image even when not united to his wife⁴⁷) he qualifies this distinction later in 7.7.12. He locates the renewing of the image in fallen humanity in the renewing of the mind following Ephesians 4:23-24 and Colossians 3:9-10.

If, then, we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, . . .no one can doubt, that man was made after the image of Him that created him, not according to the body, *nor indiscriminately according to any part of the mind, but according to the rational mind*, wherein the knowledge of God can exist.⁴⁸

Here Augustine divides the mind into different parts. The rational mind is that which is directed to the knowledge of God. And it is the renewal of this part of the mind, or the giving of this mind, which is the image of God in men as well as in women.

And it is according to this renewal, also, that we are made sons of God by the baptism of Christ; and putting on the new man, certainly put on Christ through faith. Who is there, then, who will hold women to be alien from this fellowship, whereas they are fellow-heirs of grace with us; and whereas in another place the same apostle says, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; for as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ: there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus?”⁴⁹

Augustine then asks, “Pray, have faithful women then lost their bodily sex?” and answers himself, indicating that the renewal of the mind in the image of God represents “no sex.” Nevertheless,

But because she differs from the man in bodily sex, *it was possible* rightly to represent under her bodily covering *that part of the reason which is diverted to the government of temporal things*; so that the image of God may remain on that side of the mind of man on which it cleaves to the beholding or the consulting of the eternal reasons of things; and this, it is clear, not men only, but also women have.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 7.7.10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.7.12; emphasis added.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; Gal. 3:26-28

⁵⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 7.7.12; emphasis added.

Augustine appears to be trying to make sense of what he understands to be conflicting messages in the Scriptures. He recognizes that Genesis 1:27 includes women in the image of God, and yet I Cor. 11:10 speaks of males in the image of God (who therefore do not cover their heads) while women are the glory of men (as male) and thus, cover their heads.

But Augustine is more nuanced. He divides the mind into multiple parts so as to be able to include women in the renewing of their minds, a renewing of the image of God in women, while at the same time arguing that women's minds are not naturally directed to things above. He argues that women cover their heads because their minds are directed to earthly things, e.g., the governance of their households. This interpretation of the veiling of women helps explain the practice of some consecrated virgins removing the veil—a symbol of their subordination to men (in marriage) and also a symbol of the direction of their minds (toward earthly rather than heavenly things).

Augustine is in substantial agreement with the substance metaphysics bequeathed to him by Plato and Plotinus. Women are lesser men in body and in mind. Nevertheless, there is a part of their minds which can be renewed in the sexless image of God. And in the life to come, though bodily differences will remain, the inequality of sexes that exists in this life will finally give way to equality when body and soul are reunited in the resurrection and women and men relate to one another not according to hierarchically ordered marital relations but as equals, sharing a common humanity.⁵¹

⁵¹ Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount*, Part 1, Chapter XV, 40-41, translated by William Findlay, Revised and Annotated by D. S. Schaff, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf106.v.ii.xv.html?scrBook=Matt&scrCh=22&scrV=30#v.ii.xv-p7.1>.

Augustine's platonic emphasis on the rational soul (or, the rational portion of the mind) was given succinct formulation by Boethius (480-524) whose definition of the human person as "an individual substance of a rational nature" became the standard for Western theological anthropology.⁵² Boethius teaches that the human person is rational, but women are less rational; thus, women are less than human persons. While it is true that Thomas Aquinas' rediscovery of Aristotle's "psychosomatic unity of soul and body" attempted to offer a more holistic account of the person; he continued to teach the priority of the soul and the inferiority of women, based on an inferiority of mind.⁵³

Both Plato and Aristotle bequeathed to Christian theology a hierarchy of substances which paralleled a hierarchy of sex.⁵⁴ It is important to recognize the progression from Greek ontology to Christian anthropology. The true human, the true image of God, must be the male whose rational soul governs his body and whose strong body corroborates his masculine, virtuous, rational soul. Women were misbegotten bodies with defective souls, lesser humans, lesser images of God. These assumptions would be carried into Christological writings; thus, the messiah, if he was to represent true humanity, must necessarily have been incarnated as a male human—the perfect restoration of the original human.

⁵² Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 168.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 168. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.29.1 and 1.75.6. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q.92, a.1, Reply to Objection 2. "Subjection is twofold. One is servile, by virtue of which a superior makes use of a subject for his own benefit; and this kind of subjection began after sin. There is another kind of subjection which is called economic or civil, whereby the superior makes use of his subjects for their own benefit and good; and this kind of subjection existed even before sin. For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates."

⁵⁴ Plato and Plotinus also handed down a disdain for the material world which can be found in so much of the writings of the early Christians. It is also important to recognize that the world of *matter*, was more closely associated with the *mater* (Latin), *mutter* (German), i.e., the mother.

In the Classical Period, the hierarchically ordered substance dualism undergirded a hierarchy of sex in home, church, and society. Substance dualism did not result in sex dualism because both men and women were believed to have bodies and souls, even if the male was more often associated with the soul/mind while the female was more often associated with body, and eunuchs and hermaphrodites displayed a mixed nature. Rather, the ancients held a view of a single sex, one true human form, the male, against which all other lesser, inverted, misbegotten males were measured. A true sex dualism was yet to come.

THE MODERN PERIOD: SUBSTANCE AND SEX DUALISM

Historical Changes: 16th to 19th Centuries

The Protestant Reformation, 16th Century

The Classical identification of the true human, true image of God, as the male lasted well into the Middle Ages, with Thomas Aquinas recovering Aristotle's ancient phrase identifying women as "misbegotten" males.⁵⁵ And while the Protestant reformers shared many of the sexist assumptions of their predecessors, they made several theological changes which laid the groundwork for a revolution in theological constructions of human sex.

Luther argued against the Greek and Medieval assumption that women were morally inferior and lesser images of God than men. Still he wrote,

⁵⁵ Joseph Magee softens the critique of Aquinas by explaining that "Aquinas' words which are usually translated as 'defective and misbegotten' are in Latin *deficiens et occasionatus*, which can mean 'unfinished and caused accidentally.' Some have argued that, because of this alternate reading, Aquinas is free of the negative connotations which attach to some translations of his works." Joseph M. Magee, "Thomistic Philosophy Page," 8/28/99 <http://www.aquinasonline.com/Questions/women.html>.

there is a great difference between the sexes. The male is like the sun in heaven, the female like the moon... therefore, let us note from this passage [Gen 1:27] that it was written that this sex may not be excluded from any glory of the human creature, although it is inferior to the male sex.⁵⁶

Luther had a fairly high view of female education, probably due to his marriage to an educated nun. Calvin, on the other hand, believed that “oral instruction in the catechism was enough for women”⁵⁷ and that teaching was out of the question.

[Woman] by nature (that is, by the ordinary law of God) is formed to obey; for... (the government of women) has always been regarded by all wise persons as a monstrous thing; and therefore, so to speak, it will be a mingling of heaven and earth, if women usurp the right to teach. Accordingly, he bids them be ‘quiet,’ that is, keep within their own rank.⁵⁸

Also in Calvin’s commentary on I Corinthians, he writes:

He (Paul) establishes by *two* arguments the pre-eminence, which he had assigned to men above women. The *first* is, that as the woman derives her origin from the man, she is therefore inferior in rank. The *second* is, that as the woman was created for the sake of the man, she is therefore subject to him, as the work ultimately produced is to its cause. That the man is the beginning of the woman and the end for which she was made, is evident from the law.⁵⁹

Rather than seeing Eve’s creation from Adam as evidence that they are equal in rank, because made from the same material (“flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone”), Calvin interprets the sequence of creation through the lens of the Chain of Being.⁶⁰ Women are lower down on the Chain; therefore, it is “natural” that they serve those of the rank above them.

While the Reformers emphasized the religious value of marriage, child-rearing, and secular vocations (a shift that brought new dignity to the menial labor of married

⁵⁶ Luther, “Lectures in Genesis,” commenting on Gen 1:27, quoted in Kvam, Scheering and Ziegler, 268.

⁵⁷ Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *Gender and Grace*, 198. Quoting *Luther’s Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1958); quoted in Tucker and Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church*, p. 174.

⁵⁸ Myatt, 9; citing Calvin, *Commentary on I Timothy*, 2:12.

⁵⁹ Myatt, 9; citing John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Volume 1*, John Pringle, trans. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 357-358. 11:8.

⁶⁰ Myatt, 9.

women and men), they continued to maintain a low view of women, even within that sphere. Luther wrote: “Women ought to stay at home. The way they were created indicates this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit upon, keep house, and bear and raise children.”⁶¹ Luther held the typical German view of women which indicated that if one take a woman from her housewifery she is good for nothing.⁶² Elsewhere he is said to have quipped, “If women get tired and die of childbearing, there is no harm in that; let them die as long as they bear; they are made for that.”⁶³ The Anabaptist Reformer, Menno Simons, shared Luther’s opinions and argued that married women should remain as cloistered as nuns within their houses.⁶⁴

Even though the Reformers raised the status of women’s work, giving it religious value, they also eliminated religious orders, the only way available for women to give themselves fully to the work of God and acquire a religious education. The elimination of monastic orders also removed a safe haven for eunuchs—a cultural and religious space where eunuchs could serve God apart from familial responsibilities.

By eliminating the monasteries and arguing for the normativity of marriage, the Reformers effectively kept all women at home under the rule of a husband with a strict division of labor and eroded the legitimate margin created by and for eunuchs during the Middle Ages. This theological and political move laid the groundwork for the hardening

⁶¹ Martin Luther, *The Table Talk*, trans. and ed. By T. G. Tappert, in *Luther’s Works*, Vol 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 8.

⁶² Will Durant, *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wycliffe to Calvin, 1300-1564* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 416.

⁶³ Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther—Descartes—Rousseau* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1950), 184; citing *Luther Werke*, X-2, 301.

⁶⁴ “Remain within your houses and gates unless you have something of importance to regulate, such as to make purchases, to provide in temporal needs, to hear the Word of the Lord, or to received the holy sacraments, etc. Attend faithfully to your charge, to your children, house, and family.” Irwin, Joyce L. *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism: 1525-1675* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 55, 63; citing Menno Simons, *The True Christian Faith*, c. 1541, from *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (c. 1496-1561)*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1956), 376-383.

of sex differentiation, the elimination of a third sex, and the doctrine of separate spheres which would come to full flower in the Victorian Era, but not before it passed through the philosophical revolution of the enlightenment.

Descartes, 17th Century, the Beginning of Modern Philosophy

Though the Reformers had broken open the possibility of questioning the authority of the past, this kind of questioning would reach its apex in the philosophical work of René Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes inherited the Platonic and Aristotelian emphasis of the priority of the rational soul or mind, but despite his indebtedness to the philosophers of the past, he was frustrated that the more he learned the less certain he felt about his knowledge. His quest for certitude led him to question everything in order to discover, beneath it all, his certainty that he himself was doubting and therefore, he must exist. From this foundation, “I think, therefore I am,” he began to reconstruct knowledge—not on the basis of received tradition but on the basis of his own thoughts and his own, individual experiences of the world. Thus, the Modern Enlightenment project began, elevating individual human reason above all else.⁶⁵ Colon Gunton observes that the classical identification of the person with the reasonable soul finds its logical conclusion in Descartes and the Enlightenment enthronement of human reason.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Descartes was not without his opponents, particularly those found in the Empiricist and Romantic traditions, who insisted on the significance of the body, of sense experience, and the passions. Though Descartes was willing to admit that the mind is not immune from influences from the body, he nevertheless continued the Platonic, Aristotelian and Augustinian emphasis on the mind as the rational ruler of the body and

⁶⁵ Melchert, 292.

⁶⁶ Gunton, “Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology,” 48.

its passions.⁶⁷ The mind, for Descartes, was god-like, in its total freedom from external constraints.⁶⁸ Like the Platonic dualism described above, Descartes' dualism could be interpreted positively and negatively for those who were not male. One can either argue that women, eunuchs, and "effeminate" men have lesser minds and therefore are less god-like, or one can argue that the mind is sexless and the basis for women's equality.⁶⁹ Romantic philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau would follow the first argument while the Pragmatists, the forerunners of liberalism, John Stuart Mill and Mary Wolstonecraft would follow the second.

Romanticism and Revolutionary Liberalism, 18th to 19th Centuries

Calvin's language of woman being created from and for the man (rather than by and for God) found its logical conclusion in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the Romantic Philosopher, who wrote of the education of women in his treatise, *Émile*, in 1762. Where Calvin argued that women were created to be subject to men and legally bound by divine law to remain such, Rousseau would advocate education as the means to preserve this "natural" arrangement.

Woman and man were made for each other, but their mutual dependence is not the same. The men depend on the women only on account of their desires; the women on the men both on account of their desires and their necessities...

For this reason the education of women should be always relative to the men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to

⁶⁷ Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 174.

⁶⁸ Melchert, 333.

⁶⁹ Laqueur argues that the New Cartesian science held that the mind is the seat of the soul and that the mind is immaterial, therefore the mind is not sexed. Thus, women's minds could theoretically be equal to men's, but this debate would rage over the next few centuries, and continues even today. Laqueur 155-156.

console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable—these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy...⁷⁰

How is such a disposition to be taught? Rousseau explains:

Girls ... should also be early subjected to restraint. This misfortune, if it really is one, is inseparable from their sex; nor do they ever throw it off but to suffer more cruel evils. ...that they may more readily submit to the will of others...

...formed to obey a being so imperfect as man, often full of vices, and always full of faults, she ought to learn betimes even to suffer injustice, and to bear the insults of a husband without complaint; it is not for his sake but for her own that she should be of a mild disposition...

Woman has everything against her, as well as our faults as her own timidity and weakness; she has nothing in her favour, but her subtility (sic) and her beauty. Is it not very reasonable, therefore, she should cultivate both?...

A man speaks of what he knows, a woman of what pleases her; the one requires knowledge, the other taste; the principle object of a man's discourse should be what is useful, that of a woman's what is agreeable. There ought to be nothing in common between their different conversation but truth.⁷¹

These citations of Rousseau come from Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 publication, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, in which she argues that women and men are both disadvantaged by the suppression of the humanity of women. While Wollstonecraft cites Rousseau in order to show the disastrous consequences of his project, they agree on at least one point, that women cannot be faulted overmuch for excessive attention to their looks and cultivating cunning, since they have nothing else which brings them any power in the world.⁷² Unlike Rousseau, she sees his educational project as that which has made women what they are today.

⁷⁰ Rousseau, *Émile* as quoted in Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792; quoted in Melchert, 480-481.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "I have not attempted to extenuate their faults; but to prove that they are the natural consequence of their education and station in society. If so, it is reasonable to suppose that they will change their character, and correct their vices and follies, when they are allowed to be free in a physical, moral, and civil sense." Wollstonecraft; cited in Melchert, 484.

John Stuart Mill, writing some 70 years after her, made similar arguments in his own treatise, *The Subjection of Women*, 1869.

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. And by their affections are meant only the ones they are allowed to have—those to the men with whom they are connected, or to the children who constitute an additional and indefeasible tie between them and a man.⁷³

According to Mill, it is this “tie between them and a man” that is the cause of women’s “subjection.”

[Women’s subjection] never was the result of deliberation, or forethought, or any social ideal, or any notion whatever of what conduced to the benefit or humanity or the good order of society. It arose simply from the fact that from the very earliest twilight of human society, every woman (owing to the value attached to her by men, combined with her inferiority in muscular strength) was found in a state of bondage to some man.⁷⁴

Mill argues that it is impossible to know whether women have rational capacities equal to that of men given their perpetual subjection. Thus, he recommends with Wollstonecraft that they be given equal educational opportunities in order to discover what capabilities and differences may truly exist.⁷⁵

The Industrial Revolution, 18th to 19th Centuries

Despite Luther’s belief that women were suited to housework, “due to their large fundaments” and men to moving around, in practice, most men and women shared the tasks of providing for the needs of the family and the care of children. Men and women worked in the fields and/or the shop, and children worked alongside them. Except for the

⁷³ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, 1869; quoted in Melchert, 482.

⁷⁴ Mill; quoted in Melchert, 479.

⁷⁵ Melchert, 484.

minority in the upper class, both worked, both looked after the children, and both were at home. All of this changed in the Industrial Revolution when jobs moved away from homes into factories. No longer were men able to share in the training of their children and participate in all family meals. Factories kept them away from their families for long 8-12 hour days.

It is essential that one recognizes the impact of economic and political influences on theological constructions of sex and gender. Because it was only after the Industrial Revolution that Christians began to redefine their concepts of the differences of the sexes. Once men were removed from the home, the home was left devoid of their governance, their moral influence, their modeling of perfect humanity. They were not there to supervise women and children (and servants). Women needed to do this in their place. But according to the classical Greek model and Medieval and Reformation theology, women were not capable of ruling. Their minds, bodies, and moral sensitivities were weak. Women were irrational and unspiritual. How could they be left alone to raise children, instructing them in such important matters as right doctrine? How would women be able to rule the servants and manage the house without their husbands?

Victorian/Romantic Gender Revolution, 19th Century

The Industrial Revolution brought about the Romantic/Victorian reconstruction of gender ideology. It is during this period that we find the association of morality and spirituality with the home, the private life, the feminine. Rather than associating mothers with matter (that which is opposed to the soul, the spiritual, the divine), Victorians held up women as “angels in the home” who maintained a private sphere of virtue, a “haven” apart from the hostile, secular world of men.

This is a far cry from women being less spiritual and more bodily. But the new economy demanded a change and Christian thinkers obliged. Rather than identifying virtue only with the *vir* (the male), Victorian thinkers divided up the virtues among the sexes. Men were given certain virtues: courage, fortitude, shrewdness. Women were given others: piety, peacemaking, and gentleness.

In some ways this was an improvement for women. At least now women were seen as having virtue as women. They didn't need to become men in order to be considered virtuous or holy. Still, this was nothing like equality and in some ways it excluded women from certain areas of influence that they had previously. Women's particular virtues were interpreted as making them suitable *only* for the private sphere, caring for children and working in the church (though not in any sort of leadership capacity). This historical change has also been labeled the "feminization of the church"—because if spirituality is a female quality then men's masculinity is threatened when men are religious. This was one of the results of the Victorian gender revolution.⁷⁶

On the other hand, this division of the sexes also opened the door to another interpretation. Women gained courage in their new status as "moral standard bearers" and argued that if they really were responsible to uphold Christian virtue then men needed them, not just in the home but also in the public sphere to make the wider world more Christian. Thus, the feminist movement of the 19th century, headed by evangelical women, drew upon this new ideology of gender. Here we find women becoming involved in suffrage and the abolition of slavery on the basis of their unique "feminine virtues."

⁷⁶ James B. Nelson, "Male Sexuality and the Fragile Planet: A Theological Reflection," *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*, Stephen B. Boyd, W. Merle Longwood and Mark W. Muesse, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 273.

Another result of the Victorian revolution (noted in chapter 1) was the virtual elimination of a third gender option. Public debates over the natures of the sexes—the assumptions that women and men have their own particular virtues associated with their separate spheres—added political pressure to clearly categorize anyone who blurred these important distinctions. Natural eunuchs and hermaphrodites had to be classified as either male or female, thus doctors coined a new phrase “pseudo-hermaphrodite” in order to acknowledge bodily difference while maintaining social order (even if “order” required people who appeared female [e.g., persons with complete androgen insensitivity syndrome] to forego all “homosexual” alliances with men).⁷⁷

Rather than seeing women as defective, misbegotten humans, valuable only for their contribution in generation (Aquinas), women begin to be seen as having human qualities and virtues that contribute to family (and society) in particular, unique ways, resulting in a complementary, binary anthropology, what Ruether has called “romantic dualism.”⁷⁸

Ontological and Theological Shifts

As we noted in our study of Classical anthropology—i.e., that there was a connection between ontology (human nature identified with the soul) and gender ideology—we can also see a connection between the gender revolution of the 19th century and ontological and theological assumptions. Romantic philosophers of the 19th century began to take the body more seriously and continued to challenge “the Enlightenment

⁷⁷ Dreger, “A History of Intersex,” *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*, 9.

⁷⁸ Ruether explains that there were two competing visions of humanity in this period, Romantic dualism and androgyny. The problem she identifies with androgyny—a focus on a human essence that is neither male nor female—is that it too often slipped into androcentrism—the male as the standard to which women are compared. Ruether, “Christian Anthropology and Gender,” 249-250.

delight in the power of human reason to control nature and everything bodily.”⁷⁹ LeRon Shults explains,

We can see the impact of this new emphasis in Schleiermacher’s desire to derive his dogmatic reflections from the pious self-consciousness, which is a modification not of knowing or doing, but of ‘feeling’... By the end of the nineteenth century, we find the empirically oriented William James making the viscera primary, reversing the traditional view so that now the bodily manifestations of emotions drive the mind’s noetic and volitional activities, rather than vice versa.⁸⁰

Whereas in the Classical period reason (associated with the soul and the male) had been seen as superior to emotion (associated with the body and the female), in the Victorian period, emotions were recovered as valid media for theological engagement.

Schleiermacher retains the idea that men display a certain type of calculating rationality, but rather than presenting women as less rational or irrational, he grants them an alternative type of rationality. In his lectures on biblical interpretation Schleiermacher speaks of different types of knowledge in gendered categories, both of which are needed for proper interpretation of biblical texts:

From the moment it begins, technical interpretation involves two methods: a divinatory and a comparative. Since each method refers back to the other, the two should never be separated. By leading the interpreter to transform himself, so to speak, into the author, the divinatory method seeks to gain an immediate comprehension of the author as an individual. The comparative method proceeds by subsuming the author under a general type. It then tries to find his distinctive traits by comparing him with the others of the same general type. Divinatory knowledge is the feminine strength in knowing people; comparative knowledge, the masculine.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 174.

⁸⁰ Ibid. He continues, “Twentieth-century behaviorism, with its reduction of all human acting (including knowing) to bodily mechanisms, was dialectically defined by its negation of the ‘soul’ side of Cartesian dualism. The problems with dualism have been the subject of extensive analysis and debate, but most contemporary philosophical and scientific discussions have moved beyond the focus on substances and abstract faculties to explore more holistic and dynamic models of human nature.”

⁸¹ Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Compendium of 1819* with marginal notes from 1828, reproduced in *The Hermeneutics Reader*, Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed. (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1985), 96.

Thus was the binary gender model reproduced in theological hermeneutics.

From One Sex to Two

Gendered politics and the practicalities of separate spheres required by the Industrial Revolution all contributed to the making of two incommensurable sexes.

Thomas Laqueur again summarizes the shift and illustrates how this new ontology transformed scientific enquiry into the body itself.

Sometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented. The reproductive organs went from being paradigmatic sites for displaying hierarchy, resonant throughout the cosmos, to being the foundation of incommensurable difference... Here was not only an explicit repudiation of the old isomorphisms but also, and more important, a rejection of the idea that nuanced differences between organs, fluids, and physiological processes mirrored a transcendental order of perfection. Aristotle and Galen were simply mistaken in holding that female organs are a lesser form of the male's and by implication that woman is a lesser man. A woman is a woman, proclaimed the 'moral anthropologist' Moreau in one of the many new efforts to derive culture from the body, everywhere and in all things, moral and physical, not just in one set of organs.⁸²

Laqueur gives two reasons for the shift from one sex to two: one epistemological and the other political. He identifies two parts of the epistemological shift. The first is the Enlightenment banishment of "superstitions:"

lactating monks, women who never ate and exuded sweet fragrance, sex changes at the whim of the imagination, bodies in paradise without sexual difference, monstrous births [under which label hermaphrodites were categorized], women who bore rabbits, and so on, were the stuff of fanaticism and superstition even if they were not so far beyond the bounds of reason as to be unimaginable.⁸³

The second part of the epistemological shift was the priority of the physical over the cosmological.⁸⁴ "There were no books written before the late seventeenth century...

⁸² Laqueur, 149.

⁸³ Ibid., 151.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

that argued so explicitly for the biological foundations of the moral order. There were hundreds if not thousands of such works... in the centuries that followed.”⁸⁵

Language changed from the cosmological and theological to the biological.

Indeed the term ‘generation’ itself, which suggested the quotidian repetition of God’s act of creation with all its attendant heat and light, gave way to the term ‘reproduction,’ which had less miraculous, more mechanistic connotations even if it did not quite capture the virtuosity of nature.⁸⁶

The shift from one sex to two in the Modern period did enable physicians for the first time to see women’s organs *as* women’s organs. Nevertheless, Laqueur cautions readers from taking these discoveries as “objective science.” “Distinct sexual anatomy was adduced to support or deny all manner of claims in a variety of specific social, economic, political, cultural, or erotic contexts. ...But no one account of sexual difference triumphed.”⁸⁷ Laqueur insists that the differences between the sexes, emphasized so powerfully in the Modern period were “largely unconstrained by what was actually known about this or that bit of anatomy, ‘this or that physiological process...’” Rather, they arose “from the rhetorical exigencies of the moment.”⁸⁸ Emphasizing the dubious nature of the shift from one sex to two, Laqueur is careful to emphasize the significance of the shift.

While the one flesh did not die—it lives today in many guises—two fleashes, two new distinct opposite sexes, would increasingly be read into the body.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 153.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 155.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 152.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 243. “But my point here is that new knowledge about sex did not in any way entail the claims about sexual difference made in its name. No discovery or group of discoveries dictated the rise of the two-sex model, for precisely the same reasons that the anatomical discoveries of the Renaissance did not unseat the one-sex model: *the nature of sexual difference is not susceptible to empirical testing*. It is logically independent of biological facts because already embedded in the language of science; at least when applied to any culturally resonant construal of sexual difference, is the language of gender... Despite the new epistemological status of nature as the bedrock of distinctions, and despite the accumulation of facts about sex, sexual difference in the centuries after the scientific revolution was no more stable than it had been before.” Ibid. 153, emphasis added.

No longer would those who think about such matters regard woman as a lesser version of man along a vertical axis of infinite gradations, but rather as an altogether different creature along a horizontal axis whose middle ground was largely empty.⁸⁹

The middle ground, once occupied by hermaphrodites, natural eunuchs, castrated eunuchs, effeminate men, and virile women had been emptied of such ambiguous cases. Thus, the modern period bequeathed a legacy of two opposite and incommensurable sexes, unified by the belief in the possession of a sexless soul in the Christian tradition or a sexless mind in the tradition of Enlightenment liberalism. Substance dualism remained the unifying factor undergirding a belief in the common humanity of the sexes regardless of difference, but this common denominator would come into question in the postmodern period.⁹⁰

Rather than understanding the image of God as the male, corporate head of a family, the modern period shifted attention to individuals, male and female, yet secured in a common humanity by the sexless soul, made in the image of a sexless God.⁹¹ All of these beliefs were to come under attack in the postmodern period when the power politics of the naming of sex, which Laqueur has illustrated, came into the light for the first time.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 148.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 155-156.

⁹¹ "Patriarchal anthropology was based on the assumption that the (free, ruling class) male was not just an individual, but a corporate person who exercises 'headship' over a 'body' of persons: women, children, servants. Women were credited with legal autonomy only through dissolving this concept of the family as the base of rights for an individualism in which each adult is autonomous. Liberal individualism abstracts men and women from their social context as isolated atoms, each motivated by self-interest." Ruether, "Christian Anthropology and Gender," 252.

POSTMODERN SHIFTS:
FROM SUBSTANCE AND SEX DUALISM TO RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY
AND THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE SEXES

The Enlightenment quest for certainty, for the Rule of Reason over all of nature, has floundered on the shoals of postmodernity. The modern quest for unified, universal, objective knowledge, knowledge that renders power over all that is “other,” has been abandoned. Descartes’ mind was god-like, unconstrained by the body, much less by cultural, social, and historical factors. The postmodern mind is only too aware of the limits of human finitude, the situatedness of all knowing, and the impossibility of objectivity. We are not gods, and we know it.

Ironically, despite the failure of his project, Descartes’ methodological skepticism finds its logical conclusion in postmodern deconstructive theory. Even the very language we use to try to formulate ideas has become subject to critique. Language is now believed not only to describe the world but to create worlds, enabling us to see some things and not others, to think some things and not others. The history of the sexes, and especially the history of intersex, is illustrative of this very point.

In the ancient world, when there was language for eunuchs, hermaphrodites and androgynes, people were able to see them, laws governed them, and places in society were carved out where they could live and contribute to the life of the community. Such is no longer the case. As we saw in chapter one, during the Victorian Era, at the very time when physicians were documenting larger numbers of intersexed bodies, by redefining their terms, creating the new language of “pseudo-hermaphrodite” they were able to remake the world, virtually eliminating hermaphroditism (at least from public record), through a few strokes of the pen.

But postmodern thinkers are not only deconstructive. By recognizing the power of language to create worlds, many postmodern thinkers, both Christian and non-Christian, are using it to recreate a world that is more attentive to difference than that which was allowed in the Modern period. James Olthuis, a postmodern Christian theologian, explains:

In its heart, postmodernism is a spiritual movement that resists the totalizing power of reason. It is that resistance, and the concomitant celebration of difference and diversity, that marks a wide array of disparate discourses as postmodern. Ethically, postmodern discourses share an alertness to plurality and a vigilance on behalf of the other. Modernist rational ethics, in its Enlightenment dream of a world increasingly controlled by a pure rationality, has shown itself not only blind and indifferent to those who are other and different, those who fall outside the dominant discourse, but violent and oppressive to them.⁹²

Olthuis explains that while Modern thinkers attempted to take “others” seriously, even the “other” sex (i.e., women), they failed to do so, because their attempts were wholly self-serving. Their versions of “others” were reflections of their own desires and projections of their fears, threats to the self which had to be overcome.⁹³ In such a world, “One either dominates or is dominated—as Freud, Hegel, and Sartre in particular emphasize...

Thus, Paul Tillich defines power as ‘the possibility a being has to actualize itself against the resistance of other beings.’ To be a self is to have enemies. Implicitly, if not explicitly, one is always at war. This apotheosis of the self is seen to crest in the idealism of Hegel in which everything becomes itself in and through its own other. In the end, since the ‘other’ has a utilitarian function in relation to the self, relationship to the other is, finally, self-

⁹² James H. Olthuis, “Face-to-Face: Ethical Asymmetry or the Symmetry of Mutuality?” (1996), in *The Hermeneutics of Charity: Interpretation, Selfhood, and Postmodern Faith, Studies in Honor of James H. Olthuis*, James K. A. Smith and Henry Isaac Venema, eds. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 135.

⁹³ “...reason [is] the instrument by which an ego or society of egos overpowers and totalizes, appropriates and disempowers anything that is ‘other’ or different.” Olthuis, “Crossing the Threshold: Sojourning Together in the Wild Spaces of Love” [1993], in *The Hermeneutics of Charity*, 26.

relationship. When an ‘other’ resists this role, failing to mirror the self, when it resists being used and consumed, it must be invaded and dominated.⁹⁴

In the postmodern period, many “others” are finding voices to resist such domination. Women are pushing back against the dominating language of the “other” sex, being compared always and everywhere to a standard that is male and required to do all of the tasks which men consider objectionable. They are continuing the work begun in the late modern period of resisting the language of “other” by calling for the “rights of men” to be extended to them—rights to vote, to own property, to make legal and financial decisions without the authority of a husband, father, or male guardian, and equal pay for equal work.⁹⁵ As Dorothy Sayers argued almost seventy years ago, women are not asking to be other, nor opposite, but simply to be recognized as human.⁹⁶

In the postmodern period, men too are finding voices to resist the hegemonic accounts of masculinity which have oppressed not only women, eunuchs, hermaphrodites, and intersex, but also any man failing to measure up to the standard of “masculine perfection.” Thus in the postmodern period we find shifts from masculinity, or “hegemonic masculinity” to masculinities in the plural.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Olthuis “Crossing the Threshold,” 23.

⁹⁵ Ruether, “*Imago Dei*, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics,” 279.

⁹⁶ “...a woman is just as much an ordinary human being as a man, with the same individual preferences, and with just as much right to the tastes and preferences of an individual. What is repugnant to every human being is to be reckoned always as a member of class and not as an individual person.” Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (1938; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 19. “They are ‘the opposite sex’—(though why ‘opposite’ I do not know; what is the ‘neighbouring sex’?). But the fundamental thing is that women are more like men than anything else in the world. They are human beings.” Sayers, “The Human-Not-Quite-Human,” (reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 37.

⁹⁷ “Hegemonic masculinity” is “a technical term designating the dominant construction of masculinity in our culture. Specifically, hegemonic masculinity denotes the ideals considered appropriate for Euro-American, educated, middle- and upper-class, heterosexual, culturally Christian males—that group of men who have held the lion’s share of public power in this country. Hegemonic masculinity is implicitly contrasted with non-hegemonic masculinities—the construction of appropriate male behavior for those outside this group, including poor and lower-class men, Native American, African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and Jewish men; and gay men. ...the hegemonic masculine ideals have a significant

It is in this context that the intersexed are also finding voices to resist the domination of language which has erased their existence from public society. They are crying out with similar language, not to be known as another “other” but to be recognized as human. As one woman with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome put it:

The world has tried to make us feel like freaks. We have felt like freaks. I felt like a freak most of my life, but look at me. I’m just a human being just like everybody else. ...I really have a place in the world. I really am a human being, a very valid human being...⁹⁸

But what is a human being? How does one define human being in the post-modern age? Is a definition of human being even possible today? Postmodern deconstructionist, Jacques Derrida insisted it is not.⁹⁹ In the early 18th century, when Americans confronted intersex babies, the question of their humanity was decided on the assertion that “’tho [sic] their outward Shape may be deformed and monstrous; [they] have notwithstanding a reasonable Soul, and consequently their Bodies are capable of a Resurrection.’”¹⁰⁰ The “reasonable soul,” the divine substance passed down from Plato to Augustine to Descartes was the security of human personhood, but this very substance has come under considerable attack in postmodern times.

effect on males both inside and outside the hegemonic group.” The distinction of masculinities is “an extension of the effort to study men as a specific gendered group. Just as it is important to recognize that men’s experience is not identical with human experience, so it is also important to appreciate that the experiences of all men are not the same. At different times, in different places and cultures, in different social and economic classes within the same culture, men have experienced their lives differently and have lived under different norms of appropriate behavior.” Stephen B. Boyd, W. Merle Longwood and Mark W. Muesse, “Men, Masculinity, and the Study of Religion,” in *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*, Stephen B. Boyd, W. Merle Longwood, and Mark W. Muesse, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), xv.

⁹⁸ Sharon Preves, “For the Sake of the Children,” *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*, 62, 61.

⁹⁹ Kevin Vanhoozer, “Human Being, individual and social,” in *Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, Colin Gunton, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 170.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 7-8.

Ontological Shifts

Rejection of Substance Dualism

The shift from cosmology to biology, which began in the late modern period, reaches its logical conclusion in the postmodern abandonment of substance dualism. Advances in scientific understandings of the brain and its functions, along with philosophical challenges to the subject-object dualism of the modern project, have led to a thoroughgoing reconfiguration of what it means to be human. Some Christian scholars are arguing that these scientific and philosophical theories amount to nothing less than a Copernican revolution in theological anthropology.¹⁰¹

Theologian LeRon Shults explains how even some conservative theologians have been willing to move away from the idea that humans are made of both body and soul.

The activities once ascribed to the ‘soul’ and its ‘faculties’ are now accounted for by consciousness as an emergence of patterns of neuronal functioning in the human brain, which in turn are connected to chemical interactions throughout the body. These give rise to ‘feeling,’ which cannot be separated from ‘thinking.’ Conversely, how we think affects how we feel and act.¹⁰²

Nancey Murphy, a theologian and philosopher of science at Fuller University, has shown how the faculties of the soul enumerated by Thomas Aquinas have brain responses that can be located for each. “Even in the most intense religious experience of contemplatives, imaging techniques have shown that during deep meditation very particular patterns of neural functioning are operative.”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Joel B. Green, “Body and Soul? Questions at the Interface of Science and Christian Faith,” *What About the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian Anthropology*, Joel B. Green, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 6.

¹⁰² Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 179.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 180. Nancey Murphy, “Darwin, Social Theory and the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge,” *Zygon* 34, no. 4 (1999): 596. See also the constructive proposals of James B. Ashbrook and Carol Rausch Albright, *The Humanizing Brain* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1997).

Rather than seeing these discoveries as proofs of the impossibility of the supernatural or of communion with God, a number of biblical scholars and theologians are arguing that a rejection of substance dualism is not a rejection of Christianity but of Platonic metaphysics—non-Christian philosophical notions they believe have distorted past interpretations of the Scriptures. They insist that the Bible does not present the soul as a metaphysical substance opposed to the body. Rather, like Aristotle, they show how the term “soul” in its Hebrew and Greek variations is used to speak of the life of the person in holistic fashion—a task Joel B. Green takes on at length in *Body, Soul and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*.¹⁰⁴ The new challenge for theologians is not the existence of the soul and its relation to the body, but the mind/brain, body/consciousness connection and the possibility of talking about human selves at all.¹⁰⁵

How does one talk about the self after abandoning the concept of the soul? Augustine spoke of these as one and the same, when he wrote. “I, that is, my soul...”¹⁰⁶ We remember Plato and Descartes and even Wollstonecraft and Sayers who appealed to the shared faculty of reason (which Sayers called “that great and sole true Androgyne”) as the basis for the co-humanity of the sexes.¹⁰⁷ But the reduction of the soul to the brain disallows such a conclusion. Scientists tell us that even the brain is sexed through pre- and post-natal hormones as well as through shifting brain structures that develop through restructuring that occurs on account of experiences of living in a sexed body and a

¹⁰⁴ Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008). See also Green’s essay “‘Bodies—That Is, Human Lives’: A Re-Examination of Human Nature in the Bible,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 149-73. See also *What About the Soul?*

¹⁰⁵ Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 181-183.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 167, citing Augustine’s *On the Doctrines of the Church*, 1.27.

¹⁰⁷ Sayers, “The Human-Not-Quite-Human,” 44.

gendered society.¹⁰⁸ While “brain sex” is the least understood of all the categories of the science of sex differentiation, it is nevertheless a factor that complicates the possibility of speaking of a “sexless” human nature—something shared by male, female, and intersex alike.

How does one secure the humanity of anyone—male, female, or intersex—without the “reasonable soul” and without even the concept of a human self? Despite Derrida’s objections, postmodern thinkers continue to proffer alternative proposals.

Bodies, Relations, and the Multiplication of the Sexes

Building on the assumption that humans are mere bodies, most secular, postmodern thinkers fall into one of two philosophical camps as biological determinists or social constructionists. Neither is unproblematic.

In the twentieth century, socio-biologists have suggested that every aspect of our social lives is but a sub-plot in a broader evolutionary drama scripted by human DNA. The true story of the self is about human genes that seek to survive long enough to reproduce.¹⁰⁹

Given this situation, theologian Kevin Vanhoozer asks, “Is it possible to save human freedom and dignity, to preserve the person, and if so, on what grounds?”¹¹⁰

Other postmodern theologians have suggested that with the fall of modern metanarratives, humans are able to recognize the socially constructed nature of societies. While some might conclude from the discovery of the power of culture that humans are nothing but cogs in the cultural machine, without the ability for self-determination, most do not abandon all ground for human self-determination. Rather, they argue that if culture

¹⁰⁸ Hughes et al, “Consensus Statement on the Management of Intersex Disorders,” 2. See also Hines, *Brain Gender*; and Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*.

¹⁰⁹ Vanhoozer, 169.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

is a human creation, it can be recreated, reconstructed, at least in modest degrees. Clifford Geertz concluded, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.”¹¹¹ These webs consist of the cultural constructions into which we are born and in which we participate either by cooperation or resistance, as well as our personal narratives—the stories we write to make sense of ourselves, to create our selves in the world.¹¹² According to theologian Elaine Storkey, this theme of self-creation, rather than self-mastery, is central to the postmodern spirit.

Once we recognize that the self is in the process of being constructed, it is only a short step to the notion of self-creation. ... There is no aspect of our identity therefore which we cannot create... Our sexuality is also our creation, so to take one example, there is nothing ‘given’ about heterosexuality. It too is a product of the power concepts of modernity. There is nothing fixed about monogamy, either, and plurality of couplings fits much more comfortably into a postmodernist culture.¹¹³

Given the conclusion that humans are nothing but bodies, highly diverse, with no grand narrative to tell us who or what we are, or how to act, it is perfectly understandable how some sociologists of gender are arguing for a deconstruction of the sex/gender system. Gilbert Herdt’s call for a third sex, Fausto-Sterling’s identification of five sexes, David Hester’s recognition of hundreds of sexes, and Kessler and McKenna’s insistence on the elimination of sex and gender categories remain perfectly reasonable suggestions in the postmodern context. If bodies are all that we are, if the cultures into which we are born can be reshaped and there is no objective vantage point for better and worse constructions, then the best we can hope for are less oppressive, more peaceful relations between bodies. But even here we have no absolute vantage point from which to argue for such ethical treatment of “others.”

¹¹¹ Ibid., 161.

¹¹² Storkey, “Modernity and Anthropology,” 144.

¹¹³ Ibid., 144-145.

The ancient Greeks recognized only one sex, the male. Many have found this to be oppressive to women, so it is rejected. The binary sex model of the modern period was an improvement, but this also proved to be oppressive to women—who are always constructed as the “other” sex—as well as oppressive to intersexed persons who no longer had a place on the chart. Both systems are oppressive. Neither lead to peaceful relations between persons. Both can and must be rejected. The ontological shifts allow for the multiplication of the sexes or their abandonment. Either option is open for those who would choose this path.

Theological Turn to Relationality

Given their vocation, theologians are considerably more interested in questions of ontology than non-religious thinkers. They are not satisfied to speak of the human as wholly biologically determined, nor as beings with the power of self-creation, no matter how circumscribed that power. Nevertheless, many acknowledge the validity of the postmodern critique of the modern self and are working to rethink theological anthropology in its wake. LeRon Shults identifies the most significant shift as the “Philosophical Turn to Relationality:”¹¹⁴

Today most philosophers no longer describe human nature with the categories of substance ontology, as in ancient philosophy, nor in terms of autonomous subjectivity, as in early modern philosophy. In both of these models, the ‘self’ is dualistically separated from its ‘knowing.’ The human subject is defined prior to and over against the objects of knowledge. In late modernity, however, we find a new emphasis on the self as always and already immersed in the dynamic process of knowing and being known in community. The hard dichotomy between subject and object is rejected.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality*.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

Shults notes that despite the fact that many postmodern thinkers have concluded from these reflections that there can be no self, a number of postmodern theologians refuse to join in the lament.

James Olthuis employs the language of psychology to explain that the postmodern “‘death of the self’ was not a real death but ...the death of a ‘false self’ which is no real loss but the beginning of healing.”¹¹⁶ He insists that “There is still room for an agent self that is not absolute, with no claims to self-authorization and full presence...” and returns to Christian theology to begin theological anthropology again.¹¹⁷

Likewise, Shults is hopeful that the death of the modern self, tied to a non-Christian ontology, will open up the possibility of finding more accurate descriptions of the self, complete with a revisioning of ontological categories.

To conclude from this, as some radical deconstructionists do, that no substantial ‘self’ exists at all follows only if we completely divorce relation from substance. If being is essentially relational, however, we may still speak of the ‘self’ as substantial and real—precisely because of the intensity of its self-relationality. As Calvin Schrag points out, the rejection of old anthropological models does not mean a jettisoning of every sense of self. One may argue instead for a “praxis-oriented self, defined by its communicative practices, oriented toward an understanding of itself in its discourse, its action, its being with others, and its experience of transcendence.”¹¹⁸

Kevin Vanhoozer agrees that “personhood, not substance, comes first in the order of being. ...persons are not autonomous individuals. ...persons are what they are by virtue of their relations to others.”¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, even while he critiques the modernist version of individuality, Vanhoozer insists that personhood is not lost, “assimilated into some

¹¹⁶ Olthuis, “Crossing the Threshold,” 27.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.,” Cf., James Olthuis, “Be(com)ing: Humankind as Gift and Call,” *Philosophia Reformata* 58 (1993) : 153-172.

¹¹⁸ Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 181; quoting Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity*, 9.

¹¹⁹ Vanhoozer, 174.

collectivity... [R]ather a particular person... achieves a concrete identity in relation to others.”¹²⁰ Similarly, Jürgen Moltmann, attempts to navigate the shoals between individuality and collectivism which both threaten human being.

An individual, like an atom, is literally that ultimate element of indivisibility. An ultimate element of indivisibility, however, has no relationships, and also cannot communicate. ...If an individual has no relationships, then he also has no characteristics and no name. He is unrecognizable, and does not even know himself. By contrast, a person is the individual human being in the resonance field of the relationships of I-you-we, I-myself, I-it. Within this network of relationships, the person becomes the subject of giving and taking, hearing and doing, experiencing and touching, perceiving and responding.¹²¹

Theological Reconstruction

Trinitarian Relationality and the Social *Imago*

These postmodern theologians have moved a long way from Boethius’ definition of the human person as an “individual substance of a rational nature,” focused as it was on the individual apart from society and on the rational in opposition to the body. Postmodern theologians want to affirm the body as a fundamental element in human personhood even as they avoid grounding rationality in substance metaphysics. On the other hand, many of these same theologians are eager to ground relationality in ontological categories. It is this latter shift that has led to a renewed interest in the Trinitarian nature of God.

Plato’s soul and Aristotole’s mind, their centers of human identity, were both grounded in their conceptions of a monistic God. Thus, their anthropology reflected their

¹²⁰ Ibid., 174-175.

¹²¹ Jürgen Moltmann, “Christianity and the Values of Modernity and the Western World,” lecture presented at Fuller theological Seminary (April 1996); quoted by Warren Brown, “Reconciling Scientific and Biblical Portraits of Human Nature,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy and H. Newton Malony, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 225.

attempts to escape the body (and its sex) and become united with the divine soul/mind. Christian thinkers who built upon their ontological speculations found themselves at odds with their own unique Christian heritage, belief in the goodness of the body, of creation, and resurrection, as well as their belief in a God who is three-in-one.

As we noted in the introduction to this project, the renewal of trinitarian studies and its significance for theological anthropology is usually traced to Karl Barth (1886-1968), who pulled together the contributions of Martin Buber, Wilhelm Vischer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Emil Brunner, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, and Friedrich Schleiermacher to argue that the way in which humans image God is in their existence as relational beings.¹²² Barth concluded,

the analogy between God and man, is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation. This is first constitutive for God, and then for man created by God. To remove it is tantamount to removing the divine from God as well as the human from man.¹²³

Relationality is constitutive of divinity and humanity in God's image. Ultimately, "Jesus is a man for His fellows, and therefore the image of God, in a way which others cannot even approach, just as they cannot be for God in the sense that He is."¹²⁴ Inasmuch as there is a proper location of the image of God in humans, following after the pattern of Jesus, Barth locates this in the relationality of male and female.

¹²² Barth, *CD*, III/2, p. 195; cited in Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 271. Cf. Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 124. Ruether, provides a summary of the contributions of Buber, Bonhoeffer, and Brunner in "*Imago Dei*, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics." Von Kirchbaum's contributions are neglected by Ruether and Shults but her influence upon Barth's reflections on this subject were essential to his work. See Suzanne Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth: A Study in Biography and the History of Theology* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998). Janet Soskice suggests that Barth, Bonhoeffer and Buber may have all been indebted to Schleiermacher for their emphasis on the I-Thou of reciprocity. Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 50.

¹²³ Barth, *CD*, III/2, ¶ 45.2, p. 185.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 222.

The Trinity and Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

Barth's construction is important for our discussion because he was also the first to connect the *imago Dei*, not to an extra-bodily, sexless, divine substance, but to human being *as* sexually differentiated. Thus, he insists that male and female together are the "original and proper form of this fellow-humanity... This basic distinction, the differentiation and connexion [sic] of the I-Thou must be explained as coincident with that of male and female."¹²⁵

Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man which is that of male and female...?¹²⁶

This interpretation has come to be known as the "social view" of the *imago Dei*.¹²⁷

Barth's contribution arises directly from the biblical text of Genesis 1:26-27,

Then God said, 'Let us make human[kind]¹²⁸ in our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule ...' So God created the human in his image, in the image of God he created [the human],¹²⁹ male and female he created them.

Rather than focusing on the rule of humans over the rest of creation as early Christian theologians have done, Barth shifts attention to verse 27 where the plurality of God ("let us make") is imaged in the plurality of what is made, "male and female." Thus, the

¹²⁵ Ibid., *CD*, III/2, ¶ 45.3, p. 292.

¹²⁶ Ibid., ¶ 45.2, p. 195.

¹²⁷ This view carries various names: social, relational, special community, etc. I have chosen social in order to more clearly reflect the connection between social trinity and social *imago*.

¹²⁸ The Hebrew here is *adam* without the article, which can be translated as *human*, *a human*, *man*, *a man*, or *humankind*. I have translated it with the inclusive, *humankind*, in order to match the verb which is plural, "let them rule."

¹²⁹ My translation. I have chosen to substitute the noun to which the pronoun is referring (the antecedent) in order to avoid the confusion between natural and grammatical gender to which English-language readers are often prone. The Hebrew pronoun here is masculine because it must correspond to the masculine noun *adam*. We know that *adam* is an inclusive noun not only from this passage where it is then described as male and female but also from Gen. 5:2 "God created them male and female, and God blessed them and named them *adam* in the day when they were created." Some translators change the Hebrew singular to an English plural in order to bring out the inclusive: "He created *them*." I have chosen to retain the singular by substituting the noun to which the pronoun refers.

Christian who reads the Trinity back into the plural pronoun concludes that humans as male and female, called to “become one flesh” (Gen 2:24), somehow reflect the unity of the Trinity.

For Barth sex/gender (i.e., masculinity and femininity) represent the “center of humanity” and are inherently connected to sexuality. Sexuality according to Barth is not sinful *per se* but it has been deeply affected by sin since the fall. Thus,

that awful genius of sin is nowhere more plainly revealed than in the fact that it shames man at the center of his humanity, his masculinity and femininity, before God and man, and every attempt to escape this shame, every self-justification, or concretely every denial and suppression of sexuality can only confirm and increase the shame... This is the climax of this text and therefore of the whole biblical history of creation.¹³⁰

Kevin Vanhoozer summarizes Barth’s contribution to theological anthropology:

Sexuality, and the male-female duality in particular, becomes an image for the difference-in-relatedness that characterizes human, and divine, being in general. It is therefore impossible to speak about humanity apart from ‘cohumanity’: the human person is both irreducibly individual and constitutionally interrelated.¹³¹

Barth’s reconfiguration moves conversations about the *imago Dei* away from disembodied attributes (e.g., rationality) or functions (e.g., dominion) toward the relationality found between the first man and first woman. Upon first blush, his proposal is good news for women. Rather than being excluded from full participation in the image of God, due to a supposed inferior rationality or unnatural dominion, one cannot begin to speak about the image of God without speaking about men and women in relation to one another and to God.

Even where Barth’s proposal has been roundly critiqued, it is impossible to overestimate the significance of his reflections for subsequent theological work. Theologians

¹³⁰ Barth, *CD*, III/2, ¶ 45.3, p. 292.

¹³¹ Vanhoozer, 172.

now regularly assume a binary model of human sex differentiation based on the creation narratives found in Genesis (not the one sex model of the classical period), and most read equality and mutuality into sex relations, rather than hierarchy (a trend which many feminists find ironic).¹³² As the rest of this dissertation will show, recent work in theological anthropology continues to ground theological concepts such as the *imago Dei*, human personhood, and human relationality on the creation of humans as male and female in heterosexual marital relation with analogies to trinitarian relationality and difference-in-relation.¹³³

Postmodern Theological Anthropologies and Intersex

Even while many postmodern theologians have welcomed the turn from substance ontology to relational ontology, most Christian thinkers continue to uphold the binary sex model of the modern period, emphasizing the significance of sexual differentiation (as male and female) and heterosexual relationality for *imago Dei*, human personhood, and human relationality. Their constructions continue to neglect the presence of intersexed persons within the human community and problematize not only their humanity but also their ability to image God.

The binary sex model of the modern period, even when presented by postmodern theologians, remains subject to the postmodern critique of the way “otherness” has been defined and employed. Even Olthuis, who defends postmodernism as a “spiritual

¹³² Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Rosemary Radford Ruether, in *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, 3-4, 269-70, 284, 288.

¹³³ Stanley Grenz sums up the current state of trinitarian studies, heralding the “triumph of relationality.” He explains, “Although contemporary theologians vary enormously in the degree to which they are willing to renounce their allegiance to a metaphysics of substance, they seem to agree that more stress should be placed on the claim that God is *relational*.” Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 117, emphasis original.

movement... [alert] to plurality and vigilan[t] on behalf of the other,”¹³⁴ continues to employ the binary sex model in his revision of theological anthropology.¹³⁵ There are a few postmodern theologians who are extending this vigilance on behalf of those who diverge from heterosexual practice,¹³⁶ but almost none who pay any attention to the theological challenge of intersex.¹³⁷

Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, perhaps because of their commitment to (hetero)sexual ethics, are first among those who have failed to take seriously the challenge of intersex to their theological constructions. While ignorance of intersex may account for some of this neglect, even those familiar with intersex tend to dismiss it or advocate “correction” through medical technology in order to uphold sex and gender complementarity.¹³⁸

Is it possible to incorporate postmodern vigilance on behalf of “others” while at the same time upholding traditional Christian sexual ethics (i.e., heterosexual monogamy)? I will argue that it is, but not without a serious reconsideration of the theological edifices that have been built on the binary sex model by Evangelicals and Roman Catholics alike. That is the task of the chapters which follow.

¹³⁴ Olthuis, “Face-to-Face,” 135.

¹³⁵ Olthuis, “Be(com)ing: Humankind as Gift and Call,” 161-164.

¹³⁶ Stuart, *Religion is a Queer Thing*.

¹³⁷ Cornwall, “Kenosis,” 182.

¹³⁸ Hollinger, 84.

PART II
CRITIQUE AND CONSTRUCTION:
THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE POSTMODERN PERIOD

an Introduction

In Part I of this dissertation we learned of the phenomenon of intersex, persons whose bodies do not fit neatly into the category of either male or female—a surprisingly high number despite lack of public recognition in contemporary society. We also learned that the ancients were not unfamiliar with intersex. Indeed, Jesus himself discussed those who are born eunuchs—an ancient term under which some intersex conditions would have been classified. Notwithstanding the checkered history of the treatment of eunuchs in the early Christian period, we noted that eunuchs and hermaphrodites were publicly recognized by early Christian societies—both East and West—and that their bodily ambiguity prompted theological reflection on the significance of sex, gender, and sexuality for theological anthropology.

We then traced the history of the human self from Plato’s disembodied, sexless soul through the Western Enlightenment elevation of reason over sense perception on to the postmodern recovery of the body, its senses, and its sex. Along the way we also traced how theological reflection on the image of God followed similar shifts, from the centrality of reasonable rule of the (masculine) soul over the (feminine) body—a presupposition which undermined the affirmation that women are also made according to

the image of God—to the postmodern insistence that the image of God cannot be reflected apart from male and female in community, a social view of the *imago Dei*.

This postmodern theological account of the image of God reflects both a return to the body as well as the philosophical turn to relationality, and for many theologians, it is sexuality that guides the reading of both. The return to the body is a return to the sexed body—male and female. The turn to relationality has been construed in sexual terms by more than a handful of theologians. Chapters 5 and 6 will investigate these twin themes: *imago Dei* as sexed body and *imago Dei* as sexual community. Exploring the challenges and contributions which intersex and a more careful reading of Jesus' teaching on eunuchs bring to current theological anthropologies built upon the social *imago*, I will argue in chapter 4 that the binary sexed model needs to be expanded in order to include the intersexed while not being deconstructed of all meaning and value. In chapter 5, I will argue that the social *imago* must remain social, resisting the slide into sexual communion. Finally, in chapter 6, I will follow the theological trajectories laid out in chapters 4 and 5 to ask how the eschatological goal of human identity—the identification and union of the ecclesial community with Christ—addresses the place of sex, gender, and sexuality as these impinge upon the *imago Dei*.

CHAPTER 4

SEX, GENDER, AND *IMAGO DEI*: FROM OTHER TO OTHERS

Chapter three concluded with the recognition that Barth and those who have followed him in the social view of the *imago Dei* as “male-and-female-in-community” have taken up the postmodern turn to relationality and the postmodern turn to the body while retaining a modern conception of sex and gender difference. But postmodern vigilance on behalf of others calls theologians to more careful attention to bodies as they are found in the real world rather than in the ideal world of philosophical and theological systems. Philosophically and theologically the male-female difference has been hailed as paradigmatic of the “other.” This simplistic construal has caused theologians to over-emphasize difference between the sexes while at the same time blinding them to the existence of other others. I will argue that more careful attention to “real” men, women, and intersexed persons, in all of their particularities, diversity, and similarities, as well as a fresh reading of biblical narratives can help us move forward in our theological understanding of sex and gender differences and their place in theological discussions of identity and *imago Dei*.

In order to do this, I will present a brief overview to the ways in which the sex binary model has been construed in Roman Catholic and Evangelical theology. I will focus on the legacy of the late Pope John Paul II (1920-2005), in what has come to be known as the *Theology of the Body* (a collection of homilies delivered from September

1979 to November 1984). It is impossible to identify a similarly representative voice for American Evangelicalism; any such choice is suspect from the beginning. Nevertheless, I will risk putting forward the work of Stanley J. Grenz (1950-2005) whose work on theological anthropology and human sexuality has been widely received within the Evangelical academy.¹

After showing the strong consensus between these two theological traditions, I will examine how both are being extended in ways that continue to problematize intersex persons, as well as many non-intersexed persons by overstating the significance of sex and gender difference. I will then conclude by suggesting a better way to build upon the good work of both of these traditions in order to build a more balanced, nuanced, and inclusive vision of the relation between sex, gender and *imago Dei*.

The Common Witness of Roman Catholic and Evangelical Theologies of the Body

There are striking similarities between Roman Catholic and Evangelical theologies of the body. In Part I of his *Theology of the Body*, Pope John Paul II builds a case for the nuptial meaning of the body as the foundation for sexual ethics.² He finds several meanings for the sexed body and the marital sexual act in his reflections upon the creation accounts found in Genesis 1-4. I have summarized these as follows:

¹ Evangelical theologian Richard Lints attests to the influence of Stanley Grenz on contemporary Evangelical theological anthropology in Lints, "Introduction: Theological Anthropology in Context," *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton and Mark R. Talbot eds. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 7. Hollinger depends heavily on Grenz, employing Grenz's definitions of sexuality as foundational for his own work in, *The Meaning of Sex*, 15-16.

² John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Michael Waldstein, trans. and ed. (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).

1. The sexed body participates in the meaning of personhood: Sexual distinction is not mere attribute but fundamental, “constitutive” of the person.³
2. The image of God, though present in an individual human, is also (more fully revealed) in the communion of persons, the union of the first man and first woman.⁴ This union is specifically related to the “conjugal act.”⁵
3. The spousal meaning of the body relates to the ability of the spouses to express love through the gift of self. This gift of self “fulfills the very meaning of [human] being and existence.”⁶ The gift of self becomes the paradigm of Christian love. It is the basis for celibate religious vocation,⁷ the model of God’s love for the world in Christ,⁸ and grounded in the Trinitarian nature of God.⁹
4. The body also carries a parental (paternal/maternal) meaning. The pope argues that masculinity and femininity reveal themselves more fully in paternity and maternity.¹⁰ Paternity mirrors divine Fatherhood.¹¹

³ Ibid., page 166-169; homily 10.

⁴ “man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning. ... Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. He is, in fact, ‘from the beginning’ not only an image in which the solitude of one Person, who rules the world, mirrors itself, but also and essentially the image of an inscrutable divine communion of Persons.” Ibid., 163; 9:3.

⁵ Ibid., 167; 10:2.

⁶ “The human body, with its sex—its masculinity and femininity—seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and of procreation, as in the whole natural order, but contains ‘from the beginning’ the ‘spousal’ attribute, that is *the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift* and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.” Ibid., 185-186; 15:1, italics original to John Paul II.

⁷ “love as the readiness to make the exclusive gift of self for the ‘kingdom of God...’” Ibid., 435-436; 79:8.

⁸ Ibid., 509; 97:4.

⁹ This can be clearly seen from the quote above from *Man and Woman*, 163; 9:3. Editor Michael Waldstein also emphasizes the centrality of Trinitarian thought in his introduction to *Man and Woman* where he quotes from John Paul II’s earlier work, *Sources of Renewal*. Here Wojtyła wrote: “Man’s resemblance to God finds its basis, as it were, in the mystery of the most holy Trinity. Man resembles God not only because of the spiritual nature of his immortal soul but also by reason of his social nature, if by this we understand the fact that he ‘cannot fully realize himself except in an act of pure self-giving’ [*Gaudiam et Spes*, 24:3].” Waldstein, 89; citing *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 61.

¹⁰ “*the mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood...* In this way, what also reveals itself is the mystery of the man’s masculinity, that is, the generative and ‘paternal’ meaning of his body.” John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 210-211, 20:2; italics original to John Paul II.

¹¹ “Fatherhood is one of the most prominent aspects of humanity in Sacred Scripture. The text of Genesis 5:3, ‘Adam...begot a son *in his image, in his likeness,*’ is explicitly connected with the account of the creation of man (Gen 1:27; 5:1) and seems to attribute to the earthly father the participation in the divine work of transmitting life...” Ibid., 211, footnote 33. Page 17 of the introduction indicates that the footnotes are original to John Paul II and “an integral part of the text.”

Though couched in different language, Stanley Grenz, in his text *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*, and in his theological anthropology, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, identifies the same features of human sexuality; meanings I have labeled combining language from both traditions as 1) Personal, 2) Sacramental, 3) Unitive and 4) Procreative.¹²

1. **Personal:** Sexual distinction is essential to human personhood. It is connected to but mysteriously deeper than chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, or social (affective gender) expression.¹³
2. **Sacramental:** Sexual distinction is the basis for “bonding.” It is the most basic form of the human community, the primitive form of the *imago Dei* which is more fully revealed in Christ (the true image), the communion of the church, and the eschatological nuptial union between Christ with his church. The union-in-difference is fundamental to Grenz’s understanding of sexuality—which, while it images the Trinity, ultimately prefigures the union between God and creation.¹⁴
3. **Unitive:** The sex act is an expression of mutual submission which Grenz also describes as “gift of self.”¹⁵
4. **Procreative:** The sex act is an expression of openness beyond the couple to others—particularly children. “Sexual intercourse, through its link to procreation, constitutes

¹² While in Roman Catholic literature the “unitive and procreative” elements stand for the full meaning of sex, including its sacramental meaning under the unitive, I believe it is important to maintain the distinction between the two. Grenz utilizes this distinction when he argues against the acceptance of homosexual marriages. He contends that while homosexuals may be able to give themselves to one another in love and mutual submission—thus fulfilling one of the meanings of sex in marriage—their unions will never represent the “unity in difference” that the male/female union symbolizes as a prefiguring of the eschatological union between God and Church. The nuance in Grenz’s argument should not be missed especially considering that it can be argued that homosexual unions can image (in a sacramental way) the Trinitarian union of persons just as well if not better than heterosexual unions—given the fact that God is beyond sex/gender distinctions (suggesting their irrelevance or limited value to the argument of union in difference), or is symbolically portrayed as a union of same sex/gender persons (Father and Son). Here, the eschatological union between God and humanity must be maintained as the meaning of unity in difference and the basis for the argument. Of course, Rosemary Radford Ruether and other feminists have wisely warned of the dangers of a symbolic universe which identifies God with the male and humanity with the female. Their arguments on the limits of analogical language and the dangers of unnecessary applications of such symbolism must be heeded.

¹³ Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 22-30. Both Grenz and John Paul II take for granted that there is a fundamental connection between biological sex and “affective sexuality” (i.e., socio-cultural gender expression).

¹⁴ Grenz, *Social God and Relational Self*; summarized by Grenz in “The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of the *Imago Dei*,” in *Trinitarian Soundings in Systematic Theology*, Paul Louis Metzger, ed. (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 87-100.

¹⁵ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 88-89.

an apt human analogy to the expansive love of God, which likewise creates the other as its product.”¹⁶

The Context of the Critique

The significance of the overlap in these two theological visions of sex, gender, marriage, and spirituality should not be missed. There is a powerful common witness of these two major players in conservative American Christianity that many find compelling. The critique that follows should not be interpreted as an attempt to undermine this common witness. Rather, it is an effort to strengthen it by affirming some general principles, acknowledging their limitations, and pushing beyond these limits to a more comprehensive theology of human persons made in the image of God.

BINARY DIFFERENCE IN ROMAN CATHOLIC AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGIES

The Binary Model in John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*

John Paul II begins his homilies on the *Theology of the Body* with the same text examined in chapter 2 of this dissertation: Matthew chapter 19:1-12. He begins with Jesus’ words in verses 1-8 but interrupts a complete analysis of the passage by jumping to Genesis, and inserting Jesus’ statements about the indissolubility of marriage (Mt. 19:8; Mk. 10:6-9), lust (Mt. 5:28) and the resurrection of the body (Mt. 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35-35), followed by Paul’s teaching on the resurrection in I Corinthians 15, before returning to attend to the last verses of the pericope, Matthew 19:9-12. After reading “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom” through the Pauline language of I Corinthians 7, the late Pope concludes with a long exposition on the sacrament of marriage (Eph. 5:21-33), and its implications for the continuing authority of *Humanae*

¹⁶ Ibid., 90-91.

Vitae—the prohibition of artificial contraceptives penned by Pope Paul VI in 1969. This is the shape of his text as he describes it.¹⁷

Given his admission of the purposes of his work, one should not find it surprising that his *Theology of the Body* only considers certain types of bodies—those that fall into the binary pattern of Adam and Eve—while excluding others. He does not consider what the bodies of eunuchs, intersex bodies, have to say for any theology of the body. Rather, following the pattern of many Church fathers, he briefly acknowledges the physical nature of eunuchism but defines it as “the physical defects that make the procreative power of marriage impossible.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, this is an ambiguous phrase that could include everything from impotence to infertility. Avoiding the gender ambiguity of eunuchs altogether, he reads the eunuch through the lens of continence or virginity translated into spiritual marriage.¹⁹

John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* is built upon heterosexual complementarity—which guides not only sexual ethics but is developed to ground the meaning of human existence and even Christian spirituality:

The human body, with its sex—its masculinity and femininity—seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and of procreation, as in the whole natural order, but contains ‘from the beginning’ the ‘spousal’ attribute, that is *the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift* and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.²⁰

His proposal takes Jesus’ statement in Matthew 19:4-5 very seriously:

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 659-663; homily 133.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 416; 74:1.

¹⁹ John Paul II reads “eunuch for the sake of the kingdom” through I Cor. 7, Rev. 14:4, Mt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25; Lk. 20:35-36; see *Man and Woman*, 414- 462; homilies 73-86.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 185-186; 15:1, italics original to John Paul II.

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?”

The nuptial meaning of the body insists that masculinity and femininity exist “for this reason,” i.e., to direct women and men to marriage. And marriage, according to John Paul II, exists as the primary metaphor for Christian love in the Scriptures. (The question of whether or not marriage *should* be seen as the primary metaphor for Christian love is the subject of the next chapter. For now, we focus our attention on the late Pope’s construal of masculinity and femininity.)

According to John Paul II, masculinity and femininity are relational terms.

Neither can be understood apart from the other.

Thus, as Gen 2:23 already shows,²¹ femininity in some way finds itself before masculinity, while masculinity confirms itself through femininity. Precisely the function of sex [that is, being male and female], which in some way is ‘constitutive for the person’ (not only ‘an attribute of the person’), shows how deeply man, with all his spiritual solitude, with the uniqueness and unrepeatability proper to the person, is constituted by the body as ‘he’ or ‘she.’²²

Unfortunately, the late Pope does not unpack what he means by sex as “constitutive” of the person rather than a mere “attribute.” This is regrettable, given the weight he places upon it. What he does unpack is the connection he sees between femininity and motherhood and masculinity and fatherhood.

According to his *Theology of the Body*, masculinity and femininity are ordered toward fatherhood and motherhood.

[T]he mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood... In this way, what also reveals itself is the mystery of

²¹ “The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man.’”

²² John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 166, 10:1.

the man's masculinity, that is, the generative and 'paternal' meaning of his body.²³

But while woman's maternal femininity is read off of her body,²⁴ the connection between masculinity and fatherhood can be understood as more "hidden."²⁵ Rather than looking to men's bodies in order to understand fatherhood, the late Pope directs his hearers to the presentation of fatherhood in the scriptures—especially the Fatherhood of God.²⁶ Thus, femininity and masculinity direct women and men to marriage. Marriage is the paradigmatic form of the "gift of self" (which is the ultimate form of love—human and divine). This love is made visible in the conjugal union of husband and wife that leads naturally to motherhood and fatherhood. Marriage points to the sacramental, loving union between Christ and the Church and fatherhood points to God the Father.

Despite the fact that there are numerous problems with such an account (not least of which is the obvious imbalance between fatherhood and motherhood in their connection to the person and work of God²⁷), there is also much to commend in the

²³ *"the mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood... In this way, what also reveals itself is the mystery of the man's masculinity, that is, the generative and 'paternal' meaning of his body."* Ibid., 210-211, 20:2; italics original to John Paul II.

²⁴ "The whole exterior constitution of woman's body, its particular look, the qualities that stand, with the power of perennial attraction, at the beginning of the 'knowledge' about which Genesis 4:1-2 speaks ('Adam united himself with Eve'), *are in strict union with motherhood*. With the simplicity characteristic of it, the Bible (and the liturgy following it) honors and praises throughout the centuries 'the womb that bore you and the breasts from which you sucked milk' (Lk 11:27). These words are a eulogy of motherhood, of femininity, of the feminine body in its typical expression of creative love." Ibid., 212, 21:5, emphasis original.

²⁵ "masculinity contains in a hidden way the meaning of fatherhood and femininity that of motherhood." Ibid., 217, 22:6.

²⁶ "Fatherhood is one of the most prominent aspects of humanity in Sacred Scripture. The text of Genesis 5:3, 'Adam...begot a son *in his image, in his likeness*,' is explicitly connected with the account of the creation of man (Gen 1:27; 5:1) and seems to attribute to the earthly father the participation in the divine work of transmitting life..." Ibid., 211, footnote 33. Page 17 of the introduction indicates that the footnotes are original to John Paul II and "an integral part of the text."

²⁷ While motherhood is read off of the female body, fatherhood is read off of the work of God in creation, so that fatherhood is presented as participating in the divine work in a way that motherhood is not. Note how the following quotation falls short of acknowledging her participation in God's work of creation: "The first woman to give birth *has full awareness of the mystery of creation, which renews itself in human generation*. She also has full awareness of the creative participation God has in human generation, his work

Theology of the Body. The first is John Paul II's attempt to confirm the goodness of the body, sex differentiation, sexual desire, and marriage in the face of a long tradition of the devaluation of each. Additionally, despite the fact that the sacramental image of the union of Christ and the Church has historically led to a belief in the absolute authority of the husband over the wife, John Paul II insists upon a mutuality in marriage that is unprecedented in the Roman Catholic tradition up to his time.²⁸ The mutuality he sees in marriage is also integrated into his understanding of the relationship of masculinity and femininity as one of "reciprocal enrichment"²⁹ although the details of this enrichment are not spelled out in this series of homilies.

The obvious omission from our perspective is that John Paul II does not take the time to develop a theology of the body of the eunuch. He assumes that the eunuch is one who cannot marry because "he" cannot father children, but he fails to take seriously the liminal status of the eunuch as one who is neither (fully) male/masculine nor female/feminine. Such recognition would call into question the very foundation of his project, because, according to Jesus, there are those whose bodies do not carry a nuptial meaning—they naturally do not marry. And there are still others who consider the

and that of her husband, because she says, 'I acquired a man from the Lord'" Ibid., 213, 21:6. The woman "has full awareness" of God's participation, of God's work and that of her husband. Her own work is not acknowledged as participating in this same work. Similarly in the following, "In this new man—born from the woman-parent through the work of the man-parent—the same 'image of God' is reproduced every time, the image of that God who constituted the humanity of the first man... (Gen 1:27). Ibid., 213. Here again we find that man's contribution is spoken of as work—representing the work of God in creation—while the child is simply "from the woman."

²⁸ He interprets the submission of the wife in Eph. 5:22 in light of 5:21, the command for mutual submission of all believers (*Man and Woman*, 473; 89:3). In 30:6 (p. 252) he argues that the domination of Genesis 3:16 ("he will rule over you") is a result of the fall. Nevertheless, he sees it as the man's responsibility to be "the guardian of the reciprocity of the gift and its true balance... as if it depended more on him whether the balance is kept or violated or even—if it has already been violated—reestablished" (261; 33:2). Cf. Lisa Sowle Cahill, "The Feminist Pope," in *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship? The Equal-Regard Marriage and Its Critics*, David Blankenhorn, Don Browning and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, eds. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 40-48.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 165, 9:5.

“nuptial meaning of the body” to be of lesser importance than the priority of the kingdom.³⁰ While John Paul II acknowledges the broad nature of the renunciations involved in the choice of making oneself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom, he does not recognize the challenge of the eunuch to his binary sex/gender complementary model.³¹

The Binary Model in Stanley Grenz’s Evangelical Theology

In his earlier work, *Sexual Ethics*, Stanley Grenz’s theological reflection on the nature of human sexuality is similar to John Paul II’s work in that its scope is limited by his attention to heterosexual ethics, thus assuming the male/female binary model. In his later work, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, as well as his summary essay, “The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of the *Imago Dei*” (published the year of his untimely death), wherein he had the opportunity to look beyond the sexual, he does not. Rather, he expands the heterosexual model to argue that sexuality (i.e., the heterosexual drive toward marital bonding) provides the basis for all human relationality, including human relation to God (spirituality), and the bonded ecclesial community. This latter emphasis, on the place of sexuality, will be explored in the next chapter. In this chapter we must focus our attention on his construal of male and female, rather than the nature of their bond.

³⁰ Whether this choice should be seen primarily through the lens of spiritual marriage is the question of the next chapter.

³¹ “Contenance means *a conscious and voluntary renunciation* of this union and all that is connected with it in the full dimension of human life and the sharing of life. The one who renounces marriage also renounces generation as the foundation of the community of the family composed of parents and children. The words of Christ to which we refer indicate undoubtedly this whole sphere of renunciation, although they do not dwell on particulars.” John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 427; 77:3, italics original to John Paul II.

It is important to understand that for Grenz, heterosexual (marital) bonding is not the final form of the *imago Dei*. It is the foundational form. Grenz reads the development of the *imago Dei* in three canonical moves: 1) From a creation-centered anthropology beginning with Adam and Eve made who are made “in [God’s] image and according to [God’s] likeness” (Gen. 1:26); 2) to a Christocentric anthropology identifying Jesus Christ as the “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) and “the exact representation of [God’s] being” (Heb. 1:3). But he does not stop there. 3) From here Grenz argues that the Scriptures teach us that “God’s intention is that those who are in Christ participate in his destiny and thereby replicate his glorious image.”³² “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29). Commenting on this verse Grenz writes,

The climax of the verse comes in the subordinate clause that follows, ‘that he might be the firstborn’, which expresses the Christological intent of God’s foreordination, namely, the pre-eminence of Christ among those who participate in the eschatological resurrection. ...Consequently, humankind created in the *imago Dei* is none other than the new humanity conformed to the *imago Christi*, and the *telos* toward which the Old Testament creation narrative points is the eschatological community of glorified saints.³³

Given his larger vision of the *imago Dei* as the eschatological body of Christ, it might appear pedantic to focus on his construal of masculinity and femininity. Nevertheless, I believe that the way in which Grenz extends heterosexuality as the basis for all human relations, even eschatological relations of the bonded, ecclesial community, justifies a more careful look at the basis of his project.

³² Stanley J. Grenz, “The Social God and the Relational Self,” 90. “Paul’s Adam-Christ typology, therefore, indicates that the creation of Adam did not mark the fulfillment of God’s intention for humankind as the *imago Dei*. Instead, this divinely given destiny comes only with the advent of the new humanity, consisting of those who participate in the *pneumatikon soma* by means of their connection to the last Adam. In this manner, Paul paints Christ as the true image of God who imparts his supernatural characteristics to his spiritual progeny in a manner similar to Adam passing on his natural traits to his physical offspring.” Ibid.

³³ Ibid, 91.

In chapter one of his *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*, Stanley Grenz argues that sexuality [i.e., sex differentiation with its (assumed) corresponding gender distinctions] is essential to the human person. Where John Paul II used the language of “constitutive,” Grenz uses “essential” but both argue that sex, gender, and sexuality are not mere attributes.³⁴

Grenz rejects what he labels the “Medieval anthropology,” which located a common humanity in the sexless/rational soul, and more modern theological proposals of androgyny coming from Jungian depth-psychology.³⁵ He insists that

men and women are different in ways that are more fundamental than simply their roles in the reproductive process. The differences lie even in the basic ways in which we view ourselves and the world. Men and women think differently; they approach the world differently.³⁶

It should not go unnoticed that Grenz cites the work of John Money, the medical psychologist of Johns Hopkins University who became famous for his work on intersex and his insistence that intersex could be “fixed” through medical intervention and whose work has now come under considerable criticism as chapter 1 of this dissertation recounted.³⁷ This is significant because it shows that Grenz was at least aware of the phenomena of intersex but failed even to mention that there are those whose bodies do not naturally fit the categories he believes are “essential.”³⁸

³⁴ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 22-30.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁸ Grenz cites John Money’s article “Human Hermaphroditism,” in *Human Sexuality in Four Perspectives*, Frank A. Beach, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976). Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 262, note 25.

Over-Extending the work of Stanley Grenz and John Paul II

Evangelical ethicist Dennis Hollinger is indebted to Grenz in his own work, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life*. Hollinger does better than Grenz in the fact that he at least acknowledges the reality of intersexed persons and their potential challenge to a heterosexual ethical program. Unfortunately, he fails to reflect theologically on intersexed bodies—beyond dismissing them as products of the Fall and suggesting that their bodies can be “rectified” (i.e., corrected through medical technology) “in the direction of divine givens.”³⁹ Hollinger reads Matthew 19:4 as Jesus’ affirmation of “creation givens” (“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’”). He then goes on to explain these givens in ontological terms. “Jesus affirms that a basic given of reality is human maleness and femaleness. He doesn’t define specific functions of this dual way of being, but simply posits this ontological reality as the paradigm for guiding humans in marriage and sex.”⁴⁰

There are several dangers in the above proposal. First, the focus on upholding heterosexual ethics has led to a dismissal of the theological significance of intersexed bodies. Second, an emphasis on the “constitutive” or “essential” nature of masculinity or femininity for human personhood, identity, and *imago Dei*, found in the work of John Paul II and Stanley Grenz, naturally leads to Hollinger’s conclusion that intersex persons should seek medical help in order to “rectify” their bodies/identities, by conforming to creational norms or divine givens, i.e., bodies that are “naturally” male or female. Third, by emphasizing sex differentiation for (hetero)sexual ethics, Hollinger illustrates how Evangelical and Roman Catholic theologians are tempted to push the pendulum too far,

³⁹ Hollinger, 84.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

overemphasizing sex differentiation to the point of speaking of sex difference as “ontological difference.” Thus Hollinger writes of “this dual way of being... this ontological reality”⁴¹ and “the male-female ontological distinction” as the foundation for marriage and sexual activity.⁴²

Evangelicals are not the only ones to speak of ontological difference between the sexes. In 2004, the Vatican, under the leadership of Pope John Paul II, issued a letter to Roman Catholic bishops entitled, “On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World.” The letter was penned by the current Pope Benedict XVI when he was still known as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and head of the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This letter illustrates the same tendency as found in Evangelical theology. By emphasizing sex difference for heterosexual ethics and calling for the “collaboration of men and women” on account of essentialist gender differences, Roman Catholic theologians are also overemphasizing sex differentiation to the point of risking ontological difference. The letter describes sex differentiation as “belonging ontologically to creation.”⁴³ This is an obscure phrase, which invites more detailed attention to other portions of the letter.

In paragraph 8, we find an affirmation of the full dignity of men and women as persons made in the image of God, followed by an emphasis on difference.

Above all, the fact that human beings are persons needs to be underscored: ‘Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God.’⁴⁴ Their equal dignity as persons is realized as *physical, psychological and ontological complementarity*, giving

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 60.

⁴³ “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World,” May 31, 2004. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html.

⁴⁴ Citing John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), 7.

rise to a harmonious relationship of “uni-duality,” which only sin and “the structures of sin” inscribed in culture render potentially conflictual. The biblical vision of the human person suggests that problems related to sexual difference, whether on the public or private level, should be addressed by a relational approach and not by competition or retaliation.⁴⁵

This physical, psychological, and ontological complementarity is extended into the spiritual realm later in the same paragraph.

Furthermore, the importance and the meaning of sexual difference, as a reality deeply inscribed in man and woman, needs to be noted. ‘Sexuality characterizes man and woman *not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual*, making its mark on each of their expressions.’⁴⁶ It cannot be reduced to a pure and insignificant biological fact, but rather “is a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love.”⁴⁷ This capacity to love—reflection and image of God who is Love—is disclosed in the spousal character of the body, in which the masculinity or femininity of the person is expressed.⁴⁸

Grenz and Hollinger make similar statements in their own works. Hollinger actually quotes Grenz in his Introduction where he writes:

To put it another way, our sexuality is the form of our bodily or physical being within the world. It certainly encompasses our *emotional, social, and spiritual selves*, but it is related to the very way in which we as embodied beings exist in relationships to others. As Stanley Grenz puts it, “Sexuality comprises all aspects of the human person that are related to existence as male and female. Our sexuality, therefore, is a powerful, deep, and mysterious aspect of our being. It constitutes a fundamental distinction between the two ways of being human, i.e., as male or female).”⁴⁹

It is important to note that Hollinger also follows Grenz in reversing the normal definitions of sex and sexuality, saying that “sex” is “particular acts of physical intimacy”

⁴⁵ “On the Collaboration of Men and Women,” 8, emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Ibid., citing Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love* (November 1, 1983), 4.

⁴⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love* (November 1, 1983), 4.

⁴⁸ “On the Collaboration of Men and Women,” 8; emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Hollinger, 16; emphasis added.

while “sexuality [refers] to our maleness and femaleness as human beings.”⁵⁰

Unfortunately, both use “sexuality” so broadly that it sometimes includes sex differentiation, culturally formed gendered behavior/role/identities, and (genital and social) sexual expression. Again Grenz illustrates this overlap:

We give expression to the fundamental sexual dimension of our being in many ways. The most obvious, of course, is through sexual attraction and sexually determined acts. Such acts include the way we speak and touch others especially those to whom we are sexually attracted, and ultimately in genital sexual relations. But there are other ways of expressing our sexuality. They may range from the seemingly mundane—how we dress, comb our hair, etc.—to the more sublime—the appreciation of beauty, as well as cultural and artistic preferences and activities.⁵¹

Grenz finds support for this view in a similar statement “adopted by the Tenth General Convention of the American Lutheran Church”:

Human sexuality includes all that we are as human beings. Sexuality at the very least is biological, psychological, cultural, social, and spiritual. It is as much of the mind as of the body, of the community as of the person. To be a person is to be a sexual being.⁵²

Whereas Grenz followed John Money as one of his primary sources for scientific study of sex differences, Hollinger refers to more recent “brain-imaging technologies” which “show difference in the responses of women and men to external stimulations of all sorts, even though brain responses upon gender lines frequently do not seem to represent gender differences in behavior.”⁵³ What both fail to attend to is the fact that brain-imaging technology has also shown that

few, if any, individuals correspond to the modal male pattern or the modal female pattern. Variation within each sex is great, with males and females near the top and bottom of the distributions for every characteristic. ...In fact,

⁵⁰ Ibid.,15.

⁵¹ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 21-22.

⁵² Ibid., 21; citing “Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior,” a statement adopted by the Tenth General Convention of the American Lutheran Church.

⁵³ Hollinger, 74.

although most of us appear to be either clearly male or clearly female, we are each complex mosaics of male and female characteristics.⁵⁴

Both Evangelicals and Roman Catholics seem committed to gender essentialist complementarity (i.e., the belief that all men think and behave in a particular way and that all women think and behave in a different but complementary way) and base their theological anthropology on this foundation. Both use this to argue that men and women should work together in the home, church, and world.⁵⁵ But for each, complementarity is a simplistic binary model. There are only two ways of being in the world—an ideal masculinity and an ideal femininity. But for all of its importance, none of the authors are able to put their finger on concrete definitions of masculinity and femininity. John Paul II attempts to link masculinity and femininity to the paternal and maternal. Grenz and Hollinger do not even attempt a description. The 2004 letter to the bishops “On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World” comes closest to a definition for femininity by describing it as “a capacity for the other”—a definition that arises out of physical maternity but is expanded into other relations and to the spiritual. While the document does insist that “the feminine values mentioned here are above all human values [because] the human condition of man and woman created in the image of God is one and indivisible,” it qualifies this by saying that “women are more immediately attuned to these values [thus] that they are the reminder and the privileged

⁵⁴ Hines, 18-19.

⁵⁵ “The fundamentally different outlooks toward others, life, and the world that characterize males and females mean that the two sexes are supplementary. Each sex needs the supplemental approach to reality offered by the other in all the various dimensions of human life together.” Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 253, “In this perspective, one understands the irreplaceable role of women in all aspects of family and social life involving human relationships and caring for others. . . . It implies first of all that women be significantly and actively present in the family. . . . It means also that women should be present in the world of work and in the organization of society, and that women should have access to positions of responsibility which allow them to inspire the policies of nations and to promote innovative solutions to economic and social problems.” “On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World,” 13:4.

sign of such values. But, in the final analysis, every human being, man or woman, is destined to be ‘for the other’.”⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the letter does not define masculinity at all. It warns that “Whenever these fundamental experiences are lacking” [i.e. concern for the other nourished by women’s care for children in the home], “society as a whole suffers violence and becomes in turn the progenitor of more violence.”⁵⁷ This statement could be construed as defining masculinity only in negative terms (i.e., violence), but the text is not explicit.

It does seem strange, given the theological weight which Evangelicals and Roman Catholics place on gender complementarity, that they are unable to define either pole of the equation. While in past centuries, theologians have argued *against* greater female participation in church and society on the basis of gender differences, most contemporary Evangelicals and Catholics are arguing *for* greater female participation in these areas—barring ordination to the priesthood by Roman Catholics and more conservative Evangelicals.⁵⁸ This greater measure of participation and valuing of the “woman’s perspective” may be heralded as an improvement; nevertheless, this complementary model inadvertently introduces other dangers.

Some Problems in Evangelical and Roman Catholic Theologies of the Body

By overemphasizing sex and gender difference, and its essential or constitutive relation to human personhood, both Evangelicals and Roman Catholics are running

⁵⁶ “On the Collaboration,” 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13:4.

⁵⁸ John Paul II upholds the restriction of women from ordained priesthood on the basis of his model while Grenz argues that these essential differences do not prohibit women’s ordination to senior pastoral offices. See Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

headlong into theological trouble. Their emphasis on the radical (ontological) difference between men and women threatens to undermine the value of the incarnation for women.

Dennis Hollinger presents Jesus as “not an asexual being, but a male with the same physiological and hormonal makeup of all males, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).”⁵⁹ Quoting Evangelical ethicist and theologian Lewis Smedes, he writes, “Christian piety does not have to be nervous about the sexuality of Jesus. He was a male, and his masculinity shaped his human life from his hormones to his soul.”⁶⁰ Such statements present two dangers: First, it gives the mistaken impression that all men have the same physiological and hormonal makeup, and second, it works to drive a wedge between Christian women and the savior in whose image they are created and into whose likeness they are being transformed day by day (II Cor. 3:18). Both problems must be addressed.

First, it is inaccurate to state that all men have the same physiological and hormonal makeup. This should be obvious to the common observer who notices the great diversity among men in society. But when such common sense arguments fail to convince those already committed to sex/gender essentialism, scientific study can also assist in proving the point. The Director of the Behavioral Neuroendocrinology Research Unit at City University in London explains that there are differences in hormone levels among men and that these differences should be seen as advantageous for the human species:

One advantage of having sexual development controlled by gonadal hormones, rather than directly by genetic information, is that it allows for great variability both within and between individuals. Not only are several hormones involved, but the action of these hormones depends on a number of processes, including the amounts of each hormone produced, their conversion to other active products, and the numbers or sensitivity of receptors at each

⁵⁹ Hollinger, 85.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

target site. As a result, individual men and women are each complicated mosaics of different sex-related traits, rather than replicas of the modal man or modal woman. In addition... environmental sources of hormones and other factors that modify the actions of hormones can modify sexual differentiation, at least in theory. This provides more potential for flexibility than if sexual development depended directly on genetic information. Thus, the use of this secondary mechanism (i.e., hormones) allows for greater diversity in the species as well as potentially greater responsiveness to environmental changes.⁶¹

What physicians have documented at the neuroendocrinological level, sociologists, psychologists, and cross-cultural anthropologists have also documented in their own fields.⁶² One simply cannot speak of masculinity as if it were a single unified perspective on self and world—or insist that this single perspective is the one that Jesus shared. Although some theologians are beginning to bring such studies into their accounts, speaking about masculinities in the plural, or of hegemonic masculinity in the singular, Evangelicals and Roman Catholics have been slow to bring such insights into their theological anthropologies.⁶³

It is simply inaccurate to present Jesus as a male “like every other male” as if all males were alike. Such statements may sound comforting to some men in the church but

⁶¹ Hines, 35.

⁶² “There is certainly convincing evidence for the power of socialization to shape our perceptions of the world and even to shape the physical structures of the world. For example, the shape, strength, and specific skills of females and males are not merely a function of biological differences but are also heavily influenced by systematic differences in experience within a cultural context (Hubbard, 1990; Lorber, 1993). If these differences were indeed biologically innate, then the well-documented steady and rapid ‘closing of the gap’ between women and men in competitive sports and in technological competence could not occur (Lorber, 1993). Other researchers have shown that when gender differences in a trait are examined, we consistently find enormous variation within the gender ‘categories,’ and enormous overlap between the categories, to the extent that we must question whether these categories truly ‘carve up nature at the joints’ (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Van Leeuwen, 1990). Furthermore, the meaning of being female or male has been shown to vary across cultures, and over time. Womanhood and manhood in the sixteenth century were experienced very differently from the late twentieth century, and they are very different for people in their teens than for those in their sixties. In one culture, males are emotional, social and talkative; in another, the reverse is true (Stephens, 1963; Tarvis & Wade, 1984).” Heather Looy, “Male and Female God Created Them: The Challenge of Intersexuality,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 21 (2002), 13. See also Heather Looy, “Sex Differences: Evolved, Constructed and Designed,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 29:4 (Winter 2001): 301-313.

⁶³ Boyd, Longwood, and Muesse, xiv-xv.

it is imperative that we recognize the danger they present, not only to men who do not fit the mold but also to women who cannot and to the intersex who can only approximate likeness to Jesus in certain respects—depending on the specifics of their intersex condition. Presenting not only Jesus’ body but also his soul as radically, ontologically different from the bodies and souls of women puts Jesus’ humanity beyond the reach of over half of the human race. Elizabeth Johnson spells out the danger for women:

The Christian story of salvation involves not only God’s compassionate will to save but also the method by which this will becomes effective, namely, by God’s plunging into sinful human history and transforming it from within. The early Christian aphorism: ‘What is not assumed is not redeemed, but what is assumed is saved by union with God’ sums up the insight that God’s saving solidarity with all of humanity is what is crucial for the birth of the new creation. *Et homo factus est*: thus does the Nicene creed confess the universal relevance of the incarnation by the use of the inclusive *homo*. But if in fact what is meant is *et vir factus est*, with stress on sexual manhood, if maleness is essential for the christic role, then women are cut out of the loop of salvation, for female sexuality is not taken on by the Word made flesh. If maleness is constitutive for the incarnation and redemption, female humanity is not assumed and therefore not saved.⁶⁴

What is being contested is not the historicity of Jesus as a male human but a theological emphasis placed on the masculinity of Jesus, combined with an insistence on essential sex/gender differences, exacerbated by a distorted presentation of the radical nature of those differences.

The 2004 letter to Roman Catholic bishops does not address the masculinity or maleness of Jesus; nevertheless, it also places Jesus’ humanity and spirituality beyond the reach of his female followers when it emphasizes physical, psychological, and spiritual differences between men and women.⁶⁵ Roman Catholic theologian, Janice Martin Soskice, takes comfort in the fact that when the letter speaks of sexual difference

⁶⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 153.

⁶⁵ “On the Collaboration of Men and Women,” 8.

as “belonging ontologically to creation” it “fortunately falls short of saying that there is an ‘ontological difference’ between men and women.” She argues that the language of ontological difference is philosophically and theologically problematic.

That would indeed be odd, for one can see an ontological difference between a stone and a tiger, between a planet and a lamb, but it would be an odd stretch to see an *ontological* difference between a man and a woman, unless one went the whole way and said there was an ontological difference between any two individuals, between George Bush and Nelson Mandela, for instance. That would vacate the phrase of philosophical meaning.⁶⁶

She insists that the language of “ontological difference” is “too strong” because

It would put the 2004 letter at odds, not only with *Gaudium et Spes*,⁶⁷ but with Scripture itself were it to suggest it is impossible for a woman to say that, in all significant sense, Christ is like me in every sense except sin.⁶⁸

Thus she concludes:

We find ourselves to this very day teetering between two positions that are both compelling but at the same time incompatible. We must say that, Christologically speaking, women and men cannot be different for ‘all will bear the image of the man from heaven.’ But we must also say that sexual difference is not, or should not be, a matter of theological indifference. Sexual difference has something to tell us, not just about God, but also about the human being made in the image of God.

The unresolved question then is—where, why and how does sexual difference make a difference?⁶⁹

Like Grenz, Soskice looks to the triune nature of God in order to ground unity-in-difference but she also falls into the same trap as Grenz and John Paul II when she assumes there are only two categories of difference. “[T]he fullness of divine life and creativity is reflected by humankind which is male and female, which encompasses if not an ontological, then a primal difference. And this difference is not for pragmatic reasons

⁶⁶ Janet Martin Soskice, “Imago Dei,” *The Other Journal: An Intersection of Theology and Culture* 7 (April 2, 2006).

⁶⁷ The Vatican II document, “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” Dec. 7, 1965.

⁶⁸ Soskice, “Imago Dei.”

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

but by divine plan.”⁷⁰ Thus, her helpful critique of Roman Catholic theological anthropology also needs to be expanded by a theological reflection upon intersexed bodies. It is to that task that we now turn.

A THEOLOGY OF INTERSEX BODIES: ONTOLOGICAL SAMENESS AND REAL DIFFERENCE

Intersex as Illustration of Ontological Sameness

Theological reflection on intersexed bodies must extend beyond their dismissal as products of the Fall.⁷¹ As I argued in chapter 2, Jesus in his words about eunuchs, even in the context of his affirmation of the creation account of male and female, does not dismiss physical intersex conditions as a product of the Fall to be overcome. Rather, he teaches his disciples that they can learn from eunuchs. Even more, he instructs them that those who can should model their lives on those who do not fit neatly into either the category of male or female.

Reflecting on intersex bodies is helpful because it can also grant insight into the thorny question of sameness and difference among the sexes. In particular, it provides us with substantial support for arguing against the construal of sex difference as ontological difference. Intersexed bodies show, once again, how males and females are made of the same stuff. It is not impossible for a “male” fetus (XY chromosomes and testes) to develop into a female person—complete with labia, clitoris, a short vagina, breasts, feminine musculoskeletal structure, and a female gender identity. This is the common pattern for intersexed persons with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, an intersex condition occurring on the average of one out of every 13,000 births. Similarly, it is not

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Hollinger, 84; and Colson.

impossible for a “female” fetus (XX chromosomes and ovaries) to develop into a male—complete with a phallus capable of vaginal penetration, male pattern hair growth, voice descent, musculoskeletal development, and male gender identity—as is possible in more severe cases of Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia. To call androgens and estrogens “male hormones” and “female hormones” respectively is misleading given that both androgens and estrogens course through the veins of men, women, and intersexed persons (albeit at different levels) and affect much more than reproductive and secondary sex characteristics.⁷² Even gonadal tissue is undifferentiated in the early weeks of gestation.⁷³ Males, females, and intersexed persons are made of the same “stuff.” We belong to the same order of being. We are not *ontologically* different. This is not to deny that there are no real differences between the categories but that such differences do not belong to the realm of ontology.

Intersex as Illustration of Real Difference

At the same time to say that there is no ontological difference between male, female, and intersex does not mean that there are no real differences between men and women. One could not even speak about intersex if there were not two categories of sex able to be “inter”-mixed in various ways. In this way, John Money’s critique of Anne Fausto-Sterling’s “Five Sexes” is valid. Intersex is “not a third sex” but “a mixed sex or an in-between sex.”⁷⁴ Scientific studies on males, females, and intersexed persons illustrate these similarities and real differences.

⁷² Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 182-194.

⁷³ Hines, 22-23.

⁷⁴ Money, *Sex Errors*, 6.

Melissa Hines' work as Director of the Behavioral Neuroendocrinology Research Unit at City University in London shows how it is possible to speak about sex/gender differences in a more nuanced fashion. She argues that when trying to discuss behavioral differences between males and females it is helpful to compare them to differences in height. We all know that men are "generally" taller than women, and yet, we all know exceptions to this "rule."

Comparing the average heights of males and females shows how it is possible to identify a typical male pattern as well as a typical female pattern while at the same time recognizing the significant overlap between the two norms. Hines explains that differences in behavior are much less noticeable than differences in height. Thus, when comparing typical male and female behavior on a number of categories, she shows how there is considerably more overlap.⁷⁵ Again, it is helpful to quote her summary, that

few, if any, individuals correspond to the modal male pattern or the modal female pattern. Variation within each sex is great, with males and females near the top and bottom of the distributions for every characteristic. ...In fact, although most of us appear to be either clearly male or clearly female, we are each complex mosaics of male and female characteristics.⁷⁶

Hines' work shows that there is real difference between the sexes—physical, psychological, social, and behavioral differences. But not all of these differences can be neatly lumped into two (or three) sex/gender categories. While there are typical male patterns, they do not apply to every male or to males exclusively. Despite the fact that there are typical female patterns, these do not apply to every female or to females exclusively. Such studies show that there is greater sameness and more differences

⁷⁵ Hines shows that sex differences in height (standard deviation of 2) are much greater than sex differences in other behaviors, i.e., 3-D rotations (.9), math problems (.3), Math concepts (.1), verbal fluency (-.4), physical aggression (.4), toy preferences (.8), rough and tumble play (.4). Hines, 10-11.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 18-19.

between and among the sexes. Given this perspective, how ought Roman Catholics and Evangelicals respond? How can we take into account a more nuanced vision of sex and gender similarities and differences in a way that makes sense of the biblical data? Certainly, it requires returning to Genesis with new eyes.

FROM OTHER TO OTHERS: PROPERLY EXTENDING THE WORK
OF STANLEY GRENZ AND JOHN PAUL II

Interpreting the Significance of Adam and Eve

The biggest theological challenge keeping Evangelicals and Roman Catholics from embracing a more nuanced version of sex/gender complementarity may be the creation account. It is here that John Paul II, Stanley Grenz, and others ground their accounts of the *imago Dei* as male-and-female-in-community as a reflection of the trinitarian communion of persons. It is here that woman is presented as the necessary “other” who calls the man outside of himself and into relationality. It is here that we find only two, a male and a female, in binary complementarity. But this is an incomplete reading of the text. It neglects the fact that Adam and Eve are only the beginning.

John Paul II looks upon Adam and Eve as the prototypes for all human interaction. According to his *Theology of the Body*, their heterosexual union reveals the meaning of human existence as it teaches us the spousal meaning of the body, which is the gift of self, the paradigm of human and divine love.

The human body, with its sex—its masculinity and femininity—seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and of procreation, as in the whole natural order, but contains ‘from the beginning’ the ‘spousal’ attribute, that is *the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift* and – through this gift – fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 185-186; 15:1, italics original to John Paul II.

Similarly, the 2004 letter “On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World” presents the creation of Adam and Eve as paradigmatic of otherness.

Above all, the fact that human beings are persons needs to be underscored: ‘*Man is a person, man and woman equally so*, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God’.⁷⁸ Their equal dignity as persons is realized as physical, psychological and ontological complementarity, giving rise to a harmonious relationship of “uni-duality...⁷⁹

The language of “uni-duality” once again construes female-male complementarity as paradigmatic of unity-in-diversity.

Grenz’s account of the *imago Dei* entails more components than John Paul II’s in that he sees canonical language about the image developing from Adam and Eve to Christ and culminating in the diverse eschatological community of the redeemed which is united to Christ as his Body. He does well to emphasize that while the marriage of Adam and Eve “marks the climax of the second creation story... it does not constitute the end of the account of the origins of human community.”⁸⁰ These two bear children, begin a family, and “as the generations multiply, the primal human community expands, resulting in the building of cities (Gen. 4:17) and the advent of societies characterized by a division of labor (4:21-22).”⁸¹ In order to interpret the significance of Genesis chapter one for theological anthropology, it is helpful to learn from Grenz’s attention to the narrative and the canonical development of the *imago*.

⁷⁸ Citing John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), 7.

⁷⁹ “On the Collaboration,” 8.

⁸⁰ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 279.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Adam and Eve: From Form to Fountainhead, Prototype to Parent

Grenz does well to point out that other differences come from the union of male and female at the beginning—differences that are ultimately taken up into the eschatological body of Christ. On the other hand, he undermines the significance of those differences when he says that sex difference is essential to the person in a way that other differences, such as age and race, are not.⁸² He does not acknowledge how differences of race, language, culture, and age can provide other differences—also essential to the identity of the person—which can significantly alter the way bodily maleness, femaleness, and intersex are interpreted. Because he views sex difference as more essential to human personhood than other differences, Grenz continues to view Adam and Eve as the paradigmatic forms of difference, rather than the fountainheads of even greater differences which are then incorporated in his progressive model.

Where Grenz focuses on sexuality, Soskice represents the center of the Roman Catholic tradition by emphasizing fecundity. In her account of the *imago Dei*, she notes how in the creation narratives “fecundity...comes from difference, the difference of light and dark, of sea and dry land. Fecundity is the interval.”⁸³ It is the literal fecundity, coming from the sexual union of male and female, which continues to ground Evangelical and Roman Catholic commitments to heterosexual marriage—and on this point their work is to be praised. At the same time, affirming the goodness of fecundity in heterosexual marriage does not necessarily lead to affirming what Hollinger calls

⁸² “Although undeniably important, racial differences and other factors do not loom as foundational in personal and social identity as do those distinctions which arise out of the fact that we are sexual beings. The first aspect noticed at birth is not race, but sex. And we carry with us throughout our lives the tendency to see our maleness and femaleness as the fundamental demarcation among ourselves. ...Racial distinction is not presented in Genesis as arising from creation itself, as is the case with sex distinctions. Rather, the races first emerge after the Flood.” Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 29.

⁸³ Soskice, “Imago Dei.”

“creational givens”—i.e., the belief that all persons must be fully, ideally, male/masculine or female/feminine, in order to more fully participate in or be conformed to the image of God. Reading Adam and Eve as prototypes for all men and all women overlooks their place in the history of revelation and redemption.

Despite the fact that theologians continue to debate whether or not the statement “Be fruitful and multiply” should be interpreted as a command or a blessing when applied to modern-day couples, all should recognize the importance of a literal interpretation of the statement for the first couple. It was their literal fruitfulness that was necessary to the divine project. The differences between the bodies of Adam and Eve enabled them to be literally, physically fruitful/fecund. But this was only the beginning. Male and female need not be held up as the epitome of otherness—from which comes metaphorical fecundity. Rather than identifying male and female as the paradigmatic forms of otherness, they can be interpreted as the fountainhead of others who may become more “other” than their parents could have ever conceived.

Reading the Genesis account this way allows us to hold several truths in tension. The first is the value of literal fecundity in marriage—stemming from the union of one man and one woman. The sexual union of male and female in marriage can be fruitful, and this fecundity is good. Sex difference is fruitful. Soskice is right, “fecundity is the interval.” The affirmation of difference arising from common, ontological sameness is also important because it protects us from the other extreme of focusing so much on difference—sex, gender, culture, language, class, race, age—that we endanger the common humanity of men, women, and intersex.

Adam and Eve: From Prototype to Parent to Pedagogue

At the same time, viewing Adam and Eve as providing the paradigm for marriage, we can also identify a pedagogical value. When we view marriage as the norm, as the way that most humans live and experience adulthood, we can view it as a divinely ordained object lesson on the value of similarity and diversity, pedagogy of love for others. Heterosexual marriage can teach us, if we are willing to learn, about loving those who are other from us. We begin to learn to love our spouse in their similarity and otherness, and then, as children come, we are challenged to learn to love those who are even more different—unable to communicate, to share our worldview, to see the reasonableness of our requests. Many of us have found that our children, because of their age difference and their generational experiences, have perspectives on themselves, their sex, gender, and sexuality, and on the world, which are far different from our own and even from our spouse despite the fact that they may share our biological sex. Learning to love our children, who are like us and yet different, stretches our love for others to new levels.

One finds a similar pattern in the biblical narrative. In the Old Testament there is a focus on family, kin, clan, and nation, but in the New Testament, this love for family is extended to the “family” of believers. Similarly in Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus compares the old covenant to the new saying:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Love for family is extended beyond kin. Love for neighbor is extended even to enemies. The love between two is expanded. Love grows. The binary-sex other multiplies to include ever more others. Ronald Rolheiser, a Roman Catholic writer on Christian spirituality, notes a similar pattern, arguing that sexual desire, when tied to faithfulness in marriage and openness to children, naturally matures and sanctifies the individual by expanding his or her world and desires.⁸⁴ Whereas Rolheiser focuses on the progressive nature of sexual desire, I focus on the nature of otherness. Reading the Genesis account in light of the larger biblical narrative we are able to affirm the goodness of marriage as the fountainhead of human difference without requiring sex difference to stand always as the paradigmatic form of difference or otherness.

Beyond the Binary

This revision of the “other” will sound familiar to those versed in feminist literature. As early as 1938, Dorothy Sayers was working for a larger vision of difference, arguing that differences of age, nationality, and class can be just as fundamental, if not more fundamental than differences of sex. “There is a fundamental difference between men and women, but it is not the only fundamental difference in the world.”⁸⁵

Roman Catholic feminist theologian, Elizabeth Johnson develops this idea in her own work, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. Her discussion is worth quoting at length.

On the one hand, feminist thought resists an unrelieved binary way of thinking, a notion of human nature polarized on the basis of sex, which inevitably leads to a dominant/subordinate pattern. On the other hand,

⁸⁴ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: A Search for a Christian Spirituality* (NY: Doubleday, 1999), 201.

⁸⁵ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 33-34.

reduction to an equality of sameness by ignoring sexual difference is also unacceptable. ...

A way beyond the impasse of these options is emerging: one human nature celebrated in an interdependence of multiple differences. Not a binary view of two forever predetermined male and female natures, nor abbreviation into a single ideal, but a diversity of ways of being human: a multipolar set of combinations of essential human elements, of which sexuality is but one. Human existence has a multidimensional character. If maleness and femaleness can be envisioned in a more wholistic context, their relationship to each other can be more rightly conceived.

All persons are constituted by a number of anthropological constants, essential elements that are intrinsic to their identity. These include bodiliness and hence sex and race; relation to the earth, other persons and social groupings; economic, political, and cultural location, and the like. The constants mutually condition one another, and in their endless combinations are constitutive of the humanity of every person. Significantly change any one of them, and a different person results.

It is shortsighted to single out sexuality as always and everywhere more fundamental to concrete historical existence than any of the other constants. Age, race, period in history, bodily handicap, social location, and other essential aspects of concrete historical existence are at least as important in determining one's identity as sex. Focusing on sexuality to the exclusion of other equally constitutive elements is the equivalent of using a microscope on the one key factor of human life when what is needed is a telescope to take in the galaxies of rich human difference. In a multipolar modal, sexuality is integrated into a holistic vision of human persons instead of being made the touchstone of personal identity and thus distorted.

The anthropological model of one human nature instantiated in a multiplicity of differences moves beyond the contrasting models of sex dualism versus the sameness of abstract individuals toward the celebration of diversity as entirely normal. The goal is to reorder the two-term and one-term systems into a multiple-term schema, one which allows connection in difference rather than constantly guaranteeing identity through opposition and uniformity. Respect can thus be extended to all persons in their endless combinations of anthropological constants, boundlessly concrete. And difference itself, rather than a regrettable obstacle to community, can function as a creative community-shaping force.⁸⁶

Although Johnson does not argue for such a model on the basis of intersex, her insistence on a multipolar model creates theoretical and theological space for intersexed persons in addition to other others. What is unfortunate is that these ideas have yet to seriously alter mainstream Evangelical and Roman Catholic theological anthropologies.

⁸⁶ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 155-156.

And yet, the seedbed for such ideas has already been laid by both traditions in a shared emphasis on eschatology.

From Eden to Eschaton: The Priority of the Future

One of the similarities between the Evangelical anthropology of Stanley Grenz and the Roman Catholic vision of Janice Martin Soskice is the emphasis each places on the eschaton as the final form of the human. They insist that as helpful as the creation accounts may be, these are not to be understood as the paradigm or final form for humanity. Rather, true humanity is a future toward which we are moving.⁸⁷

This priority on the future fits well with an expansive notion of otherness. While the primal or primitive form of the *imago* as a community of diverse persons may be found in the creation of Adam and Eve, these do not need to remain the paradigmatic form of otherness. Other others are born from these parents: other ages, other languages, other cultures, and even another sex: intersex.

In chapter 2 we learned how, in the ancient world, it was not only woman but also the eunuch that stood as the paradigmatic other. Eunuchs were legally other, morally other, sexually other, socially other, religiously other, and ethnically other. They were, to quote Claudius Mamertinus once again, “exiles from the society of the human race.”⁸⁸ And yet it was of these exiles that the prophet Isaiah spoke, when he promised them a place in the kingdom of God:

⁸⁷ Soskice, “The Ends of Man and the Future of God,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, Graham Ward ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 77. The eschatological trajectory is less evident in John Paul II’s work. When he does speak of the eschatological *imago* as “*communio personarum*” he does not present this as an additional meaning but the original vision presented in the Garden. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 400-401, homily 69:6-7.

⁸⁸ Kuefler, 36.

Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.” And let not any eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.” For this is what the LORD says: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”⁸⁹

Isaiah predicted the future inclusion of these others. Foreigners and even eunuchs would be included in the temple of God, which from the perspective of the New Testament can be named the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the eschatological community.

In the 4th century, when Jerome wanted to argue for the essential nature of sex differences, he employed the logic of the resurrection. He insisted, against Origen (his former theological mentor), that sex difference would remain at the resurrection.⁹⁰ Similarly, Augustine insisted that sex difference would remain although it would no longer impair relations between the sexes.⁹¹ The Scriptures speak also of differences of race and culture, nation and tribe present in the eschatological community. Revelation 7:9 describes “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.” It can be argued that the differences enumerated in Revelation 7:9 are recognized as essential to the personal

⁸⁹ Isaiah 56:3-7.

⁹⁰ Jerome, *To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem*, 31, translated by W. H. Fremantle, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.vi.viii.html>.

⁹¹ Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount*, Part 1, Chapter XV, 40, translated by William Findlay, Revised and Annotated by D. S. Schaff, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf106.v.ii.xv.html?scrBook=Matt&scrCh=22&scrV=30#v.ii.xv-p7.1>.

identity of individual Christians even if they are also transformed in such a way that they no longer divide the people of God.

Following a similar logic, Susannah Cornwall has argued that there is no need for us to believe that intersexed bodies will be “healed” or “corrected” at the resurrection, i.e., transformed into an ideal male or female body. She insists that new creation brings about not only the healing of individuals and their bodies, but also the healing of communities to the point that identities of difference that now divide and impair communal life will no longer be divisive or limiting.⁹²

Cornwall finds helpful resources in the work of disability theologians, particularly those of John M. Hull and Nancy Eiseland. In her work, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberation Theology of Disability*, Eiseland suggests that bodily differences, which are now perceived as impairments, may persist even at the resurrection. She bases this belief on the fact that “Christ himself is portrayed in the New Testament as having a wounded body even after his resurrection (Eiseland 1994: 99-100).” Cornwall goes on to suggest,

It is conceivable that other instances of physical impairment, and physical atypicality, will also persist in the human bodies of the general resurrection. . . . The resurrected Jesus, with his impaired hands and feet, is God’s revelation of a new humanity—‘underscoring the reality that full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability.’ The wounds of the impaired Jesus are not to be vilified, nor to be pitied; they are marks of life experience, and signposts to a new kind of life too.⁹³

CONCLUSION

John Paul II may be correct to state that biological sex is constitutive of the human person. Stanley Grenz may be correct in insisting on the essential nature of sex for personal identity. But their proposals must be expanded through a reading of the larger

⁹² Cornwall, “*Kenosis*,” 196.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 195.

scriptural narrative of which Genesis is only the beginning. Sex identity as male or female may be essential. But there are more essentials than these two. Stanley Grenz's progressive account of the social *imago* lays the groundwork for including other essential differences in the eschatological community of God which is the fullness of the *imago*, the *telos* of true humanity.

Consequently, humankind created in the *imago Dei* is none other than the new humanity conformed to the *imago Christi*, and the *telos* toward which the Old Testament creation narrative points is the eschatological community of glorified saints.⁹⁴

This eschatological community is comprised of more than males and females. It is “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language...” (Revelation 7:9). It includes eunuchs who have held fast to the covenant and foreigners who have bound themselves to the LORD (Isaiah 56:3-7). It includes the intersexed who may be resurrected as intersexed and know, possibly more than females or males the truth of Galatians 3:26-29:

You are all [male, female, and intersex] sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Being “in Christ” does not make all believers male “sons” any more than the declaration of being “Abraham’s seed” makes all believers Jewish—thus eliminating ethnic, cultural, and racial distinctions upheld in Rev. 7:9. Rather, all of these distinctions, which now divide, are taken up into Christ who is revealed as the true image of God, the seal of our shared humanity, and the promise of its perfection. We will return to explore the connection between the *imago*, christology, and eschatology in chapter 6,

⁹⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, “The Social God and the Relational Self,” 91.

but before that we must attend to the connections being made between sexuality and the image of God.

CHAPTER 5

SEXUALITY AND *IMAGO DEI*: THE RELATIONAL TURN

The postmodern theological account of the social *imago* reflects both a return to the body as well as the philosophical turn to relationality. After Barth, many theologians insist that in order to speak of the human at all, one must speak of male and female in relation. Just as God exists as a community of divine love so humanity images God through the community of love. This social view of the *imago Dei* has been widely received because of the way in which it requires the full incorporation of women into theological constructions of the image. In the last chapter, I showed how this tradition could be improved so that the social *imago* creates space not only for women but for intersex persons as well.

This chapter will explore the connections that have been made between the social view of the *imago Dei* and human sexuality. Both John Paul II and Stanley Grenz build upon the social *imago* in their discussions of human sexuality but they emphasize the place of sexuality and heterosexual marriage to such a point that they risk transforming the social *imago* into the spousal/sexual *imago*. Their proposals sexualize all human relations as well as the relationality between the members of the Trinity. In doing so, they are inadvertently undermining traditional Christian sexual ethics and the goodness of celibacy, and problematizing the sexuality of married persons. These Roman Catholic and the Evangelical theologians risk marginalizing not only intersexed persons but

anyone unable to enter into heterosexual marriage and married sexuality. Thankfully, these dangers can be avoided.

In this chapter I will lay out the ways in which Stanley Grenz and John Paul II shift the social view of the *imago* to become the sexual/spousal *imago*. I will illuminate the dangers in their proposals and suggest ways in which these traditions can continue to uphold the goodness of sexuality and marriage without making these the primary lenses through which we read the social *imago*. I will argue that the social *imago* is the right place to begin speaking about the significance of human relationality and communities of love provided these relations are not sexualized.

IMAGO DEI AND SPOUSAL SEXUALITY
IN STANLEY J. GRENZ AND JOHN PAUL II

Stanley Grenz: Social *Imago* becomes Sexual *Imago*

Stanley Grenz acknowledges his debt to Karl Barth upon whom he builds his vision of the social *imago*, but Grenz differs from Barth in his insistence that it is not simply relationships that constitute human personhood but sexual relations. Grenz believed that Barth's construal of the relationality between Adam and Eve as the primal I-Thou relationship leads to a devaluation and final abandonment of human embodiment and sexuality.¹ For Grenz this will not do. Grenz argues that the biblical narrative does not allow us to leave sexuality behind. According to Grenz, God did not simply make two humans to be in relationship, but a male and female to be in sexual relationship. Rather than seeing the sexual dimension of the relationship of Adam and Eve as a feature of their

¹ "...he [Barth] exchanges the dynamic of sexuality, understood as the sense of incompleteness that gives rise to the drive toward bonding, for the paradigm of I-Thou relationality. In spite of his concern to draw deeply from the creation of humankind as male and female, in the end Barth leaves human sexuality behind." Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 95. See also Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 300-301.

marital relationship, Grenz sees even more significance in sexuality than that which draws humans into marriage. In his theological anthropology text, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, he explains his reading of Genesis thus:

Adam's cry of delight as the presence of the woman rescues him from his debilitating solitude, ... suggests, however, an even deeper aspect of human sexuality [i.e., deeper than procreation].² The narrative indicates that individual existence as an embodied creature entails a fundamental incompleteness or, stated positively, an innate yearning for completeness. This sensed incompleteness is symbolized by biological sex—that is, by existence as a particular person who is male or female. The incompleteness is related to existence as a sexual creature and therefore to human sexuality. Sexuality, in turn, is linked not only to the incompleteness each person senses as an embodied, sexual creature but also to the potential for wholeness in relationship to others that parallels this fundamental incompleteness. ...Hence, sexuality is the dynamic that forms the basis of the uniquely human drive toward bonding.³

Two pages later he summarizes his position, saying:

The ultimate goal of sexuality, and hence of the impulse toward bonding, is participation in the fullness of community—namely, life together as the new humanity [the believing community, the bride of Christ]... in relationship with God and all creation. ...Viewed in this light, sexuality, understood as the sense of incompleteness and the corresponding drive for wholeness, forms the dynamic that not only seeks human relationships but also motivates the quest for God.⁴

According to Grenz, it is sexuality that illustrates or symbolizes our “sense of incompleteness and corresponding drive for wholeness.” It is sexuality that leads humans out of isolation into community. It is sexuality that motivates bonding. It is the sense of sexual incompleteness that motivates the quest for God.

Rather than regarding the sexual relation of Adam and Eve as the first fruitful foundation for other kinds of relations, Grenz redefines sexuality as the basis for all

² He states in a previous paragraph: “The account of the creation of man from the earth and the subsequent fashioning of the woman from the man indicates that sexuality cannot be limited to the roles of male and female in reproduction. Rather it goes to the core of human personhood. ...Sexuality, therefore, includes the various dimensions of being in the world and relating to it as persons embodied as male or female, together with the various internalized understandings of the meaning of maleness and femaleness.” Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 277.

³ *Ibid.*, 277-278.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

relationality. He writes, “[S]exuality is the drive toward bonding in all its forms, even in the bonding that characterizes singleness”—i.e., bonding in church community and in close friendships.⁵ Elsewhere in his *Sexual Ethics*, he writes:

The drive toward bonding... is always based on our existence as sexual beings – on our fundamental incompleteness, our inner restlessness, our desire for love and intimacy.⁶

In the above quotation one can see that, instead of defining incompleteness as a fundamental component of being a finite creature, Grenz defines finitude as sexual. Sexual incompleteness becomes the symbol of any incompleteness. Whereas sexual need could have been presented as one of the many, varied ways in which humans need others, Grenz presents sexuality as the paradigm for all need, even human need for God. Thus, the fulfillment of that need—the love of friends, neighbors, spouse, children, community, church, and God—are all viewed through the lens of the sexual.

Lest we suppose that this is simply one influential evangelical who has imbibed too much of the Freudian spirit of the age, let us consider the similarities we find in Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*.

John Paul II: Social *Imago* becomes Spousal *Imago*

In his *Theology of the Body* John Paul II shows his affinity for the social view of the *imago Dei* as *imago Trinitas*.

Man [by which he means the human] became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning. ...Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. He is, in fact, ‘from the beginning’ not only an image in which the solitude of one Person, who rules the world, mirrors itself, but

⁵ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 190, 191-192.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

also and essentially the image of an inscrutable divine communion of Persons.⁷

According to John Paul II, “the authentic development of the image and likeness of God, in its trinitarian meaning, [is] its meaning precisely ‘of communion.’”⁸

Similarly, in *The Trinity’s Embrace*, he proclaimed,

Today it is more necessary than ever to present the biblical anthropology of relationality, which helps us genuinely understand the human being’s identity in his relationship to others, especially between man and woman. In the human person considered in his “relationality,” we find a vestige of God’s own mystery revealed in Christ as a substantial unity in the communion of three divine Persons. In light of this mystery it is easy to understand the statement of *Gaudiam et Spes* that the human being, “who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself (cf. Luke 17:33).” Interpersonal communion and meditation on the dignity and vocation of woman strengthens the concept of the human being based on communion (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7).⁹

Humans image God not so much as individuals but in community, and God has written our need for community on our very bodies—by creating humans as male or female. Masculinity and femininity lead us to marriage which teaches us love and enables us to participate in a union with another that corresponds to the union of the three persons of the Trinity. This marital union, according to the Pope, is specifically related to the sexual act.

The unity about which Gen. 2:24 speaks (‘and the two will become one flesh’) is without doubt the unity that is expressed and realized in the conjugal act... The fact that they become ‘one flesh’ is a powerful bond established by the Creator through which they discover their own humanity, both in its original unity and in the duality of a mysterious reciprocal attraction.¹⁰

⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 163, 9:3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 427, 77:2.

⁹ John Paul II, “Commitment to Promoting Women’s Dignity” (General audience Nov. 24, 1999), in *The Trinity’s Embrace: God’s Saving Plan, A Catechesis on Salvation History* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2002), 289.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 167, 10:2.

Notice that it is sexual union which realizes and expresses marital union and that sexual union enables the couple to “discover their own humanity.” Elsewhere, the Pope makes an even bolder statement, saying that sexual union in marriage “fulfills the very meaning of [human] being and existence”:

The human body, with its sex—its masculinity and femininity—...contains ‘from the beginning’ the ‘spousal’ attribute, that is *the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.*¹¹

What is the meaning of human existence which masculinity and femininity teach us? According to the late Pope, it is love. This is nothing new. Christians have always maintained that the center of the gospel is love; however, it is the nature of Christian love which is now under consideration. According to John Paul II, the nature of Christian love is “spousal” by which he means the giving of one’s whole self, body and soul, to another, for the well-being of the other. Just as the Father gives Himself to the Son and the Son to the Father in the eternal union of the Trinity, so spouses give themselves to one another in marriage becoming “one flesh.”

In his emphasis on the nature of spousal love as self-gift, John Paul II is developing the teaching of St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), on whom the Pope, then Karol Wojtyła, wrote his theological dissertation. St. John of the Cross was a sixteenth century mystic who meditated on the mysterious analogy between husband/wife and Christ/Church, found in Ephesians 5:21-32, and transposed the analogy from the Church as Bride, to the Bride as individual soul. St. John of the Cross remains famous for his *Spiritual Canticle*, a poetic meditation, paraphrase, and commentary on the *Song of Songs* in Spanish, in which the individual soul is the Bride and Christ is the Bridegroom. In his

¹¹ Ibid., 185-186, 15:1, italics original to John Paul II.

writings, one finds spousal longings viewed through a spiritual lens and vice versa. From St. John of the Cross, John Paul II learned a “spousal theology of self-gift”¹² and developed the saint’s “characteristic triangle of theses: love is a gift of self; spousal love between man and woman is the paradigmatic case of the gift of self; the origin and exemplar of the gift of self lies in the Trinity.”¹³ Michael Waldstein, one of John Paul II’s translators and editors, is careful to point out that the Pope never used spousal language of the Trinity. Nevertheless, his central text, John 17:10, is transposed from God the Father and God the Son onto marriage: “All that is mine is yours and yours is mine, and I am glorified in them.”¹⁴

One of the difficulties in interpreting John Paul II is identifying what he means when he speaks of conjugal love. Whereas he uses the word “sex” (in the English translation) to speak of masculinity and femininity, he rarely uses the explicit language of sexuality or intercourse. Rather, he talks of “the conjugal act,” “uniting so as to become one flesh,” “reciprocal attraction,” “nuptial,” or “spousal” love as ways to express sexual desire and action between husband and wife.¹⁵ Unfortunately, one is left to decipher if sexual love is the focus of his intention or if he is speaking of a more general marital love in which sexuality is but one facet. It is not always clear from his writings if the image of God as *communio personarum* is related to marriage in general or married sexuality more specifically.

William E. May, professor of Moral Theology at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at The Catholic University of America, has tried to

¹² Waldstein, “Introduction,” *Man and Woman*, 79.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 167, 10:2; 185-186, 15:1.

untangle John Paul II's legacy on this point. He argues that marriage is established by "the act of irrevocable personal consent." The leaving of "father and mother" and cleaving to the spouse are acts of personal consent. According to May's interpretation of John Paul II, "[t]he act of matrimonial consent is an act of self-giving love."¹⁶

A man and a woman become husband and wife when they "give" themselves to one another in and through the act of irrevocable personal consent that makes them to be spouses. And in consenting to marriage, to being husband and wife, they consent to all that marriage implies and therefore they consent implicitly to the conjugal act, the act "proper and exclusive to spouses." In and through the conjugal act husband and wife literally become "one flesh," "one body."

May distinguishes between matrimonial consent and the conjugal act. The former creates marriage while the latter creates union. One finds a similar distinction in John of the Cross who differentiated between marital consent and the conjugal act in his own writings when he separates "spiritual betrothal" (the act of promise) from "spiritual marriage" (the act of union).¹⁷ According to St. John of the Cross,

spiritual marriage is incomparably greater than the spiritual betrothal, for it is a total transformation in the Beloved, in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain consummation of the union of love. The soul thereby becomes divine, God through participation, insofar as is possible in this life. ...Just as in the consummation of carnal marriage there are two in one flesh, as Sacred Scripture points out (Gen 2:24), so also when the spiritual marriage between God and the soul is consummated, there are two natures in one spirit and love...¹⁸

For St. John of the Cross's spiritual analogy, there is certainly a progression in which marital sexual union is valued above marital promise. It is difficult to know

¹⁶ William E. May, "The Communion of Persons in Marriage and the Conjugal Act," (September 21, 2003), <http://www.christendom-awake.org/pages/may/communionofpersons.htm>.

¹⁷ St. John of the Cross describes the nature of "spiritual betrothal" in his *Spiritual Canticle*: "There he gave me his breast / There he taught me a sweet and living knowledge / And I gave myself to him / keeping nothing back / there I promised to be his bride" (St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza B 27; quoted by Waldstein, 29).

¹⁸ St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, commentary on st. 22, par. 3; quoted by Waldstein, 31.

whether John Paul II reflects the same hierarchy. The language he uses could certainly be read as indicating this same elevation of sexual union given that he speaks of the sexual union of spouses as “the conjugal act” rather than naming personal consent as the “conjugal act,” i.e., the act which creates or defines marriage. But his avoidance of the common language of sexuality is better understood as his attempt to differentiate what he would see as base sexual activity from the ideal he proposes in his *Theology of the Body*—sexual activity which is attentive to the irreplaceable personal identity of the spouse, loving, self-giving, and open to the creation of life (i.e., unhindered by artificial contraception). The unloving use of the spouse’s body for personal sexual satisfaction is not “the conjugal act.” He also wants to distinguish married sexual union from unmarried sexual union. Thus, spouses may engage in sexual acts but these can only be labeled “the conjugal act” if they meet the criteria defined above.¹⁹

In May’s own account, when he takes the time to unpack the ways in which heterosexual marriage images God, he focuses on the sexual act—not the interpersonal dynamics of emotional union, joy, or common labor, but the ways in which male and female reproductive processes image the divine.

¹⁹ “The conjugal act can be considered merely in what St. Thomas called its ‘natural’ species, i.e., according to its natural, physical structure as a genital act between a man and a woman who simply ‘happen’ to be married. But as a *human, moral* act it is an act ‘proper and exclusive to spouses,’ one made possible by their marital union. As a moral, human act it is “specified,” not by its physical structure, but by its ‘object,’ that is, precisely what the spouses are choosing to do in giving themselves to one another and receiving one another *as spouses*. The conjugal act, as a human, moral act, is an act that participates in the *communion of the persons who are husband and wife*, open to the ‘goods’ or ‘blessings’ of marriage. Non-married people can engage in *genital sex* because they have genital organs, but they are not capable of engaging in the conjugal act precisely because they are not married. The unmarried male cannot ‘give himself in a receiving way’ to the woman nor can she ‘receive him in a giving way’ precisely because they have failed to ‘give’ and ‘receive’ each other in and through an act of marital consent, an act of irrevocably giving and receiving each other. Their act of genital union does not and cannot, therefore, unite two irreplaceable and nonsubstitutable persons; it merely *joins* two *individuals* who are in principle replaceable, substitutable, disposable. Their act, which ‘mimics’ the conjugal act, is, as Pope John Paul II has correctly said, ‘a lie.’” May, “The Communion of Persons in Marriage and the Conjugal Act,” citing Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (*Familiaris consortio*) (November 22, 1981), no. 11.

[Male sperm] symbolizes the superabundance and differentiation of being, ... whereas the woman in her way symbolizes the unity of being insofar as ordinarily she produces only one ovum; she symbolizes what can be called the interiority and sameness of being.

...As we have seen, man and woman are two different and complementary ways of being the image of God. He is both the superabundant Giver of good gifts and the One who is always with us and for us, and who greatly longs to welcome us and to give our hearts refreshment and peace.

...the man, in imaging God, is called above all to bear witness to his transcendence and superabundant goodness, his Glory as the “Wellspring of the Joy of Living,” while the woman, in her imaging of God, is called upon to bear witness to his immanence, his “interiority” or withinness, his Glory as the “Ocean Depth of Happy Rest.”²⁰

We see in the above that it is spousal sexuality, “the conjugal act,” which images God in the world in discrete masculine and feminine forms. Thus does the Roman Catholic tradition insist that it is only marital sexuality that is open to new life that can aptly be described as “conjugal,” and that the conjugal act “expresses and actualizes in a fitting way the *communion of persons*” which is the image of God.²¹

Roman Catholic theologian David Matzko McCarthy summarizes this shift in contemporary Roman Catholic accounts of the image of God and sexuality, saying,

...[this] account follows modern trends by highlighting sex and sexual desire as ideal expressions of love. Sex is considered representative of conjugal love, and conjugal intercourse is considered a good and sacramental experience. Through a sexual relationship, we discover our humanity in intimate communion with each other as “Other,” and, in the process, encounter God’s grace.²²

McCarthy explains that this account arose in order to correct earlier Roman Catholic views on marriage which saw little to no value in marital sexuality beyond procreation.

In the mid-twentieth century, theological personalism emerged, in Catholic circles, as a challenge to instrumental and juridical understandings of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² David Matzko McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household, 2nd Edition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 24.

marriage. Personalism offered a challenge to the idea that marriage is not good in itself but produces only external goods like children and social stability.²³

But the new personalist account elevates sexuality to such an extent that sexual love is now seen as the basis for all Christian love.

Both the Evangelical and Roman Catholic traditions are connecting the image of God to married sexuality—male and female in heterosexual union. For both traditions heterosexual marital union is reflective of Trinitarian love. Now, there is much in these proposals to recommend them. The assertion that the meaning of human existence is love and that this love is grounded in God who is a community of love is central to the Christian faith. What is problematic is that human love, and the divine love after which it has become an image, is being labeled as sexual. This is what John Paul II and Stanley Grenz have done. John Paul II has made spousal/sexual love the paradigmatic form of Christian love while Grenz has presented sexuality the basis for all relationality. The social *imago* is shifting to become the spousal/sexual *imago*. These shifts have dangerous consequences.

UNCOVERING HIDDEN DANGERS

One of the first dangers inherent in these shifts is the sexualization of divine love. When Trinitarian love is sexualized it can lead to several problematic applications. It weakens theological arguments for traditional Christian sexual ethics. It undermines the goodness of celibacy. It adds the weight of spiritual failure to sexual difficulties.

²³ Ibid., 4-5.

Sexualizing Trinitarian Love

Whereas John Paul II is careful not to speak of divine love as sexual or spousal, his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical defended the claim that while God's love is "totally *agape*," it is not inappropriate to speak of God's love as *eros*. He admits that *eros* and *agape* have been pitted against one another in the history of Christianity where *eros* has been understood as "ascending" love while *agape* is presented as "descending" love.²⁴ While acknowledging that the Biblical authors (and Septuagint translators) do not use the term *eros* explicitly, he finds it in Pseudo-Dionysius²⁵ and defends it on the basis of the Old Testament prophets,

particularly Hosea and Ezekiel, [who] described God's passion for his people using boldly erotic images. God's relationship with Israel is described using the metaphors of betrothal and marriage; idolatry is thus adultery and prostitution.²⁶

It is the idea of passion that drives the Pope's desire to include *eros* in the description of divine love.

The philosophical dimension to be noted in this biblical vision, and its importance from the standpoint of the history of religions, lies in the fact that on the one hand we find ourselves before a strictly metaphysical image of God: God is the absolute and ultimate source of all being; but this universal principle of creation—the *Logos*, primordial reason—is at the same time a lover with all the passion of a true love. *Eros* is thus supremely ennobled, yet at the same time it is so purified as to become one with *agape*.²⁷

Like Benedict XVI, Stanley Grenz also defends speaking of God's love through the lens of *eros* on the basis of biblical metaphors of marriage—God's marriage to the

²⁴ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, I.7. Earlier in the encyclical, Benedict XVI differentiates between various presentations of *eros* insisting that *eros*, when not debased, rises 'in ecstasy' toward the Divine, [leading] us beyond ourselves. *Deus caritas est*, I.5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I.7 endnote 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I.9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I.10.

ancient Israelites and Christ's marriage to the Church.²⁸ And, like Benedict XVI, Grenz wants to defend divine passion.

These considerations suggest that while retaining the primacy of *agapē*, our understanding of divine love must incorporate aspects of the other concepts too. In fact, when stripped of the dimensions of love expressed in *philia* [friendship], *storgē* [familial affection/compassion], and to some extent even *eros*, our conception of God who is *agapē* can easily degenerate into a distant, austere, "Stoic," deity.²⁹

The relationship of *eros* to sexuality is a difficult one. Depending on their concerns, authors employ varying definitions of *eros* to suit their needs. Benedict XVI emphasizes *eros* as passion but includes the "erotic" imagery of the Prophets. Grenz adds that *eros* within the godhead should be understood as "desire for communion with the beloved."³⁰ When he considers the human condition, Grenz, like others, draws a distinction between *venus*—"the drive to propagate the species through procreation"—and *eros*—"the communion which the sex act nurtures between sex partners, which sets humans above the world of nature."³¹

'Sexual desire' refers to the need we all have to experience wholeness and intimacy through relationships with others. It relates to the dimension often called *eros*, the human longing to possess and be possessed by the object of one's desire. Understood in this way, *eros* ought not be limited to genital sexual acts, but encompasses a broad range of human actions and desires, and it participates even in the religious dimension of life in the form of the desire to know and be known by God. For many people, the desire for sex, the longing to express one's sexuality through genital acts (*venus*), is psychologically inseparable from sexual desire. Nevertheless, for the development of true sexual maturity, a person must come to terms with the difference between these two dimensions and learn to separate them both in one's own psychological state and in overt action.³²

²⁸ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 319.

²⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997., 290.

³⁰ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 320.

³¹ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 19.

³² *Ibid.*, 20-21.

Given these distinctions, Grenz is willing to include *eros* as present within the immanent Trinity, and does not shy away from calling God “sexual.” According to Grenz, God is sexual, but not because God engages in genital sexual relations with Godself or with humans; these are some of the ways in which the Hebrew God differed from other gods of the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, Grenz is willing to speak of God as sexual for two reasons: 1) because God as Trinity is relational, and 2) because God has employed gendered language (both masculine and feminine) in order to reveal Godself in the Scriptures.³³

Just as John Paul II’s work is difficult to interpret because he avoids using the explicit language of sexuality, Grenz’s work poses difficulties for the opposite reason. As was noted in the last chapter, one can see that Grenz conflates the categories of sex differentiation, gender, and sexual desire and sexual action by speaking of them all as “sexuality.” He insists that sexuality pervades every human relationship because every human relationship happens between persons who have sexed bodies—either male or female. Thus, all human relations are sexual. Although God does not have a body, Grenz still insists that God is sexual because God is relational and willing to employ gendered language.

Despite his willingness to use the language of sexuality for relationality, bonding, sex, gender, and the erotic, Grenz does draw a distinction by differentiating between genital sexuality and what he has called “social sexuality.” Social sexuality is the language he uses to describe any relationship between humans because it recognizes that all relationships are between persons with embodied biological sex, gendered

³³ Stanley J. Grenz, “Is God Sexual? Human Embodiment and the Christian Conception of God,” in *This is My Name Forever: The Trinity and Gender Language for God*, Alvin F. Kimel Jr., ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 190-212.

perspectives, and gendered behaviors. All human relations are sexual; some are genitally-sexual while others are merely socially-sexual. Thus, within his system of thought, a nursing mother's relationship to her child is "sexual" because it is a relationship rooted in the sexed body and a form of intimate bonding.³⁴

Grenz teaches that genital sexuality is to be reserved for marriage while social sexuality extends to all human interactions in this life and the life to come. Commenting on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22:30 ("At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven"), Grenz writes,

Although genital sexual activity has no place in the eschatological reign of God, sexuality will be present in various forms.

Sensuality, for example will remain... a heightened appreciation for sensual joy as is indicated by the use of sensuous imagery in the biblical vision of the reign of God. Sexuality is present in the form of the aesthetic sense, as is evidenced by the biblical vision of the beauty of the place of God's eschatological reign. But of highest importance, sexuality remains present in the form of mutuality. According to the biblical vision, the eschatological community is a bonded society... It is a society of transformed yet embodied human beings, the perfect community of male and female, in which all experience the fullness of interpersonal relationships.³⁵

For Grenz, sensuality, aesthetics, and mutuality are all aspects of sexuality. Sexuality is the broad category under which sensuality, relations, and aesthetics fall as subsets.

Grenz's conflation of sex, gender, and sexuality, and his insistence that relationality arises from sexuality, leaves him no choice but to conclude that God is sexual, even if he wants to limit the discussion to social, rather than genital sexuality—an *eros* that does not arise from bodily need or incompleteness within God but a desire for

³⁴ Lisa Graham McMinn, whose work builds on Grenz's foundation and is endorsed by Grenz himself, draws out the "sexuality" of pregnancy, childbirth, breast-feeding, and parenting. Lisa Graham McMinn, *Sexuality and Holy Longing: Embracing Intimacy in a Broken World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

³⁵ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 250-251.

communion with the beloved.³⁶ Nevertheless, despite his attempt to draw careful boundaries, this language opens the door to conclusions to which Grenz would object.

Weakening Traditional Christian Sexual Ethics

While Grenz wants to ground heterosexual sexuality in the social Trinity and limits genital sexuality to this side of the eschaton, other theologians do not see the need for such limitations.³⁷ Thomas Breidenthal and Ronald Rolheiser expand Grenz's vision of sexuality in heaven. Breidenthal writes, "I have no doubt that in heaven we will enjoy a measure of delight and fulfillment in every other praiser of God which we should not shrink from calling sexual delight and sexual fulfillment."³⁸ Rolheiser is more specific. Commenting on Jesus' statement in Matthew 22:30 (that there would be no marriage in heaven) Rolheiser insists that this does not mean there will be no genital sexuality.

What Jesus is saying is not that we will be celibate in heaven, but rather that, in heaven, all will be married to all. In heaven, unlike life here on earth where that is not possible, our sexuality will finally be able to embrace everyone. In

³⁶ "Any attempt to link God with *eros* must avoid implying some kind of divine desire for creation borne from a supposed insufficiency within God. Yet Christian thinkers readily admit the role of 'desire' not just in human sexual relations but even in religious devotion... Furthermore, ...one of the most powerful theological motifs within the biblical narrative draws metaphorically from marital love. The Old Testament prophets illuminated God's relationship to Israel through a drama depicting the betrothal of Israel to Yahweh (Jer. 2:2; Isa. 62:5), Israel's subsequent adultery (Jer. 3:8; cf. Hos. 2:2, 4-5), and God's steadfast faithfulness with its promise of a future restoration (e.g., Hos. 2:23). New Testament writers such as Paul (Rom 9:25) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:9-10) applied this dramatic motif of marital love to Christ's relationship to the church. Through his self-sacrificial life and death, Christ, the loving bridegroom (Mark 2:19; John 3:29; Rev. 21:9), demonstrated his love for the church (Eph. 5:32)." Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 319.³⁶

³⁷ "Sexuality, however, simply cannot be left behind. Marriage and genital sexual expression are limited to this penultimate age, of course. But sexuality is not. To leave sexuality behind is to undercut the significance of the resurrection. This central Christian doctrine indicates that sexuality is not eradicated en route to eternity. Instead, after the manner of the risen Jesus, humans participate in the transforming event of resurrection as the embodied persons—male or female—they are. Above all, however, *to relegate sexuality to the temporal is to undermine the basis for community in eternity*. Even though genital sexual expression is left behind, the dynamic of bonding continues to be operative beyond the eschatological culmination, for this dynamic is at work in constituting humans as the community of the new humanity within the new creation in relationship with the triune God." Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 95.

³⁸ Thomas Breidenthal, "Sanctifying Nearness" in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., ed. (London: Blackwell, 2002), 352.

heaven, everyone will make love to everyone else and, already now, we hunger for that within every cell of our being. Sexually our hungers are very wide. We are built to ultimately embrace the universe and everything in it.³⁹

While Rolheiser and Breidenthal expand Grenz's vision to include communal genital sexuality in heaven while attempting to uphold traditional Christian sexual ethics this side of the eschaton, other theologians see the need for no such distinctions.

Marilyn McCord Adams of Duke University argues that Trinitarian relations give us the theological foundation not only for heterosexual marriage but for a human *ménage à trios*, for incest, and for homosexual unions. She writes, "Whether or not, in which personal dimensions and to what extent, human *ménage à trios* can be an icon of godly love, depends in part on our varying assessments of human capacity for intimacy and functional household organization."⁴⁰ She notes the endurance of polygamy among African households even after their conversion to Christianity and identifies Jacob, Leah, and Rachel as a possible biblical example of holy marriage of three.⁴¹ McCord Adams explores the issue of incest, arguing that the problem with incest in human relations is inequality—the imposition on a minor who is unable to grant consent. But, given the full equality of the co-eternal Father and Son, incest in the Trinity does not suffer from the same weakness.⁴² Like many other theologians, she makes the connection between Trinitarian love and homosexual love following the traditional gendered names for first and second person of the Trinity.

³⁹ Rolheiser, 206.

⁴⁰ Marilyn McCord Adams, "Trinitarian Friendship: Same-gender Models of Godly Love in Richard of St. Victor and Aelred of Rievaulx," in *Theology and Sexuality*, 335.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* More attention to the actual marriage of Jacob to Rachel and Leah should provide ample arguments against (rather than for) polygamy.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 335.

Kathy Rudy takes the argument further when she suggests that the communal sex that takes place in many gay bars can provide a model for Christian community:

Each sexual encounter after that [in a bathroom or bar] shores up his membership in the community he finds there; and his participation and contribution subsequently makes the community he finds stronger for others. His identity begins to be defined by the people he meets in those spaces. Although he may not know the names of each of his sex partners, each encounter resignifies his belonging. And although no two members of the community make steadfast promises to any one person in the community, each in his own way promises himself as part of this world. Intimacy and faithfulness in sex are played out on the community rather than individual level.⁴³

A number of theologians (both conservative and liberal) have concluded that if the ground of all being is Trinitarian love and if Trinitarian love can be understood as sexual, then genital sexual activity gives humans privileged experience of God. While conservative theologians limit such divine experience to heterosexual married couples,⁴⁴ Carter Heyward argues that this access to the divine is possible apart from Christian marriage, “regardless of who may be the lovers.” Heyward summarizes the conclusions of many when she writes,

The erotic is our most fully embodied experience of the love of God. As such, it is the source of our capacity for transcendence, the ‘crossing over’ among ourselves, making connections between ourselves in relation. The erotic is the divine Spirit’s yearning, through our bodyselves, toward mutually empowering relation, which is our most fully embodied experience of God as love. Regardless of who may be the lovers, the root of the love is sacred movement between and among us.⁴⁵

⁴³ Kathy Rudy, “Where Two or More Are Gathered: Using Gay Communities as a Model for Christian Sexual Ethics,” *Theology and Sexuality* 2 (March 1996): 89-90; cited in Stuart, 49.

⁴⁴ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 206; cited in Christine A. Colón and Bonnie E. Field, *Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today’s Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 128.

⁴⁵ Stuart, 491; quoting Carter Heyward, *Touching our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*. In Carter’s (pseudonymous) conversation with her co-authors of *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, we find similar assertions: “Sexual pleasure, or orgasm, is really about *ecstasy*—at least that’s what it is for me. And ecstasy is a central religious theme, even a mark of revelation. It’s led me to suspect that controlling women’s sexuality is also about controlling alternative sources of religious knowledge. ...I am convinced

James Nelson and Sandra Longfellow summarize the conclusions of a number of theologians when they insist:

To the degree that it is free from the distortions of unjust and abusive power relations, we experience our sexuality as the basic eros of our humanness that urges, invites, and lures us out of our loneliness into intimate communication and communion with God and the world. ...Sexuality, in sum, is the physiological and emotional grounding of our capacities to love.⁴⁶

Grenz draws heavily on the work of Nelson and Longfellow, including part of their summary into his own work.

As James Nelson and Sandra Longfellow declare, “The word ‘sexuality’ itself comes from the Latin *sexus*, probably akin to the Latin *secare*, meaning to cut or divide—suggesting incompleteness seeking wholeness and connection that reaches through and beyond our differences and divisions.” Hence, sexuality is the dynamic that forms the basis of the uniquely human drive toward bonding.⁴⁷

And while Grenz may disagree with Nelson, Longfellow, Heyward, and others over how genital sexuality may be expressed, their theological foundation remains the same.

When the social becomes the sexual, when sexuality is seen as the basis for all relations—the basic form of bonding, the ground of all human loves—it becomes difficult to uphold traditional Christian sexual ethics. When God’s relationality is sexualized it can be used as justification for sexualities of many stripes.

that, to the extent that we are afraid of our sexual being, we’re afraid of God, because what is God if not the wellspring of our creativity, our relationality, our ecstasy, our capacity to touch and be touched at the core of our being?” Katie G. Cannon, Beverly W. Harrison, Carter Heyward, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Bess B. Johnson, Mary D. Pellauer, Nancy D. Richardson, *God’s Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1985), 194-195.

⁴⁶ James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow, *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), xiv.

⁴⁷ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 278; citing Nelson and Longfellow, xiv.

**Undermining the Goodness of Celibacy:
Reconsidering Matthew 19:12, Eunuchs, Intersex,
Unmarried, and the Sexually Inactive**

Another danger lurking in the connection between Trinitarian love and human sexuality, and one that returns us to the question of intersex, is the risk of undermining the goodness of celibacy—whether willed celibacy as a religious vocation, or unwilled celibacy as a disappointment and lifelong struggle for virtue outside the bonds of marriage, or on account of the death of a spouse, or the sexual unavailability of a spouse. If married sexuality is the most accurate way in which humans image divine love, if sexual union gives humans a privileged experience of Trinitarian union, then it becomes difficult to insist on celibacy as an equally valid Christian lifestyle.⁴⁸

John Paul II tries to argue against the above conclusion by insisting that the celibate life is not a rejection of the “spousal meaning of the body” but its fulfillment. Still, the late pope sees only two paths for human fulfillment thus defined: human marriage (the total gift of self to another human) or spiritual marriage (religious celibacy, the gift of self “totally to Christ”).⁴⁹ Both paths are viewed through the spousal/sexual lens, a lens the late Pope attempts to ground in his interpretation of Matthew 19:11-12, Jesus’ words about eunuchs.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Colón and Field, 126-132.

⁴⁹ “...man is able to choose the personal gift of self to another person in the conjugal covenant, in which they become ‘one flesh,’ and he is also able to renounce freely such a gift of self to another person, in order that by choosing continence ‘for the kingdom of heaven’ he may give himself totally to Christ.” John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 439; 80:6. Unfortunately, John Paul II neglects the many Christians who do not fall into either camp as married or celibate religious. His neglect of this third category only adds theological insult to personal frustration—the frustration many unmarried lay Christians experience at being treated like “second-class citizens” in the church. Colón and Field want to add another type of celibacy to that typically recognized by Christian theologians, a celibacy that bridges those actively waiting for a spouse and those committed to a lifetime of Christian singleness for service to God. This celibacy is “being called by God to live chaste lives as strong, single Christians for as long as he desires us to fulfill this role,” Colón and Field, 206, 209.

⁵⁰ “But [Jesus] said to them, ‘Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are

According to John Paul II, “This term [eunuch] refers to the physical defects that make the procreative power of marriage impossible.”⁵¹ He does not consider the possibility that eunuchs from birth—such as an intersex man with Klinefelter’s Syndrome—may very well be able to procreate but may not be able to self-identify as either masculine or feminine. John Paul II insists that the choice of continence arises from the awareness of the spousal meaning of the body as masculine or feminine.⁵² On the contrary, more careful attention to the meaning of eunuch in the ancient world actually turns the late Pope’s argument on its head.

At the beginning of this passage (Matthew 19:4-5), Jesus does indeed connect male and female with marriage. He responds to the Pharisees’ question about divorce by asking them,

Have you not read that the one who made them at 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”?

Here Jesus does seem to affirm the spousal meaning of masculinity and femininity, i.e., that humans enter into marriage because of their differentiation as male and female. On the other hand, Jesus speaks of eunuchs to affirm another way of life. When his disciples suggest that it is better not to marry than to be denied the possibility of divorce, Jesus responds by saying,

eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.” John Paul II comments on this passage, saying: “Christ’s words (Mt. 19:11-12) begin with the whole realism of man’s situation and with the same realism they *lead* him out, toward the call in which, in a new way, though he remains by his nature a ‘dual’ being (that is, directed as a man toward woman, and as a woman toward man), he is able to discover in this solitude of his, which never ceases to be a personal dimension of everyone’s dual nature, a new and even *fuller form of intersubjective communion with others.*” John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 426-427, 77:2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 416, 74:1.

⁵² “In light of the words of Christ, we must admit that this second kind of choice, namely, continence for the kingdom of God, is made also in relation to the masculinity and femininity proper to the person who makes this choice; it is made on the basis of the full consciousness of the spousal meaning, which masculinity and femininity contain in themselves.” *Ibid.*, 440; 80:7.

Not everyone can accept this teaching, 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 others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.⁵³

Jesus does not base the choice of religious celibacy on the “spousal meaning of the body” as masculine or feminine. Rather, he lists several reasons for not marrying. First, one may turn away from marriage because of a physical impairment that would make marriage difficult or impossible. This impairment may be a natural condition “from birth” or a result of violence accomplished by another. Or one may choose to renounce marriage by making oneself a eunuch—literally (through castration) or metaphorically (through the rejection of gendered expectations)—for “the sake of the kingdom of heaven.”⁵⁴

A more careful reading of Matthew 19:12 suggests that some bodies do not carry a spousal meaning. Rather, the bodies of naturally born and castrated eunuchs point away from marriage toward celibacy. The bodies of those that do not fall into the categories of male or female teach another way of being in the world: unmarried.

⁵³ Matthew 19:11-12

⁵⁴ The context of Matthew 19:1-12 suggests that Jesus views the eunuch as one who would not marry even though we have records of non-Jewish eunuchs marrying (e.g., Nero’s marriage to Sporus). There is also the question of the modern-day application of the assumption that eunuchs did not marry. Most Protestants would not prohibit a castrated male (or one who had a vasectomy—another condition that would have fallen under the title eunuch in the ancient world) from marrying a woman.

Whether naturally-born eunuchs should be permitted to marry is outside the scope of this chapter. Yet, one could propose an analogy from the same passage, suggesting that just as men and women can make themselves eunuchs so as not to marry, it is possible that eunuchs, or intersex persons, could make themselves like men or women in order to enter into heterosexual marital arrangements. Thus an intersex man would choose to identify as a male while an intersex woman could choose to identify as a female. Such were the laws regarding the marriage of hermaphrodites in the early modern period in many parts of Europe (Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 36. An expanded treatment of marital law is beyond the scope of this dissertation. What I am trying to do is lay the groundwork for such discussions so that Christian theologians and ethicists can understand the realities of intersex persons (their various conditions and identities) thus entering into such ethical debate in a more nuanced fashion.

It should also be noted that queer theologians have claimed the eunuch as “our queer antecedents,” suggesting that whatever Matthew 19:12 means, “is unclear but it evidently has something to do with people who do not follow the paths of marriage and family life. . . . Jesus seems to have sought to bring in the reign of god by calling people out of the hierarchically-based structures of marriage and family into a new type of kinship based on friendship which is inclusive of all.” Stuart, 44-45. The question remains as to whether these friendships should include a sexual component.

This does not mean that every eunuch must remain unmarried while every non-eunuch must marry. Each can learn from the other. Women and men can learn from eunuchs. Men (and presumably women) may choose to “cut off” their masculinity (or femininity), in order to make themselves “eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.” In other words, those whose bodies do carry a spousal meaning may choose to follow the example of the eunuch. Some early Christian men literally castrated themselves, others transgressed gendered hairstyles, dress or comportment because they recognized that the language of the eunuch suggested more than a simple renunciation of marriage, but also a renunciation of gender identity and privilege in the ancient world. The choice not to marry was a choice not to fulfill the requirements on manhood in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman culture or lay claim to the privileges of masculinity in a patriarchal culture. Similarly, some early Christian women rejected not only marriage but feminine identity. They removed their veils, the symbol of their femininity in its shame and subordination to all things masculine. They saw themselves as relinquishing their feminine identity for a new identity “in Christ.”

At the same time that Jesus does not base religious celibacy on the body as masculine and feminine, neither does he present celibacy as “spiritual marriage” or the avenue through which unmarried persons are to channel their sexuality.⁵⁵ In other words, those who are unable to experience the analogous union of the Trinity in heterosexual marital sexual relations are not then given married sexuality with God as their consolation prize. The metaphor of marriage presented by Paul in Ephesians 5 is not presented to celibate religious individuals but to the whole church—married and unmarried, a collective whole.

⁵⁵ Cf. Rolheiser; and Colón and Field, 214-217.

John Paul II's account of the spousal meaning of the body fails to take account of the bodies of eunuchs and intersex persons. His proposal, which bases Christian love on the spousal meaning of the body, places the intersexed outside of the possibility of love. For if, as the late Pope suggests, humans come to know love on the basis of the spousal meaning of the body (i.e., its masculinity and femininity), those bodies without a spousal meaning, without a clear masculinity or femininity, would at best know only a distorted view of love and at worst be placed outside the possibility of the knowledge of love.⁵⁶ This could not have been Jesus' intention when he elevated the eunuch from a symbol of shame to become an icon of radical discipleship. The love for God that leads one to become a "eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom" must be a love that is distinct from love that arises from knowledge of the body as masculine or feminine.

John Paul II's account of spousal love risks not only marginalizing the intersexed but anyone unable to enter into heterosexual marriage and married sexuality. His proposal actually undermines, rather than upholds, the goodness of celibacy—especially non-religious celibacy (i.e., celibacy that is not read through a "spousal" lens of marriage to Christ). The result is that, for those who would like to be married, spiritual second-class citizenship is added to the burden of the virtuous life.⁵⁷ The spiritualization of spousal sexuality can undermine the goodness of celibacy, and it can also present problems for the married.

⁵⁶ "The human body, with its sex—its masculinity and femininity—...contains 'from the beginning' the 'spousal' attribute, that is *the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift* and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence." John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 185-186, 15:1, italics original to John Paul II.

⁵⁷ Colón and Field, 127.

Spiritualizing Sexuality: Sexual Dysfunction becomes Spiritual Dysfunction

Sexual/spousal spirituality presents problems not just for the unmarried but also for the married. John Paul II presents a beautiful ideal that can feel far removed from the sexual experiences of many married persons. Eugene Rogers Jr. cites the frustration that some have expressed as a result of the spiritualization of sexuality.

Worried about the sort of idolatry that comes from too high a view of sex and marriage, a friend has complained that ‘all married couples need is to have a theologian telling them that they should not only expect great sex but *spiritually significant* sex, God help us.’ A contrary view is that of the celibate Sebastian Moore: ‘The most dramatic, indeed comic, instance of cross-purposes between the Vatican and the married, is that the Vatican sees the problem as one of curbing desire, whereas the married know that the problem is to keep desire going, which means to keep it growing, which means deepening.’ Both remarks are true.⁵⁸

Both remarks arise from the knowledge that sexuality, even sexuality within Christian marriage, even married sexuality that satisfies the late Pope’s standards for “the conjugal act” (i.e., self-giving, conscious of the irreplaceable identity of the spouse, and open to procreation), can feel at times more like a burden than an icon of Trinitarian union. Spiritualizing the goodness of married sexuality can add spiritual frustration to sexual frustration—adding to the burdens of married Christians.

Christine Colón and Bonnie Field have documented how the spiritualization of sexuality has infiltrated Evangelical teaching. They cite Gary Thomas, a regular contributor to *Christianity Today* and Focus on the Family, who “goes so far as to equate

⁵⁸ Rogers, “Sanctification, Homosexuality, and God’s Triune Life,” 223; citing Sebastian Moore, “The Crisis of an Ethic Without Desire” in *Jesus the Liberator of Desire* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 104; reprinted in *Theology and Sexuality*, 17.

sex and orgasm with experiencing God's presence through the shekinah glory."⁵⁹ Colón and Field add,

Then there is the added pressure to have children, for 'creating a family is the closest we get to sharing the image of God.' Many married couples without children will attest that they, like single adults, often feel excluded from many of the messages coming from the evangelical church, and Thomas's assertion clearly demonstrates why.⁶⁰

For those 43% of women and 31% of men whose bodies make sexual intimacy difficult, painful, or impossible, spiritual disappointment can be added to physical frustration.⁶¹ Not only must these persons struggle with unresponsive bodies or spouses, but they have the added layer of failing to experience the mystical union which sexuality is supposed to grant. For married couples with unequal sexual desire, spiritual guilt can be added to personal guilt and frustration. For infertile couples, spiritual failing is added to personal and family disappointment in their inability to image God through procreation. For those 10-40% of girls and 5-13% of boys who have been sexually abused and for the subgroup who are psychologically or physically prevented from

⁵⁹ "The ancient Jewish text *The Holy Letter* (written by Nahmanides in the thirteenth century) sees sex as a mystical experience of meeting with God: 'Through [the act of intercourse] they become partners with God in the act of creation. This is the mystery of what the sages said, 'When a man unites with his wife in holiness, the Shekinah is between them in the mystery of man and woman.'" The breadth of this statement is sobering when you consider that this *shekinah* glory is the same presence experienced by Moses when God met him fact-to-face (see Exodus 24:15-18)." Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 206; cited in Colón and Field, 128.

⁶⁰ Colón and Field, 128-129; quoting Thomas, 226, 241.

⁶¹ Laumann, et al. report that 43% (or 25%-64%) of women and 31% (or 10%-52%) of men report sexual dysfunction. Dysfunction was defined as "(1) lacking desire for sex; (2) arousal difficulties (i.e., erection problems in men, lubrication difficulties in women); (3) inability achieving climax or ejaculation; (4) anxiety about sexual performance; (5) climaxing or ejaculating too rapidly; (6) physical pain during intercourse; and (7) not finding sex pleasurable." E. O. Laumann, A. Paik, R. C. Rosen, "Sexual dysfunction in the United States: prevalence and predictors," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 281, no. 6 (Feb 10, 1999): 537-44. Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder or low libido is reported by 33.4% of women; 14.4% report pain during intercourse. Tracee Cornforth, "Female Sexual Dysfunction: Common Sexual Disorders and Causes of Decreased Libido," *About.com* (December 10, 2009) <http://womenshealth.about.com/cs/sexualdysfunction/a/femalesexdysfun.htm>. "In fact, as many as one third to two thirds of women experience some type of sexual problem at some time in their lives." Elizabeth G. Stewart and Paula Spencer. *The V Book: A Doctor's Guide to Complete Vulvovaginal Health* (New York: Bantam Books, 2002), 329.

entering into healthy sexual relations because of the trauma they have suffered, spiritual disappointment is added to disappointment with God for what feels like a failure to protect them when they were most vulnerable.⁶²

To his credit, Grenz acknowledges some of these difficulties (specifically “debilitating physical problems... due to illness, accident, or the aging process” which interrupt sexual relations in marriage) and cautions against overvaluing the sexual act within marriage. He insists that “sexual intercourse is not the ‘end all’ of marriage.”⁶³ Nevertheless, the overall value which he places on sexuality as the basis for human relationality and Christian spirituality and his description of sex as “the most intimate and meaningful act embodying the deep union of husband and wife that lies at the basis of marriage” tends to obscure his cautionary statement.⁶⁴

Sexuality is a good gift of the Creator. Marriage is a good gift of God. But the connection of marriage and sexuality to the image of God risks sexualizing Trinitarian relationality, weakens traditional Christian sexual ethics, undermines the goodness of celibacy, and risks adding spiritual failings to sexual frustrations.

These dangers are avoidable. It is possible to hold to the goodness of the social *imago* without allowing it to slide into the sexual or spousal image. This can be done first by clarifying several unnecessary confluences in Evangelical and Roman Catholic

⁶² The World Health Organization reports that 10-25% of girls are victims of child sexual abuse and cites studies conducted mostly in developed countries wherein 5–10% of men report being sexually abused as children. The Kinsey Institute, “Frequently Asked Sexuality Questions: Sexual Violence,” Dec. 6, 2010, <http://www.iub.edu/~kinsey/resources/FAQ.html#who2004>; citing World Health Organization. Sexual health—a new focus for WHO. *Progress in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research* 2004, 67. Steven Tracy cites even higher figures, listing female sexual abuse between 24-32% and some as high as 42% in “Where is God in the Midst of the Suffering of Abuse,” *Africanus Journal* 2, no. 2 (November 2010), 48; citing R. M. Bolen and M. Scannapieco, “Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse: A Corrective Meta-analysis,” *Social Science Review* 73 (1999): 281-313; and J. Briere and D. M. Elliott, “Prevalence and Psychological Sequelae of Self-Reported Childhood Physical and Sexual Abuse in a General Population Sample of Men and Women,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 27 (2003): 1205-22.

⁶³ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 92.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

traditions, reconsidering the usefulness of the marriage analogy, and returning to the social Trinity as the paradigm for the social *imago*.

CLARIFYING CONFLATIONS

The Social is not the Sexual

Stanley Grenz conflates the social with the sexual in his construction of the image of God by reading all human relationality through the language of sexuality. He justifies this interpretation on his reading of Genesis but his is not the only interpretation possible.

In the previous chapter I suggested that rather than reading the characters of Adam and Eve as divinely given prototypes of human sex differentiation, one could interpret them as progenitors of human sex differentiation instead. In a similar way, it is possible to affirm with Grenz the sexual nature of the relationship between Adam and Eve while at the same time arguing that their sexual relationality not be read as paradigmatic of all human relationality. Adam and Eve can be interpreted as the progenitors rather than the paradigm of other kinds of relations. Sexual differentiation, need, and desire may have been what led Adam and Eve to bond with one another, but the filling of the earth brought other relations—parents to children, siblings, cousins, uncles, grandparents, friends, strangers, and even enemies. Sexual differentiation and sexual desire provided the fruitful foundation for human relationality but not its paradigmatic form.

A second way to correct this reading of Genesis is to argue that even if one views the relationship between Adam and Eve as primarily sexual, it is important to see that male and female partnership is narrowed and distorted when viewed exclusively or primarily as sexual. Men and women cooperate in the world in many complementary

ways far beyond the sexual. The partnership of men and women is needed not only in marriage and parenting but in the church and at every level of society. Labeling these relations “social sexuality” as Grenz has done may actually undermine the ability of men and women to build healthy relationships that are holy and life-giving precisely because they are non-sexual.⁶⁵

Sex, gender, and sexuality must be differentiated. With Grenz, we must affirm that all human relations take place between persons with embodied sex and culturally-influenced gendered identities; nevertheless, not all of these relations are sexual, i.e., they do not arise from sexual need, desire, or action. A mother’s relationship with her child is influenced by her biological sex as well as her culturally-influenced and experientially-formed gender identity but it is not, nor should it be, sexual, i.e., based on erotic desire, need, or activity.⁶⁶ It is only by separating sexuality from sex differentiation and gender that sexual abuse and other sexual sins can be identified.

Grenz’s definition of sexuality requires a second clarification. He posits the primary meaning of sexuality as “the sense of incompleteness and the corresponding drive for wholeness, [forming] the dynamic that not only seeks human relationships but also motivates the quest for God.”⁶⁷ According to Grenz, sexuality symbolizes and teaches our need for others, thus leading us out of isolation:

To be sexual—to be male or female—means to be incomplete as an isolated individual. For as isolated individuals we are unable to reflect the fullness of humanity and thus the fullness of the divine image. We see the

⁶⁵ Christine A. Colón and Bonnie E. Field document the difficulties faced especially by single women who are marginalized and neglected (in one example a man refused to offer a woman in his church a ride home when her car had broken down) due to the inability of others to see them as anything other than sexual temptresses, in *Singled Out*, 100-109.

⁶⁶ Lisa Graham McMinn follows Grenz and Rolheiser in speaking about a mother’s relationship to her child as sexual in *Sexuality and Holy Longing*, 101. See also Rolheiser, 198.

⁶⁷ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 280.

other who is sexually different from us, and as this occurs we are reminded of our own incompleteness.

The fullness of humanness, therefore, is reflected only in community. As a result, *our existence as sexual beings gives rise to the desire to enter into community*, and thereby to actualize our design as human individuals. Sexuality, then, is an expression of our nature as social beings. We are not isolated entities existing to ourselves; nor are we the source of our fulfillment. On the contrary, we derive fulfillment beyond ourselves. This need to find fulfillment beyond ourselves is the dynamic that leads to the desire to develop relationships with others and ultimately with God.⁶⁸

Grenz should be praised for his communitarian reworking of the *imago Dei*, for the way in which it challenges the modernist illusion of an independent, self-sufficient self. Nevertheless, the paragraph above reveals how much Grenz is still battling the residual hold of modernist individualism. Rather than beginning with the presupposition that all humans (after Adam and Eve) come into this world already bonded by particular relations, already embedded within communities, Grenz begins with the modernist (Western, upper-class, masculine) illusion of the individual. Elsewhere, he wrote, “our fundamental sexuality gives rise to the desire *to come out of our isolation* and enter into relationship with others.”⁶⁹ Who is this individual living in so-called isolation? Such a description calls to mind the lone ranger who only discovers his need for community through his sexuality. Dennis Hollinger illustrates how the stereotype of the lone ranger certainly has been taken to extremes by some in contemporary American culture when he quotes a teenager who quipped: “Now that it’s easy to get sex outside of relationships, guys don’t need relationships.”⁷⁰ The assumption beneath such a statement is that men do

⁶⁸ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 193; my emphasis.

⁶⁹ Grenz, “Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships,” 621; my emphasis.

⁷⁰ Hollinger, 23; citing Benoit Denizet-Lewis, “Friends, Friends Without Benefits, and the The Benefits of the Local Mall,” *New York Times Magazine* (May 30, 2004), 34.

not need relationships, or do not realize they need relationships, unless their sexuality tells them otherwise.

Wendell Berry blames such an attitude on Western attempts to escape from the body, from physical labor, from the earth.⁷¹ He insists, “There is, in practice, no such thing as autonomy. Practically, there is only a distinction between responsible and irresponsible dependence.”⁷² That Western theologians can even posit the possibility of existing in isolation, outside of communities of dependence, until sexuality reminds them of their need for others only shows how some have been deluded by the partial success of the industrial revolution, becoming forgetful of all of the relations which enabled their existence prior to their discovery of their sexed body and sexual needs.⁷³

Berry insists that, historically, marriage was based on a number of needs well beyond the sexual. Marriage was a covenant providing for economic needs and physical security which extended the network of mutually dependent relations based on need, cooperation, and provision. However, after the disintegration of the household as an economic unit, Berry observes that the reasons for marriage have become too thin to sustain the conjugal relation.

Without the household—not just as a unifying ideal, but as a practical circumstance of mutual dependence and obligation, requiring skill, moral discipline, and work—husband and wife find it less and less possible to

⁷¹ Wendell Berry, “The Body and the Earth,” in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, Norman Wirzba, ed. (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002), 93-134.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷³ In his defense, Grenz does well to note that the help that Eve brings to Adam is not the relief of (genital) sexual need. Quoting Old Testament scholar Claus Westermann, he explains: “The words ‘a helper fit for him’ refers neither to the sexual nature of woman (so Augustine) nor to the help which she could offer to the farmer. Any such limitation destroys the meaning of the passage. What is meant is the personal community of man and woman in the broadest sense—bodily and spiritual community, mutual help and understanding, joy and contentment in each other.” (Grenz, *Social God, Relational Self*, 278-279; quoting Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 232.) Nevertheless, by defining the “personal community of man and woman in the broadest sense” as (social) sexuality, and suggesting that sexuality is what draws all humans (not just Adam and Eve) out of isolation into community, he risks deforming the very community he is working so hard to recover.

imagine and enact their marriage. Without much in particular that they can *do* for each other, they have a scarcity of practical reasons to be together. They may “like each other’s company,” but that is a reason for friendship, not for marriage. Aside from affection for any children they may have and their abstract legal and economic obligations to each other, their union has to be empowered by sexual energy alone.⁷⁴

This, Berry believes, should not be misunderstood as the distillation of marriage, revealing its lowest common denominator. Rather, the reduction of marriage to sexuality is the undoing of marriage.

...[Sexuality] becomes ‘autonomous,’ to be valued only for its own sake, therefore frivolous, therefore destructive—even of itself.⁷⁵

Grenz’s vision of sexuality as that which forms the basis of human bonding—the bonding of marriage and every other bonding which employs marriage as an analogy—provides theological justification for a warped vision of sexuality and marriage that has arisen in the modern age. Envisioning sexuality as that which enables bonding is not a remedy for a society that knows much of sexuality and very little of bonded faithful relations of any stripe. While sexuality may motivate some people to make promises of fidelity, the fulfillment of those promises has little to do with sexuality or *eros* and everything to do with *agape*. As C. S. Lewis quipped, “Eros is driven to promise what Eros of himself cannot perform.”⁷⁶

Grenz may be right to insist that incompleteness is the dynamic which grounds community, but his analysis misses the mark when he identifies incompleteness as sexual. Even when his proposal is nuanced so that Adam and Eve are properly understood as the primal form of the *imago of God*, with Christ and the Church as the *telos*, the eschatological *imago*, his insistence that Christ’s relationship to the Father can

⁷⁴ Berry, 112.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1960, 1988), 114.

be understood as sexual, and that sexuality provides the basis for the eschatological community, shows that his progressive-canonical vision of the *imago* never outstrips his initial definition of sexuality.

The ultimate goal of sexuality, and hence of the impulse toward bonding, is participation in the fullness of community—namely, life together as the new humanity [the believing community, the bride of Christ]... in relationship with God and all creation. ... Viewed in this light, sexuality, understood as the sense of incompleteness and the corresponding drive for wholeness, forms the dynamic that not only seeks human relationships but also motivates the quest for God.⁷⁷

Jason Sexton, in his analysis of Grenz's use of the *imago Dei*, writes, "Grenz finds it preposterous to relegate sexual embodiment to this age alone, because it would both undercut the significance of Jesus' resurrection and undermine the basis for community in heaven."⁷⁸ Once again we find that Grenz's conflation of sexuality with bodily sex differentiation leads him to confuse the significance of the resurrection for sex differentiation—being resurrected with personal, bodily identity, inclusive of sex differentiation (and other bodily markers of identity such as race, etc.)—and the impact of the resurrection for sexual relations.

Although Ephesians 5 employs the marital lens for the relation of Christ and the church, there are no Biblical passages which suggest that the bonding of individual Christians into the collective body of the church should be viewed through the lens of the sexual. The primary analogy used for ecclesial bonding is that of sibling relations. The church is to learn from familial love but not the love of spouses. Brotherly (and sisterly) love characterizes the relationality of the church, *apage*, *philia*, and *philostorgia*, not

⁷⁷ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 280.

⁷⁸ Jason S. Sexton, "The *Imago Dei* Once Again: Stanley Grenz's Journey toward a Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4:2 (2010): 201.

eros.⁷⁹ The analogy of sibling relations should protect against the sexualization of ecclesial love and keep us from concluding with Rolheiser that in heaven all will be married to all, enjoying sexual relations with “brothers and sisters” in Christ.⁸⁰ Reading ecclesial bonding through the lens of the sexual is counterproductive to healthy church life.

It is imperative that we untangle Grenz’s conflation of the social with the sexual. Sex, gender, and sexuality are related yet distinct. In order to do this, I have suggested several revisions: First, Adam and Eve should be understood as the progenitors of human relations, rather than those who provide the paradigmatic form. Second, sexuality is a type of incompleteness which reveals human need for others, but it is one of many needs which can build community. Finally, even when Grenz’s vision of sexuality is viewed as the primal form of the *imago*, with the ecclesial community standing as the eschatological *telos*, Grenz’s unwillingness to give up the language of sexuality undermines the promise of his proposal. Grenz’s conflation of sex, gender, sexuality and relationality can be corrected.

⁷⁹ In I Corinthians 1:10-11, the apostle calls on the believers to eschew dissensions on the basis of their status as brothers (and sisters). Romans 12 employs the metaphor of one body, but the language is of parts held together, not by *eros* but brotherly love (*philadelphia*). Romans 12:10 love (*philadelphia*) one another with mutual affection (*philostorgos*); outdo one another in showing honor. Similarly, when the various parts of the body are described in I Corinthians 12, this is followed by the “love chapter” where *agape* is unpacked as “patient” and “not jealous”—the opposite of *eros*. “Love (*agape*) must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (*philadelphia*). Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:9-10) “Now about brotherly love (*philadelphias*) we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love (*agapan*) each other” (1 Thess. 4:9). “Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature. For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection (*philadelphia*) with love (*agapēn*)” (II Peter 1:4-7).

⁸⁰ Rolheiser, 206.

The Spousal is not the Sexual

John Paul II introduced a different problem into his theological anthropology by his conflation of spousal with sexual. John Paul II avoids the language of sexuality because he wants to raise the bar of what good marital sexuality must entail. Thus he speaks not of spousal sexuality but “the conjugal act”—i.e., sexual activity in marriage that is loving, attentive to the particularity of the person, self-giving, and uninhibited by contraceptive devices. Unfortunately, by calling married sexuality “the conjugal act” he allows married sexuality to be seen as the pinnacle of marriage, the central way that love as self-gift is expressed. While it is clear that when St. John of the Cross speaks of sexuality as a metaphor for spiritual things (the 16th century saint certainly does indeed elevate sexual union as the pinnacle of marital self-giving), John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* is less explicit on this point. Nevertheless, the late pope opens the door to the elevation of married sexuality as central to human identity in the image of God.

As was noted above, this elevation of sexuality as a good unto itself arose in reaction to earlier Roman Catholic accounts which downplayed the value of marital sexuality beyond procreation.⁸¹ While the personalist account is an improvement in that it finds value in marital sexuality, it presents an imbalanced account by swinging the pendulum too far.

The chief problem in this personalist account is, not that it goes wrong, but that it says too much to be right. Every sexual act is defined as full and total, so that sex has no room to be ordinary. The act of sexual intercourse, in this theological framework, transcends its particular meaning in time, in order to reveal the complete contours of our two-in-one-flesh humanity. With this total union of body and spirit, sexual relationships are lifted out of the everyday

⁸¹ “In the mid-twentieth century, theological personalism emerged, in Catholic circles, as a challenge to instrumental and juridical understandings of marriage. Personalism offered a challenge to the idea that marriage is not good in itself but produces only external goods like children and social stability.” McCarthy, 4-5.

activities of marriage. ...Every act is understood to ritualize “a fully shared life” and the “total self-giving” of spouses. This ritual context suits a honeymoon or anniversary day consummation, but I dare to say that our everyday bodily presence is far more subtle and patient. Those who believe sex is earth shattering will put it out of marriage.⁸²

In contrast to this personalist account McCarthy wants to present sexuality in such a way as to keep it within the everyday realities of married life.

The everyday meaning of sex, in contrast, is extended through the day-to-day ebb and flow of common endeavors, joys, and struggles of love in the home. Not in an instant, but over time, we come to belong. In this regard, no sexual act represents a total self or full relationship. Rather, what we do today gains its meaning in relation to yesterday and what we will do tomorrow. For sex to have depth, it needs extended bodily communication over time.⁸³

McCarthy is working to restore balance to his Roman Catholic tradition by putting the goodness of marriage and sexuality back into their proper places. He argues that the Scriptures give a different picture of marriage and sexuality than that found in John Paul II and Roman Catholic personalist accounts.

The Christian tradition has emphasized communal love outside of the practices of marriage, particularly love within troublesome contexts, not exotic or heavenly places, but among the poor and amid disagreements and sin. Modern romantics set the meaning of love in the face-to-face wonder of wedding vows, but the Gospels use the image of the wedding banquet, as a place to deal with themes of hospitality and hope for the downtrodden. Love is characterized as a turning around for the unfortunate, as healing, generosity, and most of all, as forgiveness and reconciliation. Grace and forgiveness are basic to the theological drama of love. The stage is not the discrete context of interpersonal love but relationships of the human family and the practical matters of living well in community. The household, in this setting, is where love and sexual union are ordered to common goods and to God. Christian love, from the start, begins outside of me and you, but when contemporary theology conceives of the “Me and You” as *the* original context of love, it has difficulty bringing love and sexual desire back from the impractical and other worldly sphere of modern romance.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., 43.

⁸³ Ibid., 43-44.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 25; italics original.

McCarthy insists that sexuality can only find its proper place within the wider love that is marriage and that marriage can only find its proper place within the wider love that is God's love in the community—the church. It is marriage that means the total gift of self, not sexuality. Within the context of marriage, sexuality can mean many things. Within the wholeness of marriage, sexuality is liberated from the daunting task of having to mean “the gift of the whole self” in every sexual encounter.

Through any given sexual act, spouses might express love, desire, generosity, frustration, fatigue, or manipulative intent, but they will do so in the semantic context of a day, week, a stage of life, and a series of specific events, and all set within the broader context of a shared life. Any particular sexual encounter need not say anything earth shattering; it need not point to the fullness or full meaning of a sexual relationship. We need not be completed by our sexual complement. Most sex within marriage is just ordinary, a minor episode in a larger story. One set of sexual expressions may need to be redeemed by another, and can be. One-night stands and passionate affairs, in contrast, need to be earthshaking and splendid because they are the whole story. They are manic attempts to overcome the fact that there is nothing else. The true superiority of sexual intercourse in marriage is that it does not have to mean very much. Expressed sexually or otherwise, our ‘humanity’ is something that accumulates quietly through small steps and comes to us as a whole only when we step back, in order to look back and to imagine the future.⁸⁵

Marital love is distorted and diminished when it is viewed primarily through the lens of the sexual. Indeed, Ephesians 5 (the biblical passage cited so often to justify the analogy of marriage to the spiritual life) speaks of marital love not in terms of *eros* but *agape*, giving the example of a man caring for his own body, not through erotic self-stimulation, but by feeding himself.⁸⁶ This is not to say that *eros* or sexuality has no place

⁸⁵ Ibid., 8. C. S. Lewis agreed. He insisted that recent portrayals of sex as “rapt,” “intense,” and “swoony-devout,” and the psychologists who “have so bedeviled us with the infinite importance of complete sexual adjustment and the all but impossibility of achieving it,” combine to show us that what we need is a healthy dose of laughter about the whole thing. This is not to say that it is not important, nor sacramentally significant but, he argues, eating is also important, sacramentally significant, and morally and socially ordered. Lewis, 98-99.

⁸⁶ Eph. 5:28-30 “In the same way, husbands should love (*agape*) their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves (*agape*) his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body.”

in marital life but that healthy marriages require more than *eros* or sexual love in order to embrace the entire person.

Differentiating *Eros* from Marital Love and Divine Love

The conflation of *eros* with married love is evident in both Roman Catholic and Evangelical accounts. As outlined above, we find both Pope Benedict XVI and Stanley Grenz suggesting that biblical metaphors for marriage should be interpreted as justifying *eros* as a revelation of divine love. The question remains whether the kind of love that God displays in these actions are best illustrated by *eros* or *agape*. Both Benedict XVI and Stanley Grenz insist that marriage requires *agape* as well as *eros*; nevertheless, their arguments which justify *eros* on the basis of marriage tend to obscure this nuance.

Benedict XVI insists that *eros* without *agape* “is impoverished and even loses its own nature.”⁸⁷ Grenz writes,

Marriage as a covenantal bond brings together the two aspects of love, *agape* and *eros*. Within the context of marriage the sex act declares that the desire for the other, the physical attraction that two persons may sense toward each other (so central to *eros*), can truly be fulfilled only in the total giving of one to the other and the unconditional acceptance of the other (*agape*). As the love of the other characterized by desire for the other (*eros*) merges with the love of the other characterized by self-giving (*agape*), love in its highest form emerges. Sexual intercourse constitutes a visible object lesson of this reality.⁸⁸

Grenz also writes that adultery is “the triumph of *eros* over *agape*.”⁸⁹ Given their more balanced accounts of marital love elsewhere, it remains to be proved whether the marital love which illustrates God’s faithful love of God’s people is best to be described as *eros*

⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, I.7.

⁸⁸ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 87.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

or *agape*. Following Grenz's comparison above, it seems that "the total giving of one to the other and the unconditional acceptance of the other" is best described by *agape*.⁹⁰

When Grenz speaks of *eros* within the Trinity, he defines *eros* as "desire for communion with the beloved."⁹¹ But desire for communion expands well beyond the sexual or marital. The father depicted in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son could also be described with "desire" for reunion, reconciling communion, with his son. His desire leads him not to walk but to run to his son even while his son is "still a long way off."⁹² Similarly, two chapters earlier in Luke's gospel, Jesus says to Jerusalem, "how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"⁹³ Jesus is certainly articulating desire for communion with his estranged children, his loved ones. Yet, few would label the desire expressed in these passages as *eros*, given that they occur between Father and Son, Jesus and Jerusalem, hen and chicks, rather than husband and wife. If *eros* means "desire for communion with the beloved," it must be unhinged from the close connection to sexuality and marriage it retains in current parlance.

C. S. Lewis has quipped, "The times and places in which marriage depends on Eros are in a small minority."⁹⁴ Lewis named *eros*, along with *storge* (affection) and *philia* (friendship), natural loves which can be elevated by divine *agape* to become revelations of divine love while, nevertheless, remaining human loves. They can illustrate the love of God and create desire for the love of God but they remain distinct. Grenz is

⁹⁰ Ibid., 87.

⁹¹ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 320.

⁹² Luke 15: 11-32, esp. vs. 20.

⁹³ Luke 13:34

⁹⁴ Lewis, 92.

dissatisfied with such an answer.⁹⁵ He believes that proposals such as Lewis' "ultimately deny that the natural loves enjoy any transcendent grounding; they all lack any basis in the divine life."⁹⁶ Grenz seems worried that unless *eros* is found within God, it cannot be declared to be good. He shows the same concern when he attempts to argue that God is sexual:

God created humans to resemble in some sense their Creator. The *imago Dei* suggests that there is a connection between our essential human nature and the divine reality. As Karl Barth explains, "in God's own sphere and being, there exists a divine and therefore self-grounded prototype to which this being can correspond." But if God and sexuality are disjunctive, how can God be the transcendent ground for our human embodiment as sexual creatures? How can sexuality be "good," if it is an aspect of human existence that makes us unlike, rather than like God?⁹⁷

Unfortunately, the logic in the last sentence falters because it suggests that nothing can be good that does not find a correspondence in God—e.g., physical creation. And yet, God declared creation good even though distinct from and unlike God. It is possible that just as the creation is distinct from God and yet can "declare God's glory" and make visible "God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—" so human loves can reveal divine love, even while remaining distinct.⁹⁸

The fact that biblical authors had the term *eros* at their disposal but consistently rejected it in favor of *agape*—an obscure alternative—should not be dismissed as

⁹⁵ Benedict XVI may also have been dissatisfied with such an answer. He writes, "Fundamentally, 'love' is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love. And we have also seen, synthetically, that biblical faith does not set up a parallel universe, or one opposed to the human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man; it intervenes in his search for love in order to purify it and to reveal new dimensions of it." (*Deus caritas est*, I.8) Still, in this passage, Benedict seems to be more concerned that human *eros* is taken up in the biblical story, rather than insisting that divine love provide a transcendent archetype for human *eros*.

⁹⁶ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 318.

⁹⁷ Grenz, "Is God Sexual?" 190-191.

⁹⁸ Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20

irrelevant to the conversation. They knew of the association of *eros* with religious devotion but, probably because of the rampant association of *eros* with sexuality and fertility religions, they avoided its use. In our present society, when sexuality is replacing the religion of many, or being confused as the high-point religious experience—even Christian religious experience—contemporary theologians would do well to heed the example of the biblical authors and differentiate between *eros*, marital love, and divine love.

Reconsidering the Marriage Analogy in St. John of the Cross

Although the poetry of St. John of the Cross provided the theological fodder for envisioning spirituality through the lens of romantic sexuality, elevating marital sexuality above marital promise, the saint is also a helpful source for correcting this very trend. The 16th century monastic certainly bequeathed a legacy of spousal/sexual mysticism but he also remains famous for another treatise on the nature of Christian spirituality, a spirituality which sounds less like the ecstasy of a honeymoon and more like the daily realities of marriage which McCarthy is working to recover. St. John of the Cross gave us not only the *Spiritual Canticle* but also *The Dark Night*.

The Dark Night is an essential counterpoint to the *Spiritual Canticle*. The *Spiritual Canticle* uses romantic language to speak of longing, frustration at not being with God, desire for God's presence in anticipation of union with God. In this way it draws upon the experience of lovers, newly espoused, longing for their wedding day, for the day when none shall separate them. Such an analogy is fitting for the experience of the believer longing after God in this life, when the fullness of communion with God, the union so often associated with sexual union, is presented as a future reality—one hoped

for but not yet experienced. This is the metaphor which ends the biblical narrative, with the Spirit and the Bride saying “Come”—longing for the return of Jesus, the Bridegroom.⁹⁹

The poem continues the theme of lovers long estranged who now find themselves in ecstatic embrace, but the commentary which the saint adds to the poem is essential for keeping readers from misunderstanding.¹⁰⁰ St. John of the Cross explains:

Before embarking on an explanation of these stanzas, we should remember that the soul recites them when it has already reached the state of perfection—that is, union with God through love—and has now passed through severe trials and conflicts by means of the spiritual exercise that leads one along the constricted way to eternal life, of which our Savior speaks in the Gospel [*Mt. 7:14*]. The soul must ordinarily walk this path to reach that sublime and joyous union with God. Recognizing the narrowness of the path and the fact that so very few tread it—as the Lord himself says [*Mt. 7:14*—the soul's song in this first stanza is one of happiness in having advanced along it to this perfection of love. Appropriately, this constricted road is called a dark night, as we shall explain in later verses of this stanza.¹⁰¹

In his commentary on the poem, St. John of the Cross presents Christian spirituality as a journey which may begin with ecstasies able to be likened to mystical moments of union with God, but a journey which passes through other phases of relationship along the way.¹⁰² In this way, his narrative is a fitting analogy to human marriage, one that begins in hope and the excitement of the wedding but changes as the couple learns to navigate the many responsibilities of household management, financial

⁹⁹ Revelation 22:17

¹⁰⁰ “One dark night, / fired with love's urgent longings / - ah, the sheer grace! - / I went out unseen / my house being now all stilled. ...O guiding night! / O night more lovely than the dawn! / O night that has united / the Lover with his beloved / transforming the beloved in her Lover.” John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, revised edition (ICS Publications, 1991), Stanzas 1 and 5, <http://www.oed.or.at/ics/john/dn.html>.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, introduction to commentary.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, Book I, chapter 1, 1-2; Book I, chapter 4, 2. “After the delight and satisfaction are gone, the sensory part of the soul is naturally left vapid and zestless, just as a child is when withdrawn from the sweet breast. These souls are not at fault if they do not allow this dejection to influence them, for it is an imperfection that must be purged through the dryness and distress of the dark night.” Book I, Ch. 5, 1.

concerns, the demands of children, etc. His commentary teaches Christians not to trust moments of ecstasy, nor to despair during times of doubt and difficulty for these are all part of a Christian's relationship with God. Indeed, faithfulness in the absence of spiritual comfort is more a mark of intimacy with God than experiences of mystical communion.¹⁰³

When spirituality is likened to sexual desire, then lack of sexual desire can be seen as a spiritual problem. But John of the Cross speaks about times in our spiritual life when a Christian will lose her or his desire for God. He counsels them not to fear. "They must be content simply with a loving and peaceful attentiveness to God, and live without the concern, without the effort, and without the desire to taste or feel him."¹⁰⁴ Just as married persons go through seasons of desire and seasons of apathy in their relationship to their spouse and yet can remain faithfully married, so Christians go through times of desire and apathy and yet can remain faithful in their love of God.

The poem speaks of the joys of ecstatic union with God but the commentary warns the reader that these joys come after years of trials and faithfulness. In this way the analogy between sexual ecstasy and spiritual union is better likened to the joy of spouses celebrating their golden anniversary, rather than the excitement of newlyweds.

¹⁰³ "Those who are in this situation should feel comforted; they ought to persevere patiently and not be afflicted. Let them trust in God who does not fail those who seek him with a simple and righteous heart; nor will he fail to impart what is needful for the way until getting them to the clear and pure light of love. God will give them this light by means of that other night, the night of spirit, if they merit that he place them in it. The attitude necessary in the night of sense is to pay no attention to discursive meditation since this is not the time for it. They should allow the soul to remain in rest and quietude even though it may seem obvious to them that they are doing nothing and wasting time, and even though they think this disinclination to think about anything is due to their laxity. Through patience and perseverance in prayer, they will be doing a great deal without activity on their part. All that is required of them here is freedom of soul, that they liberate themselves from the impediment and fatigue of ideas and thoughts, and care not about thinking and meditating. They must be content simply with a loving and peaceful attentiveness to God, and live without the concern, without the effort, and without the desire to taste or feel him. All these desires disquiet the soul and distract it from the peaceful, quiet, and sweet idleness of the contemplation that is being communicated to it." *Ibid.*, Book I, Ch. 10, 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

John of the Cross and John Paul II may be correct in insisting that “love is a gift of self; spousal love between man and woman is the paradigmatic case of the gift of self; the origin and exemplar of the gift of self lies in the Trinity,” but their analogy only holds when marital love is separated from sexual love.¹⁰⁵ Still, it is good to remember that when Jesus spoke of love as the gift of self, he spoke not of marriage but of martyrdom: “Greater love has no one than this that they lay down their life for their friends.”¹⁰⁶

Heterosexual marriage is an important illustration of God’s love and the calling God has placed upon us to live in love: “God is love and those who live in love live in God and God in them” (I John 4:16). But heterosexual marital love is not entirely sexual, nor is it the only kind of love, or always the best kind of love, able to illustrate the love of God. One must not forget all of the other ways that love is revealed in the Bible, especially the Fatherly (and motherly) love of God and, ultimately, the sacrificial love shown in Jesus on the Cross. While some Roman Catholic authors have tried to show how Christ’s cross can be understood as “nuptials... the marriage bed mounted not in pleasure but in pain,”¹⁰⁷ a more careful reading of Ephesians 5:25¹⁰⁸ will show that it is marriage that is redeemed through martyrdom, not martyrdom that is redeemed through marriage.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Waldstein, “Introduction,” *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 78.

¹⁰⁶ John 15:13

¹⁰⁷ Christopher West, *The Love that Satisfies: Reflections on Eros & Agape*, 81.

¹⁰⁸ “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...”

¹⁰⁹ Evangelical Lisa Graham McMinn draws upon both Grenz and Rolheiser when she writes, “Men and women’s willingness to give up control, to serve and nurture, to create, to give sacrificially for the sake of others, to invest in authentic relationships with others reflects a God who graciously serves, nurtures, creates, sacrifices, and invests in those whom God loves. These are acts of redemptive sexuality that maintain relationships and communities that are strong and vibrant” (*Sexuality and Holy Longing*, 176). Her statement illustrates the subtle slip that has occurred in much writing on sexuality and spirituality. McMinn calls sacrificial loving “redeemed sexuality” when it would be better to present sacrificial loving as the way to redeem sexuality. Benedict XVI comes closer to this in *Deus Caritas est*

Returning to St. John of the Cross, one last observation is needed. It is important to note that when the saint speaks about the individual believer seeking communion with God, it is assumed that the reader is already embedded in the wider community of faith. John of the Cross speaks of the community, of spiritual directors and confessors as essential coaches who encourage the believer not to give up or misinterpret spiritual dryness for lack of love. Indeed, the wider monastic community is an essential backdrop for understanding the intimate communion of the soul with God. This vision of intimacy as already embedded in wider social communities leads us to the final point of correction for the connection between sexuality and the *imago Dei*.

RESTORING THE SOCIAL TRINITY AND THE SOCIAL *IMAGO*

Relocating Love in the Wider Community

David Matzko McCarthy, in his critique of contemporary theological accounts, argues that Roman Catholic and Evangelical constructions misplace the “location” of love. Romantic and theological personalists locate love between two partners who mirror the I-Thou relation. This was the model passed down from Martin Buber to Karl Barth to Stanley Grenz and John Paul II. It is the model upon which the social Trinity was first constructed. But McCarthy insists that the I-Thou actually distorts the nature of love, reducing it to the romantic two abstracted from the world, from family, neighborhood, finances, church, and world.

Christian love, from the start, begins outside of me and you, but when contemporary theology conceives of the “Me and You” as *the* original context

when he argues that *eros* (self-seeking, need-love) must be purified by *agape* (love as self-gift). Nevertheless, his justification of *eros* on the basis of marital metaphors in the scriptures shows how he, too, reduces marital love to *eros* rather than identifying *eros* as one dimension of the rich love shared between husband and wife.

of love, it has difficulty bringing love and sexual desire back from the impractical and other worldly sphere of modern romance.¹¹⁰

Instead of Me and You (I and Thou) as the location of love, McCarthy presents the home as the proper place of Christian love—not the isolated suburban nuclear home but the open home in a network of interdependent relationships within a neighborhood.

The romantic ideal of mutual absorption threatens to make friendships and other social relations appear as optional or as intrusions. John Paul II's personalism, while not quite romantic, risks the same kind of isolation. [In contrast, McCarthy suggests:] ...Our friends [neighbors and kin] enrich our marriages and home in important and practical ways.¹¹¹

More than “enriching,” McCarthy insists that marriages need other relations in order to survive and thrive.

He blames this “impossible ideal” on “the idea that marriage is a complete communion,” a bringing together of two halves into a complete whole.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ McCarthy, 25; italics original.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 123.

¹¹² This is where I must disagree with Benedict XVI's suggestion that the creation narrative in Genesis, the creation of the woman out of the “side” or “rib” of the *adam*, should be read as similar to Plato's creation account as recorded in the *Symposium* (I, 14-15). Plato recounts Zeus's division of a spherical creature with two faces, four arms, four legs, and two sets of genitalia enacted as a defense against human threat to the gods and punishment for human pride. This myth provides the narrative structure for Plato's account of love as the desire which leads one to search for one's other half—the half that will complete the self. Such a mythology supports the romantic assumption that I must find “the One” who will complete me. Benedict XVI writes, “While the biblical narrative does not speak of punishment, the idea is certainly present that man is somehow incomplete, driven by nature to seek in another the part that can make him whole, the idea that only in communion with the opposite sex can he become ‘complete.’ The biblical account thus concludes with a prophecy about Adam: ‘Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh’ (Gen 2:24)” [*Deus Caritas Est* I.11.1]. In contrast to the Pope, I would argue that there are profound differences between these creation accounts leading to alternative applications. In the Genesis 2:21-22, “[God] took one from his ribs/sides ... and the LORD God built the rib/side into a woman and brought her to the human” (my translation). Despite the possible translation of rib as side, most Christian interpreters reject the Jewish legend of the primordial hermaphrodite. The Genesis account shows that because woman was taken out of man, they belong together. Nevertheless, it is important not to misconstrue oneness or belonging as completion [despite interpretations which support such a view, i.e., *Genesis Rabbah* 17.2; cited by Kvam, Shearing and Ziegler, 82-83.]. Marital oneness is not completion. Married persons continue to need relationships with other humans and with God. It is this romantic *misunderstanding* of sexual/spousal love as “complete” which undermines the ability of spouses to sustain their love over the course of a lifetime. While there are important nuances to be developed here, such are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

It is impractical to hope that one person can be completed by another, or that one's spouse would be able to receive the 'total' personality and texture of the other. We should hope that friends and co-workers will tease out and cultivate personal qualities and make demands that our husbands and wives cannot. Even if marriage is a primary source of one's identity, it is quite a different matter to assume that we can exhaust one another's 'total' self.¹¹³

McCarthy insists that spousal communion is upheld and enriched by wider social, non-sexual relations. "I will discover who you really are as I come to know you in the company of others."¹¹⁴

Evangelical theologians Margaret Kim Peterson and her husband Dwight N. Peterson agree. Like McCarthy they blame romantic interpretations of divine love as undermining the ability of Christians (especially young Evangelicals) of entering into healthy relationships.

It is thus profoundly ironic that the lens through which many modern Christians have come to interpret marriage, the fantasy of romance, turns out to be so splintering and isolating a phenomenon. Romance, through its exclusive focus on the one true love, ends up separating people two by two from any other substantive human relationship. And as the sociologists tell us, it is in part that very separation from supportive networks of friends and family that makes many modern marriages as brittle and prone to collapse as they are.

It might be that what contemporary Christians need is less romance and more love.¹¹⁵

But how do Christians find "more love" to support their marriages when marital love (romantic/sexual/spousal love) is presented as the paradigmatic form of Christian love? Clearly, *eros* or sexual/spousal love is not enough. Again, the Petersons write,

Intimacy is not identical with romance, and marital love is not so different from other human loves that one cannot practice on one's parents, siblings,

¹¹³ McCarthy, 123.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹⁵ Margaret Kim Peterson and Dwight N. Peterson "God Does Not Want to Write Your Love Story," in *God Does Not ... Entertain, Play "Matchmaker," Hurry, Demand Blood, Cure Every Illness*, D. Brent Laytham, ed. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 96.

neighbors, and friends. On the contrary: one learns to love precisely by loving and being loved.¹¹⁶

Rather than beginning with spousal love for an understanding of the nature of love as self-gift, the Petersons suggest that the Christian love upon which marriages should be built can be learned outside of marriage—as children growing up in families, in friendships, in relations in the church. It is the wider community of love which teaches and enables the particular forms of love which marriage requires/entails.

...Christian love is unitive and community forming; it weaves people together into familial and churchly networks of mutual care and dependence on one another and on God. Husbands and wives, neighbors and friends, children and grandchildren, widows and orphans, all are adopted by God into the household of the church and invited to love and care for one another in ways that certainly include the bond of marriage but also include a range of other human relationships, all of which involve real connection, real intimacy, real enjoyment of other people, a real participation in the redemptive work of God in the world.¹¹⁷

Like McCarthy, the Petersons are working to place marriage within a broader community of love. At the same time, they warn their readers, “Many of us are unaccustomed to either the demands or the rewards of the cultivation of community, but this is a fundamental Christian virtue, one that is essential to the practice of Christian marriage.”¹¹⁸ The Petersons and McCarthy are correct to relocate love within the wider community. Their analyses invite further theological reflection.

Relocating Love in the Social Trinity

McCarthy’s critique of the theological foundations of romantic personalism points the way to the necessary correction of these traditions.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 96.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 104.

Christian love, from the start, begins outside of me and you, but when contemporary theology conceives of the “Me and You” as *the* original context of love, it has difficulty bringing love and sexual desire back from the impractical and other worldly sphere of modern romance.¹¹⁹

McCarthy highlights the Me and You, the I-Thou as the fundamental problem. While Barth and others were right to highlight the significance of relationality for humanity made in the image of the Trinity, the I-Thou model has nevertheless come to distort the social model. Others have noted that Barth’s projection of I-Thou onto the Trinity tends to “privilege Father and Son,” obscuring or marginalizing the Spirit.¹²⁰

Although Stanley Grenz leaves behind the language of the I-Thou, he nevertheless employs a model of the Trinity which also privileges the relationality between the Father and the Son. Despite his willingness to use the term “social Trinity,”¹²¹ Grenz never strays from Augustine’s model which depicts the Father and Son in loving relation and the Spirit as the bond of love which unites them.

The narrator [of Genesis 2] presents marriage as the joining of two persons who share a fundamental sameness as “flesh of one flesh” and yet differ from each other as male and female. This human dynamic reminds us of the dynamic within the Triune God. . . .the divine life entails the relationship between the first and second persons who share the same divine essence but are nevertheless differentiated from each other. The bond uniting them is the divine love, the third Trinitarian person, the Holy Spirit. As marriage incorporates its divinely-given design to be the intimate, permanent bond arising out of the interplay of sameness and difference, this human relationship reflects the exclusive relationship of love found within the Trinity, the unique relationship between the Father and the Son concretized in the Holy Spirit.¹²²

¹¹⁹ McCarthy, 25; italics original.

¹²⁰ Shults, 131.

¹²¹ Grenz, “Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relations,” 617. Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 277, 285.

¹²² Grenz, “Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships,” 623. “Only in fellowship with others can we show forth what God is like, for God is the community of love—the eternal relationship enjoyed by the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Spirit,” Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 179. Cf., Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 316; Grenz, *The Named God and the Question Of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 340.

While friendship (*philia*) and familial affection/compassion (*storge*) can be understood as including more than two persons, most theologians speak of *eros* as the love of two. Grenz locates *eros* in “The desire for communion [which] is especially evident in the relationship of the Son to the Father.”¹²³

Moreover, the theological assertion that God is love indicates that the bonding that characterizes the divine life stands as the transcendent archetype for the dialectic of differentiation and commonality present in the dynamic of human sexuality. As was noted previously, the eternal generation of the Son constitutes the first trinitarian person as the Father of the Son and the second person as the Son of the Father, yet the two are bound together by the love they share, a bond that characterizes the divine nature as a whole but also emerges as a separate hypostasis in the third person, the Holy Spirit. In this way, the love that characterizes the relationship of the Father and the Son in the differentiation of each from the other means that they likewise share the sameness of the divine nature—that is, love.

Similarly, when John Paul II draws the comparison between Trinitarian love and spousal love, he highlights the relation between Father and Son, recalling Jesus’ words in John 17:10, “All that is mine is yours and yours is mine, and I am glorified in them.”¹²⁴ Grenz sees a similarity between his understanding of the Holy Spirit as the love (self-gift) of Father and Son, and the trinitarian thought of John Paul II.¹²⁵ Both theologians employ Augustine’s understanding of the Trinity which identifies only the Father and the Son as persons who love while the Spirit is presented as the love or the gift exchanged/shared

¹²³ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 320. Grenz defends viewing the relation of father and son as *eros* with biblical references to Jesus’ earthly ministry, wherein Jesus calls the Father, “Abba.” Aside from the obvious response that the language of “Abba” would appear to support familial love (*storge*) not *eros*, references to Jesus’ earthly ministry illustrate how *eros* is apt language when understood as desire for communion with one whom one does not have. Even while Jesus does nothing apart from the Father (John 8:28-29), Jesus was nevertheless separated from the Father during his earthly ministry and speaks of returning to the Father (John 14:12, 28). In his human nature he illustrates human desire for communion with God that goes beyond the “foretaste” provided by the presence of the Spirit in this penultimate age.

¹²⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 33.

¹²⁵ “Pope John Paul II offers an especially lucid description of this eternal gifting: ‘It can be said that in the Holy Spirit the intimate life of the Triune God becomes totally gift, an exchange of mutual love between the divine Persons, and that through the Holy Spirit God exists in the mode of gift. It is the Holy Spirit who is the *personal expression* of this self-giving, this being-love. He is Person-Love. He is Person-Gift.’ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 328.

between these two. While neither denies the personality of the Spirit, the emphasis placed on the first two persons within this model tends to downplay the reciprocity of the Spirit within the Trinity. As John Paul II wrote in his *Letter to Families*, “The divine ‘We’ is the eternal pattern of the human ‘we,’ formed by the man and the woman created in the divine image and likeness.”¹²⁶

It is possible that the Augustinian model of the Trinity allows for the projection of *eros* onto the Godhead in a way that newer presentations of the social Trinity would not.¹²⁷ More recent “social” models emphasize not only the relationality of the Father and Son but also speak of the Spirit as “I” and a “Thou,” one who loves and is loved by Father and Son.¹²⁸ Reflections on divine love which begin with the relationality of three do not lead as quickly to analogies of human marriage, *eros*, or sexuality. A social model of the Trinity encourages the primacy of loves which are not restricted to a community of two. Emphasizing the difference between human marriage as a union of two and the Trinity as a union of three will highlight the difference between the type of union created by marriage and that which exists in the Godhead. Recovering the transcendent ground of love as the social Trinity places marriage and the conjugal sexual union in its proper place. It can stand as a subset, as one of the ways in which God’s love can be worked out

¹²⁶ John Paul II, “Society Depends on Stable Families” (General audience Dec 1, 1999), in *The Trinity’s Embrace*, 292; citing *Letter to Families*, n. 6.

¹²⁷ A thorough analysis of the relation between Trinitarian models and *eros* is beyond the scope of this paper but would be worthy of subsequent reflection.

¹²⁸ Stanley Grenz identifies a shift in the development of social trinitarianism between earlier models proposed by Barth and Rahner and the later models of Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Robert Jensen whose emphasis on the priority of three laid the foundation for the work of Leonardo Boff, John Zizioulas, Cather Mowry LaCugna and others. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 218-219. Emphasis on the three is of course not new, it can be traced especially to the Eastern formulae of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus. Nevertheless, the Western tradition has tended to emphasize the oneness of God before God’s existence as Trinity. And it is only in recent Western theological work that the priority of the three persons is being rediscovered. See also Scott J. Horrell, “Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 3 (September 2004): 399-421.

in human community, without elevating marital union as closer to divine union than the communion enjoyed by close friends or loving family members. Marriage is the union of two who do not complete one another but who complement and help the other all the while embedded in other interdependent relationships which uphold and enrich marital union. Marriage is not *the* icon of the social Trinity but *an* image of divine love. Marital love is upheld and embedded in the love of God that is higher, wider, deeper and broader than the love which marriage reflects.

Grenz's progressive account of the *imago*, which views the male-female relation as the primal image rather than the *telos* of the *imago Dei* offers a way forward but only when it is delivered from his insistence that ecclesial bonding is based upon human sexuality. While the human family grows through sexual union, the family of God grows through adoption—as humans respond out of (non-sexual) need to the redeeming love of God. The social *imago* as the ecclesial/eschatological community is the proper image of the social Trinity.

Conclusion

Gillbert Herdt, in his preface to the anthology, *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, explains that he employs the category “third” not to limit the options to one more than two but to deconstruct the contrasts and comparisons which arise within a binary system.¹²⁹ A fully social trinitarianism will take seriously the presence of a third who does not undermine duality but opens up the kinds of relations possible by moving beyond two subjects in relation. Reading divine relationality through the lens of the I-Thou or male-female leads more readily to the

¹²⁹ Herdt, “Preface,” *Third Sex, Third Gender*, 19.

ontological duality of Yin and Yang, rather than the fruitful community of the Trinity. It is the Spirit who enlarges the relationship of Father and Son, beyond two and ultimately beyond three, folding the multitude of believers into the perichoretic union of the Godhead.¹³⁰ It is the Spirit who guards against misreading the Trinity through an I-Thou which leaves us with little more than “the self-absorbed life of the Father and the Son, the One and the Other, exhausted in their dualism.”¹³¹

By recovering the canonical place of Adam and Eve, theologians can affirm their position as the progenitors of human relationality without holding them up as the paradigmatic form of human relationality in the image of the relational God. Relocating love from the binary model of spousal sexuality into the wider community of extended family, neighborhood, and *ecclesia* retains the social *imago* while delivering it from sexual distortions. It is the recovery of the social Trinity that can protect theologians from sexualizing Trinitarian love and from asking more of human sexuality than it can possibly bear. Such a shift should help retain the goodness of human sexuality without elevating it in such a way that Christian sexual ethics are undermined, celibacy is devalued, and sexual dysfunction is misread as spiritual dysfunction. Such a vision makes space for the unmarried, the non-sexually active, for eunuchs, and for intersexed persons to be recognized as fully made in the image of God—for these, too, are called into the community of faith as members of the social *imago*.

¹³⁰ Grenz presents the love which constitutes the ecclesial self as participation in the love which Christ has for the Father: “Paul describes the mystery of the Christian life by means of the simple designation ‘in Christ.’ According to this metaphor, believers are constituted by their participation in Christ’s own life, and their identity emerges from union with Christ. Because Jesus Christ is the eternal Son, those who are united with him share in the Son’s relationship to God.” Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 322. I would add that even though believers are grafted into Christ and enjoy his status of son, heir, brother, they nevertheless remain differentiated from Christ, even as Christ is differentiated from the Father and the Spirit.

¹³¹ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 119.

The social Trinity does provide the transcendent ground for the social *imago*—the understanding that humankind is called into being by a God who is a community of love and called to reflect that God through relations of love that restore, build, and heal community. In such a community, sex difference—male, female, and intersex—is but one difference among many and sexuality is kept in its proper place so that genuine communion can exist between men, women, and intersex persons in ways that bring wholeness to all.

This is the community which John Paul II and Stanley Grenz want to ground in the social Trinity even while both understand that the fulfillment of this vision awaits the coming of God's reign. Thus, it is to the tension of the already/not yet in the postmodern present that we turn to conclude our study.

CHAPTER 6

JESUS THE TRUE *IMAGO*: SEX, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY IN THE POSTMODERN ALREADY/NOT YET

Chapters four and five demonstrated that while Evangelical and Roman Catholic theologians begin their theological anthropologies with the narratives of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, both traditions are looking to Jesus as the true image of God and to the eschaton for the final form of humanity made in the image of God. They insist that as helpful as the creation accounts may be, these are not to be understood as the paradigm for humanity. Rather, true humanity is found in Christ as a future toward which we are moving.

JESUS AS THE TRUE IMAGE: CHRISTOLOGICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL TENSIONS

Jesus the Eschatological *Imago* in John Paul II and Stanley Grenz

Although he does not make this distinction in his *Theology of the Body*, in *The Trinity's Embrace*, John Paul II teaches that there are two dimensions of life offered to the human creature. The first is “physical and historical” and speaks to the divine image present in every human person—especially to human relationality and “the human couple’s procreative capacity.”¹ The second is “spiritual”:

¹ John Paul II, “The Presence of the Trinity in Human Life,” (General audience of June 7, 2000), *The Trinity's Embrace*, 345-346.

[It] expresses our communion of love with the Father, through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit: ‘The proof that you are sons is the fact that *God* has sent forth into our hearts the *Spirit* of his *Son* which cries out “Abba!” (“Father!”). You are no longer a slave but a son! And the fact that you are a son makes you an heir by God’s design’ (Gal 4:6-7).

Through grace this transcendent life instilled in us opens us to the future, beyond the limits of our frailty as creatures...²

Quoting *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life) he concludes:

The dignity of this life is linked not only to its beginning, to the fact that it comes from God, but also to its final end, to its destiny of fellowship with God, in knowledge of love of him.³

Still, it is not clear in John Paul II’s work whether this eschatological trajectory introduces anything new to his theological anthropology. The eschatological *imago* as “*communio personarum*” is presented as a return to the relationality found in the Garden.⁴ Similarly, he writes that “the world itself, *restored to its original state*, facing no further obstacles, should be at the service of the just, ‘sharing their glorification in the risen Jesus Christ’.”⁵

Stanley Grenz introduces his exploration of the eschatological *imago* toward the end of his theological anthropology by means of the following paragraph:

[T]he claim that by means of the *imago dei* the dialectic of difference and commonality characteristic of human bonding offers an analogy to the dynamic within the eternal triune life does not mean that the true reflection of the image of God lies in the marital union of male and female. On the contrary, the New Testament reserves this place for the new humanity and, consequently, for the church as its prolepsis and sign. What John Knox concludes regarding Pauline thought, therefore, represents well the tenor of the New Testament as a whole: love ‘belongs essentially within the Christian community and has meaning there which it cannot have outside.’ In this manner, the ecclesial self becomes the self constituted by love; yet love

² Ibid., 347; italics original.

³ Ibid., 347.

⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 400-401, homily 69:6-7.

⁵ John Paul II, “We Look to New Heavens and a New Earth” (General Audience, Jan 31, 2001), in *The Trinity’s Embrace*, 439-440; citing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n. 1047; cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, V, 32, 1); emphasis added.

constitutes the ecclesial self in a particular manner. Paul describes the mystery of the Christian life by means of the simple designation ‘*in Christ*.’

According to this metaphor, *believers are constituted by their participation in Christ’s own life, and their identity emerges from union with Christ*. Because Jesus Christ is the eternal Son, those who are united with him share in the Son’s relationship to God. Although this is the case already in the here and now, the participation in the divine life that constitutes the ecclesial self remains ultimately future, and hence it is present in this age only in a proleptic manner. The ecclesial self, therefore, is ultimately, eschatological.⁶

As this project has shown, Grenz’s progressive account of the *imago* begins with the sexual differentiation of Adam and Eve, moves from their sexual bond to Christ—the “true image”—who relates to the Father, not only through *philia* and *agape* but also *eros* (the desire for communion with the beloved characteristic of the love between God the Son and God the Father). But the *telos* of the *imago* resides in the incorporation of believers into Christ, an incorporation that draws upon the metaphor of sexual bonding in marriage. Grenz believes that his project thus avoids the error he ascribed to Barth, whose use of I-Thou relations ultimately left sexuality behind.

In a similar manner, John Paul II also attempts to preserve the value of sex differentiation through his understanding of the “spousal meaning of the body,” a meaning preserved in the eschaton despite the fact that marital relations are left behind.

the ‘spousal’ meaning of the body in the resurrection to the future life will perfectly correspond both to the fact that man as male-female is a person, created in the ‘image and likeness of God,’ and to the fact that this image is realized in the communion of persons. That ‘spousal’ meaning of being a body will, therefore, be realized as a *meaning that is perfectly personal and communitarian at the same time*.⁷

Both Grenz and John Paul II attempt to preserve the significance of sex, gender, and sexuality for human personhood by reading the relation of the believer to God and others in the ecclesial community through the lens of spousal sexuality. However, by

⁶ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 321-322; emphasis added.

⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 399, 69:4; italics original.

conflating sex, gender, and sexuality they fail to recognize that sex and gender are not necessarily preserved by a vision of sexuality that can be divorced from sex and gender differentiation. If sexuality can be ascribed of God, if *eros* can properly be spoken of as one of the loves which is shared by Father and Son, then the preservation of sexuality, while it might preserve the differentiation of personhood does not necessarily ensure the significance of *sex and/or gender* differentiation (given the traditional gendered names for the first and second person of the Trinity). In addition, Christological and Eschatological visions of humanity as *imago Dei* can be employed to challenge the place of sex/gender differentiation for human personhood as much as it can be used to preserve them. These tensions must be addressed if we are to present a balanced vision of the place of sex, gender, and sexuality in theological anthropology in the postmodern present.

Christological and Eschatological Tensions

Jesus the Man

The Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes*, lays out Roman Catholic theological anthropology as it relates to the doctrine of Christ. The authors of this document declare:

The most perfect answer to these questions [of the meaning of human existence] is found in God alone, who created women and men in his own image and redeemed them from sin; and this answer is given in the revelation in Christ his Son who became man. To follow Christ the perfect human is to become more human oneself.⁸

Earlier in this same document one finds a similar affirmation:

The mystery of man becomes clear only in the mystery of the incarnate Word. Adam, the first man (*primus homo*), was a type of the future, which is of Christ

⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, 41, in *Vatican II: The Basic Sixteen Documents (A completely revised translation in inclusive language)*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 208.

our Lord. Christ, the new Adam, in revealing the mystery of the Father and his love, makes man fully clear to himself, makes clear his high vocation.⁹

Commenting on both of the above quotations, Janet Martin Soskice identifies, “The unanswered question,” i.e., “does Christ make woman fully clear to herself?” She continues,

The Latin of the instruction uses the more inclusive *homo/homine*, but the patterning is upon Adam and Christ, both male. What can it mean for women to say that ‘Whoever follows Christ, the perfect man, himself becomes more of a man’ (§41: *Quicumque Christum sequitur, Hominem perfectum, et ipse magis homo fit*)? Do those aspects in which a woman is to become perfected or “more of a man” include only those aspects she shares with males, like her intellect and her life of virtue, or do they also include her mothering, her loving, her sense of her own embodiment which must be different from that of a man? Is Christ the fulfillment of female “men”, as well as male “men”, and if so, how?¹⁰

Recognizing the same problem that Soskice identifies, Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff feared “that the incarnation divinized maleness explicitly but femaleness only implicitly.”¹¹ Boff attempted to rectify the situation by suggesting that just as the Logos became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, so the Holy Spirit also became incarnate in the female flesh of Mary. “Consequently, Boff elevates Jesus and Mary together as representing the whole of humanity as well as ‘the eschatological event of the full divinization of men and women in the Kingdom of God.’”¹² Even though Boff’s solution will appear unacceptable to most Protestants, and even goes beyond the Mariology of the Vatican, nevertheless, he has identified one problem inherent in Roman Catholic and Evangelical Christological anthropologies—the problem of Jesus the man.

⁹ *Gaudiam et Spes*, 22; cited in Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 48.

¹⁰ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 47-48.

¹¹ Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 128.

¹² *Ibid.*, citing Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 211.

Some early Christians believed that redemption for women included their transformation into men, so that they could be fully conformed to the image of God, sons and heirs of God's promised redemption.¹³ Certainly, as Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation revealed, most ancient commentators at least presented the redemption of women as their development of *virtue*—an ideal never (fully) separated from manliness until the 19th and 20th centuries. And within the one-sex model of the ancient world, the attainment of full humanity and virtue could only be gained by moving up the ladder toward masculine perfection.

Contrastively, other early Christians, along with Origen, believed that humans looked forward to a sexless existence in the eschaton. Ironically, both traditions—the tradition of masculine perfection and that of sexless or androgynous humanity—draw from the same section of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise...

...But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.¹⁴

The tradition of masculine perfection follows the language of sonship. Jesus as Son brings about the redemption of every human, each becoming a son through incorporation into the Son. Jesus grants sonship to those who have clothed themselves with Christ. The tradition of sonship hearkens back to the last association of the image

¹³ Brown, 109-111.

¹⁴ Gal. 3:26-29; 4:4-7

with Adam and Eve in the Old Testament, found in Genesis 5:1-3 (“...he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth”),¹⁵ and emphasizes the similarity between Father and Son recalled in Hebrews 1:3 (“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being”). In this tradition, the figure of a daughter would highlight dissimilarity, rather than similarity. Grenz argues that the language of sonship emphasizes love: “this is the theological meaning of the language ‘Father’ and ‘Son,’ for in ancient cultures, the son was the heir, the one upon whom the father lavishes all his wealth.”¹⁶ But his interpretation may not reflect the genuine love which fathers had for daughters in the ancient world. It was not love which required the inheritance to be passed from father to son, rather than father to daughter; it was the expectation that the son would grow up to be like the father—becoming a father himself, in need of an estate to support his own family. The emphasis on the similarity of father and son, or the preferential love of father to son, displays the challenge that emphasis on sonship introduces for women, intersex persons, eunuchs or other “unmanly” men who did not or could not aspire to become *paterfamilias*.

I Corinthians 11:7 and 15:47-49 were read in such a way as to support this exegetical tradition:

For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man.

The First man (*anthropos*) was from the earth, a man of dust: the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne

¹⁵ “This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created [the *adam*], He made him [the *adam*] in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man [*adam*] in the day when they were created. When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.” Gen. 5:1-3

¹⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, “Belonging to God: The Quest for Communal Spirituality in the Postmodern World,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 54 no. 2 (Fall 1999): 47.

the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Janet Martin Soskice explains:

If Jesus Christ, unquestionably male, is the image of the invisible God, and we will all bear the image of the “man of heaven,” then it seemed reasonable to some to conclude that women will be resurrected as men. Augustine to his lasting credit said ‘no’ to this and rejected at the same time the more orthodox view, that the resurrected body will be “sexless.”¹⁷

Although Soskice praises Augustine for rejecting such views, Augustine certainly wrestled with the tensions of these texts so that in the same section of his *De Trinitate* he can argue that women can be renewed in the image of God as they direct their minds away from “the government of temporal things” (7.7.12) while only a few sentences earlier he stated that woman is not the image of God alone, but only when united to her husband (7.7.10). Augustine’s argument that a woman can only be the image of God when united to her husband is not the same position as that held by Barth, Grenz, and John Paul II (who emphasize the need for both sexes to adequately image God) for Augustine insisted that a man can be said to be the image even when not united to his wife (7.7.10).

By extension of Augustine’s logic, it is only through marriage to Christ, the true husband/man/image of God, that any human (male, female, intersexed, eunuch) is renewed in the image of God. As Tryon Inbody summarizes, “Jesus himself, who is called the Christ, is unique, definitive, archetypal, and normative for both the Christian understanding of the nature of God and of human beings.”¹⁸ As feminists have insisted, Jesus the God/Man has transformed both God and Man into male categories. These can function as emasculating all humans as they relate to the true “Man” or as a way to

¹⁷ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 44.

¹⁸ Tyron L. Inbody, *The Many Faces of Christology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 117.

exclude and/or oppress anyone who is not a “man”—women, eunuchs, intersexed, and unmanly men.

Christ’s unique place as True God, True Man, True Image bequeaths a complicated legacy for theological anthropology. And yet, other commentators look to this same section of Galatians, especially 3:28, as a way to counter the tradition of masculine perfection.

“In Christ there is no longer... male and female”

As Chapter 2 documented, those interpreters who emphasized the transformation of sex differentiation in the eschaton connected Galatians 3:28 with the eunuchs of Matthew 19:12 and the angels who do not marry in Matthew 22:30. Eunuchs came to be associated with angels on account of their (supposed) sexual continence, their freedom from the obligations of marriage (especially its ties to the economic structures of the day), their alternative gender, and their function as “perfect servants,” loyal to their masters over natural family ties, and able to mediate divided realms (heaven/earth, male/female, sacred/secular, royalty/commoners). Eunuchs and angels represented an alternative sex, an alternative gender, and an alternative sexuality. By connecting eunuchs and angels, the Church fathers were forced to consider the significance of sex, gender, and sexuality in the “already” and the “not yet”.

Many New Testament scholars have also noted that Jesus’ failure to live up to ancient ideals of masculinity, particularly his abstention from marriage and the fathering of children, may stand behind his defense of the eunuch in Matthew 19:12. Davies and Allison write,

Jesus frequently picked upon the names he was called—glutton, drunkard, blasphemer, friend of toll-collectors and sinners—to turn them around for some good end, it seems possible enough that Mt 19.12 was originally an apologetical encounter, a response to the jeer that Jesus was a eunuch.¹⁹

Despite their willingness to suggest that Jesus was harassed as a eunuch, all of these commentators seem to suggest that this was only a jeer, an insult thrown at Jesus because of his unwillingness to marry. None of them consider whether Jesus could have accomplished salvation for the world as a literal eunuch. While many liberation feminists have argued that the Messiah may not have been recognized as such had the second person of the Trinity become incarnate as a woman—nor would a female “Christa” have been able to challenge the patriarchal order of the ancient world—none have considered what Jesus’ incarnation as a eunuch, perhaps as a man with Klinefelter’s Syndrome, one naturally “caught-between” the sexes, would mean for Christology and anthropology.²⁰ While I am not making the case for an intersex Christ, I do want to challenge Christological constructions that assume the necessity of Christ’s maleness as well as his incarnation as “a male with the same physiological and hormonal makeup of all males.”²¹

Queer theologians have seized upon the declaration of Galatians 3:28 and proclaimed a queer Christ “whose own life and teaching runs against the grain of modern heterosexuality, a Jesus like us.”²² Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, in her book, *Omnigender*, argues that the baptismal formula in Galatians 3:28 should imply not only “that the social and political advantages of being male in patriarchal cultures were to be shared equitably

¹⁹ Davies and Allison, 25. Cf. Keener, 470, n. 30 and Luz, 502.

²⁰ Inbody, 123.

²¹ Hollinger, 85.

²² Stuart, 79. “This is good news because it guarantees that eventually homophobic and heterosexist oppression will cease. It is good news because it means that God’s *basileia* is being worked out in the queer community, but with that good news comes responsibility. We have to live out the vision of the *basileia* in our own lives and communities if we are to experience anything of its liberatory potential. This might mean following Jesus’ example of prophetic action or transgressive practice.” Ibid., 83.

with females” but that it can and should be read literally—erasing the distinction between men and women so that others are included not only in the eschatological community but in the present inauguration of that vision.²³ She looks for a literal fulfillment of omni-gender in Jesus himself, seizing upon a parthenogenetic account of the Virgin birth, given by Edward L. Kessel (emeritus professor of biology at the University of San Francisco). Kessel suggested that a parthenogenetic conception (the development of an unfertilized ovum) would have rendered Jesus chromosomally female (XX since he took his flesh entirely from Mary his mother).²⁴ His phenotypic presentation as male may have come about through natural sex reversal.²⁵ While Mollenkott’s recital of Kessel’s proposal does not list a specific intersex condition as a possible reason for “sex reversal,” I would suggest that a severe case of Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia in an XX fetus could have produced a substantial enough phallus for sex assignment as male and the development of male secondary sex development. Mollenkott ponders,

I cannot help making a connection to the Genesis depiction of a God who is imaged as both male and female and yet is literally neither one nor the other. A chromosomally female, phenotypically male Jesus would come as close as a human body could come to a perfect image of such a God. And since I do not share Kessel’s view that hermaphrodites or intersexual people are necessarily pathological or defective, it seems to me that from the perspective of his findings, intersexuals come closer than anybody to a physical resemblance of Jesus.²⁶

²³ Mollenkott, viii.

²⁴ Ironically, ancient embryology led to the opposite conclusion: “God as source of generation, and Logos, as seed of generation, . . . are symbolically male. In a scheme wherein only males are truly generative, then, in a sense, only males can truly give birth. The only true parent is the father, source of seed which it is the female task to nurture.” Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 109-110. She quotes Aquinas who defended this view. “Aquinas, in the *Contra Gentiles*, suggests that one reason why we do not speak of the First Person of the Trinity as Mother is because God begets actively, and the role of the mother in procreation is passive (IV. 11.19).” Ibid. Nevertheless, the insistence that Jesus took his flesh from his mother required her participation in more than nurturing the seed of the Father.

²⁵ Edward L. Kessel, “A Proposed Biological Interpretation of the Virgin Birth,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* (September 1983): 129-136; cited in Mollenkott, 105.

²⁶ Mollenkott, 106.

Mollenkott does not move from here to privileging intersex persons as the only adequate representatives of Jesus, as if only intersex persons should be ordained, etc. Rather, she employs this account to deconstruct the privileges conferred upon men as the only adequate representatives of a male Christ and masculine God. Her vision begins with an omnigender God, who creates humans in this image (“male and female”), who is embodied by Jesus (the parthenogenetic female-male Christ), and ultimately consummated in the male or female, male and female, transgendered community that makes up the Body of Christ, the Church.

We have already seen that Jesus of Nazareth is not exclusively a male Savior after all, judging from his/her parthenogenic [sic] birth. Now we see that Holy Scripture depicts Christian men as his/her brides and Christian women as his/her brothers. At the very least, such biblical gender blending ought to encourage those who take scripture seriously to become less rigid about gender identities, roles, and presentations.²⁷

Where other scholars use the multiplicity and overlap of gendered descriptions to argue for metaphor against literality,²⁸ Mollenkott, and other queer theologians, argue for a literal reading of transgendered or omnigendered language in the Scriptures.

Cornwall highlights the fluidity of gendered imagery especially in medieval devotion and mysticism.

Although it is anachronistic to project contemporary constructions of sexuality and gender identity back onto communities which understood them very

²⁷ Mollenkott, 112.

²⁸ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, esp. 77-83 where she draws on Ricoeur (*The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans. D. Ihde (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974); and Jürgen Moltmann, “The Motherly Father: Is Trinitarian Patripassianism Replacing Theological Patriarchalism?,” in Metz et al. (eds.), *God as Father?* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 51. Soskice also reflects on early Syriac Christian texts which included more feminine imagery in their worship of the Trinity: “All three Persons of the Trinity can be styled in the imagery of the human masculine and of the human feminine. But better still, the play of gendered imagery keeps in place the symbols of desire, fecundity, and parental love, while destabilizing any over-literalistic reading. This seems to be the implicit strategy of the Old Testament itself, where images of God as bridegroom and father jostle against one another in a way that would make an overly literalistic reading noxious.” Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 115.

differently, it is important to recognize that even Christians have not always understood maleness and femaleness, masculinity and femininity as either-or, mutually-exclusive categories in exactly the ways that one might suppose. Caroline Walker Bynum, Sarah Coakley, Michael Nausner and others have usefully reflected on unusual or even overtly “gender-bending” figurings of gender in the medieval mystics, in Gregory of Nyssa and elsewhere...²⁹ What this means is that “queer,” transgressive and “crossing” bodies are always already present to theology in its own past, and that “atypical” intersexed or transsexual bodies therefore already map onto the mixed-up, much-inscribed Body of Christ.³⁰

Reflecting on the same material, Janet Soskice remarks:

A striking medieval example... can be found in Julian of Norwich. So much has been made of Julian’s dramatic styling of Christ as mother that we almost fail to notice the splendour of Revelations of Divine Love as a piece of Trinitarian theology. ...in placing great emphasis on Christ as our Mother, she is at once provocative and altogether orthodox: Jesus was indubitably male, yet, if he is to be the perfection of our humanity, he must also be the perfection of female humanity.³¹

All of these theologians are attempting to break open the maleness of Jesus, in order to open up space for women and others. Soskice looks to the gender-blending imagery of the mystics as helpful yet metaphorical (“Jesus was indubitably male”). Cornwall focuses on the ecclesial Body of Christ in its plurality of human bodies—male, female, intersexed, transgendered, etc. Mollenkott looks to the gender-blending of both Church and Christ “him/herself.”

Like Mollenkott, J. David Hester takes the sex/gender-blending of eunuchs literally, connecting the “transgressive body of the eunuch that symbolizes the kingdom” to the “baptismal formula of Gal. 3:28” in celebration of “the Postgender Jesus” and

²⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 39.3 (Autumn 1986) : 399-439; Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); and Michael Nausner, “Toward Community beyond Gender Binaries: Gregory of Nyssa’s Transgendering as Part of his Transformative Eschatology.” *Theology & Sexuality* 16 (March 2002) : 55-56; in Cornwall, “State of Mind,” 8.

³⁰ Cornwall, “State of Mind,” 8.

³¹ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 115.

“transgressive sexualities.”³² Cornwall concurs that the maleness of Jesus is “already a complicated picture” being that Jesus stands for both masculinity and femininity. Jesus is the husband/head of the church/bride before whom men must become as submissive wives. But Jesus also stands as the (feminine) receiver, the other to whom God the Father relates as (masculine) initiator—the super-masculine.³³

Given the sex/gender-blending of Jesus’ person—either in his gender role performance or his very body—combined with the eschatological proclamation that in “Christ there is no longer... male and female” it is no wonder that intersex and transgender theologians are questioning the binary model of societal organization. The central question which frames the contemporary debate is the question of “When?”: “*when* the overturning of these sex-gender differences is supposed to take place.”³⁴

Chapter 2 illustrated that many early Christians recognized the challenge of eschatology for sex and gender distinctions; nevertheless, most relegated sexual activity to the present life—connected as it was to birth and death. The eschatological end of marriage, which Jesus declared in Matthew 22:30, was believed to indicate the end of sexual activity. After the condemnation of Origen, on account of their desire to uphold the resurrection of the body, a consensus began to form that while sex identity would remain at the resurrection, gender and sexuality would be altered in the coming kingdom. Early Christian commentators rejected the idea that sexual relations would continue after the resurrection and most envisioned a transformation of gender, particularly the transformation of female subordination brought about on account of the sin of Eve or the supposed natural inferiority of the female sex confirmed through the institution of

³² Hester, “Eunuchs,” 38-39.

³³ Cornwall countering Barth’s theological use of gender in *Sex and Uncertainty*, 79.

³⁴ Hester, “Eunuchs,” 39.

marriage (which required obedience to husbands) and the hierarchical ordering of church and state.³⁵ Although some church fathers were willing to speak of a sexless soul, and the reworking of sex/gender relations in the eschaton, they continued to draw a sharp divide between this life and the next. As Matthew Kuefler observed, their theological anthropologies protected the power structures of the present age, “rendering the genderless ideal of earliest Christianity quaint but harmless.”³⁶

Given the renewed emphasis on the place of eschatology for theological anthropology, contemporary commentators are reconsidering that interpretive move. Some contemporary theologians believe that by putting off the reordering of sex and gender to an eschatological future, significant harm will continue to be perpetrated in the present. It is the power of the eschatological vision to transform injustices in this life, inaugurating the justice of the coming kingdom, which has led theologians to reconsider the significance of Galatians 3:28 for life in the “already.” Cornwall wrestles with these complexities, noting that the inauguration of sex/gender transformation in the “realized temporal world... seems too unrealistic or utopian for most theologians to take seriously.”³⁷

I am not proposing that intersexed individuals are harbingers of the Gal. 3.28-order, liminal or united firstfruits of the coming age. It would be highly problematic to use them in this way. But even if it would be naïve to read Gal. 3.28 as a simple prophesy of sexual androgyny in this present realm, it must be read as questioning something about the way in which females and males relate to one another in God’s economy. The Galatians text implies that there is something about participation in Christ, about *perichoresis* between Christ and the church and between humans, which means that even such apparently self-evident concepts as sexed nature are not to be taken as read in the nascent new order.³⁸

³⁵ See especially Jerome, Letter XLVIII. *To Pammachius*, 14; and Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount*, Part 1, Chapter XV, 40-41.

³⁶ Kuefler, 230.

³⁷ Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*, 72.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

In her exegesis of Galatians 3:28, Cornwall focuses on the conjunction male *and* female as opposed to the comparison found in the first two couplings (Jew *or* Greek, slave *or* free). She argues,

The assertion that there is no male *and* female in Christ does not necessarily mean that there is no male *or* female; biological reproduction in its present form is therefore still possible. However, what no longer exists in Christ is the all-encompassing cipher “male-and-female” for humanity. Humanity does not exist in Christ only as male-and-female as they relate to each other. . . . wherein humans are completed as humans only by so-called sexual complementarity.³⁹

Like Mollenkott, Cornwall wants to open up space for others, envisioning “a society where sex and gender do not work as a binary but rather as a continuum or a multiplicity, and where anatomy (particularly genital anatomy) is not unproblematically used as a cipher for identity.”⁴⁰ She continues,

If male-and-female is passing away, then it need not stand for or encompass everyone; human bodies need not be altered to ‘fit’ it, particularly before those who live in them (like neonates with intersex/DSD conditions) can express an opinion. . . . The “no more male-and-female in Christ” then, means no more taxonomies of goodness or perfection attached to the success or otherwise of how a given body meets certain criteria for maleness or femaleness. . . . The end—the cessation—of male-and-female is the end—the *telos*—for humanity. This is the crux of reading Gal. 3.28 in a more than future sense, for a realized eschatology is rooted in the *already*, the possibility for the redemption of this present realm.⁴¹

Inaugurating Christ’s Eschatological Justice

While eschatology and christology do provide fruitful ground for theological anthropology, their answers to the significance of sex, gender, and sexuality are ambivalent—at times raising more questions than they answer. What can be clearly observed, however, is that those who have shifted away from the “Jesus the Man”

³⁹ Ibid., 72-73.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁴¹ Ibid., 73-74; italics original.

paradigm to “In Christ there is no longer... male and female” do so on account of a concern to address injustices in the human community in light of the righteousness of God to be revealed in the coming kingdom, inaugurated already but not yet fulfilled.

Cornwall notes how eschatology can be used either as an escape from responsibility to pursue justice in the present or as motivation to work with God in inaugurating the kingdom.⁴² Reflecting on the implications for the debates surrounding intersex surgery, she writes,

A belief that bodies will be ‘fixed’ after death sometimes makes it too easy to dismiss the struggles faced currently, but an attitude that human beings might be co-redeemers with Christ encourages endeavouring to do everything possible to eradicate enforced discommodity and promote inclusion.⁴³

She insists,

Healing is not simply about individuals, but about communities—overcoming fears about a subsuming of identity which then provoke a desperate clinging to arbitrary categories. It is this which then leads to an unwillingness to accept those who are ‘other’—the impaired, the intersexed, the liminal—perhaps out of a fear that to speak with someone necessitates losing one’s own voice.⁴⁴

The question to be answered is how best to work toward the eschatological justice which God’s kingdom is already bringing but which is far from complete. Among those thinking theologically about intersex, three solutions have been proffered: Omnigender proposed by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, the End of Gender proposal of J. David Hester and the Kenosis of Sex Identity posited by Susannah Cornwall. All three begin with an earnest desire to bring freedom to the oppressed: to intersex persons, LGBTQ persons, and anyone else oppressed by the binary gender model and the heteronormativity upon which it is based.

⁴² Cornwall, “*Kenosis*,” 187-188.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

Omnigender

Mollenkott argues that opening up the binary model to include more gender options and the blurring/queering of these categories are the ways to correct gender injustice in society. She laments,

the traditional assignment of males to the more powerful roles of the public sphere and females to the more supportive roles of the private sphere has brought with it a host of inequities. Money, prestige, influence, and honor are accorded to those who function publicly but domestic work is hardly respected as work, let alone financially rewarded. . . .such injustice renders urgent the need for a new gender pluralism, a nonhierarchical omnigender paradigm.⁴⁵

Following the recommendations of Martine Rothblatt, transman (a male-to-female transsexual) and author of *The Apartheid of Sex*, Mollenkott suggests the following changes to societal organization:⁴⁶

Children would be brought up as males, or females, or simply as persons, according to the option of their parents—at least until the child is old enough to decide and express their own gender identity. . . . In such a society intersexual babies could comfortably be brought up that way until they could express their own preference about sex assignment, hormones, and surgery.

There would be no sex/gender typing on governmental records such as birth, marriage or death certificates, passports, and motor vehicle licenses . . .

Bathrooms in a gender-fluid society would be unisex. Inside they would look like women's restrooms today: no urinals, only sit-down toilets enclosed in privacy stalls. (As I write, a marine troop carrier, the USS *San Antonio*, is being built without urinals in any of the heads, as precursor of the society to come.) Children would be taught to sit down to urinate, regardless of their genitals. To discourage sexual predators, public lavatory space would be under automatic video surveillance; but simply the fact that any person of any gender, age, strength, and sexuality might enter the rest room at any time should in itself be an important deterrent to rape or other unwanted attentions.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Mollenkott, 3.

⁴⁶ Martine Rothblatt, *The Apartheid of Sex* (New York: Crown, 1995).

⁴⁷ Mollenkott, 167-169.

Sports and prisons would no longer be sex segregated, a proposal she believes will be more equitable for all.⁴⁸

Since separate is never equal, athletes with vaginas would at last have equal access to sports arenas, practice times and areas, top athletic scholarships and salaries, and first-rate coaching. And people with atypical chromosomal makeup would no longer be humiliated by exclusion from competition.⁴⁹

In many ways their proposal suggest something like a return to the one-sex paradigm of the Classical Greco-Roman period except that in this model the differences inhering in the one sex are not organized hierarchically. In this, Mollenkott parts ways with other trans-gender theorists, such as Holly Devor, who suggests that masculinity and femininity are immature stages in human development while transgender is presented as the new model of gender perfection.

I hope and trust that in an omnigender culture, “masculine” men and “feminine” women would not necessarily be judged as immature but would be acceptable as anyone else as long as they were truly comfortable and fulfilled by that gendering. Our goal is not to produce a different gender underclass, but to do away with gender hierarchies altogether.⁵⁰

Mollenkott should certainly be applauded for her genuine concern for equality but her proposal overlooks the fact that justice often requires treating people differently rather than the same. Justice requires special attention to the vulnerable, and global statistics continue to show that women and children make up the largest percentage of the most vulnerable. When “[w]omen aged fifteen through forty-four are more likely to be maimed or die from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined” eliminating gender segregated bathrooms and prisons hardly sounds like the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 170.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 172.

most compassionate response.⁵¹ It is true that intersex and transgendered persons are also targets of (typically male) violence. It would seem that working toward equal safety for all might require paying more attention to difference (e.g., family, unisex, handicapped bathrooms) rather than eliding difference in the name of equality.

The End of Gender

J. David Hester's scheme is slightly different. Hester is dissatisfied with proposals such as those by Kessler and McKenna who employ intersex to argue that there is no such thing as sex, only gender. He reverses the constructivists' perspective by arguing that the recognition of multiple sexes eradicates the gender paradigm altogether.

“Having” a sex is different than “being” a gender, because even with the fluidity of “gender” (and therefore the implicit freedom to deviate) it presumes a stable body through which gender can be performed, or upon which gender can be carved out. But while people ponder the possibility of multiplying genders, asking what does it mean to “enact” feminine/masculine/queer/straight/bi-/trans identities, very rarely do people ponder the possibility of having no clearly identifiable sex.⁵²

Hester asks “why must we have a sex? ...The question to occupy us is no longer how do we shape the body, but how does the body *also* shape us?”⁵³

I am suggesting a fundamental alternative for gender theorists and gender ethicists to ponder: sex is far more important than gender. So important, in fact, that when sex does not fit, gender concepts will come and *make* a sex. The body is required to have a sex *before* subjectivity and agency can be ascribed and recognized (cf. AAP RE9958, The delay in naming and registering the child.) Indeed, I would suggest that the lesson from intersexed people is that the obligation of a body to have an identifiable sex is the most fundamental ethical obligation of our culture. It is only on this basis that medical intervention in non-emergent cases of intersexuality can be justified.

⁵¹ Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 61.

⁵² Hester, “End of Gender,” 222.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 223; italics original.

It is only on this basis that legal requirements for sexed identity can be explained.⁵⁴

Whereas social constructionists assume a passive body that is given meaning through culture, Hester argues that “intersexed bodies show just the opposite *as well*: there is no such thing as gender, it is all *sex*.”⁵⁵

Responding to Hester’s assertion that intersex brings about the end of gender, Cornwall counters by recalling that some intersexed persons are content with the two gender model.

ISNA, for example, insisted that claiming an intersexed identity does *not* necessarily entail situating oneself within a liminal or third gender (Herndon 2006), although some people with intersex/DSD conditions do identify as androgynous. What Hester’s argument actually implies is that intersex/DSD bodies are *postsex*, not *postgender*. ISNA’s point was that it is possible to have a clear gender (which is not necessarily the same as a permanent gender) without having an “unambiguous” binary sex.⁵⁶

Rather than arguing for omnigender or the end of gender, Cornwall suggests an alternative proposal.

Kenosis of Sex Identity

Although she is willing to draw parallels between intersex and gender-queer theorists/theologians, Cornwall also reminds these same authors to consider those intersex persons who are not asking for a remaking of the world of gender. She warns,

Making a person “mean” concepts with which they may not wish to be associated—as when an intersexed individual is held up as necessarily queering heterosexual gender-mapping even if they themselves would not wish to be aligned with such a project—risks distorting and misrepresenting them. This might be interpreted as doing violence to their personhood.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 222; italics original.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 220; italics original.

⁵⁶ Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*, 206; italics original.

⁵⁷ Cornwall, “*Kenosis*,” 186.

Following Iain Morland, she suggests that concern for “weaker members” of Christ’s body (I Cor. 12) might lead to an alternative application, namely, that it is “those whose bodies are considered unremarkable in terms of a sex-gender harmony who must be prepared to relinquish the (unsolicited) power and status which currently comes with such a state of affairs.”⁵⁸ Following the language of Philippians 2:7 used to describe the example of Jesus who did not cling to the privileges associated with his divinity but “emptied himself” (*ekenōsen*), Cornwall asks, How would such a *kenosis* be enacted? Cornwall suggests opting out of declaring one’s sex on questionnaires where such information is not pertinent and rejecting gender stereotypes in our own language or others’. She continues:

Within churches, it could be refusing to participate in disseminating teaching or liturgy grounded in essentialist, complementarist norms of maleness and femaleness on which masculinity and femininity are supposed unproblematically to supervene. Crucially, however, rather than eliding bodily differences (as Mollenkott’s “omnigender” society threatens to do), a multiplicity and immense range of variation should be acknowledged and celebrated.⁵⁹

Moreland goes even further, suggesting “Non-intersexed people who seek justice for the intersexed should refuse the identities ‘male’ or ‘female.’”⁶⁰ J. David Hester heeds Moreland’s example by listing his gender as “whatever” on his webpage.⁶¹ Still, there is arguably more fluidity for the category of gender—especially given Hester’s call for the “end of gender.” However, refusing to identify as male or female when the category fits does not aid in personal identification. It might be more helpful to allow other markers

⁵⁸ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁹ Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*, 105.

⁶⁰ Iain Moreland, “Narrating Intersex: On the Ethical Critique of the Medical Management of Intersexuality, 1985-2005,” PhD thesis (Royal Holloway: University of London, 2005), 131; cited in Cornwall, “*Kenosis*,” 189.

⁶¹ http://www.ars-rhetorica.net/J_David_Hester/About_Me.html.

into the category of sex, such as intersex, male-to-female transsexual (transwoman), female-to-male transsexual (transman), etc. for identification purposes on governmental and medical records.

Still, Cornwall's more modest suggestions do merit consideration, especially as one recognizes the privilege—"the (unsolicited) power and status"—attending unambiguous bodies.⁶² "Kenosis for non-intersexed people necessitates thinking ourselves into the margins—not in order to colonize experience which is not ours" but in order to learn from and work with the intersexed for justice and inclusion.⁶³ She agrees with Hester who has argued that "one strategy for overcoming the marginalization of people with intersex/DSD conditions might be one which recognizes that 'healing' is not 'healing from', but living comfortably and healthily with oneself as intersex."⁶⁴

Certainly communities of care, educated about intersex and willing to learn from the experiences of others, can aid in this kind of healing but only as they learn to overcome their own fears which intersex can raise. Cornwall highlights these fears by comparing intersex with disability. She names what Frances Young, Jean Vanier, and others have noted, that "the able bodied fear the disabled not because disability is so far away from the 'good' body but because it is so close."⁶⁵ Just as Peter Brown's study revealed that ancient eunuchs were feared because they were reminders of what men

⁶² Cornwall, "Kenosis," 188.

⁶³ Ibid., 197.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 183; citing J. David Hester, "Intersex(es) and Alternative Strategies of Healing: Medicine, Social Imperatives and Counter Communities of Identity," (published in German) in *Zeitschrift für Ethik in der Medizin* (2004); available in English at http://www.ars-rhetorica.net/J_David_Hester/Intersexes_files/AlternativeStrategies.pdf, 5.

⁶⁵ Cornwall, "Kenosis," 195; citing Frances M. Young, *Face to Face: A Narrative Essay in the Theology of Suffering* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 170. See also Jean Vanier with Krista Tippett, "The Wisdom of Tenderness," ([interviewed] October 28, 2007, [aired] December 20, 2007, and December 24, 2009), <http://being.publicradio.org/programs/2009/wisdom-of-tenderness>.

could become, so Cornwall suggests that the non-intersexed fear the intersexed for similar reasons.⁶⁶

There are those of us whose bodies match the current criteria for accepted maleness or femaleness, but this does not necessarily mean that this will be so forever. Perhaps intersexed bodies threaten non-intersexed people because, as historian and activist for intersex issues Alice Dreger says, ‘The questioned body forces us to ask exactly what it is—if anything—that makes the rest of us unquestionable.’⁶⁷

Returning to the question of eschatology, Cornwall suggests that “rather than assuming intersexed bodies will be perfected to unambiguity, we ought to ask what eschatologies of perfection suggest about our own body anxieties.”⁶⁸ Working from the question of the resurrection of non-intersexed bodies to those of the intersexed, she ponders:

Both male and female bodies have already undergone enormous changes, particularly at puberty, before reaching adulthood. The bodies of women who have borne children also appear different afterwards: is it the pre- or post-motherhood body that is more perfect and will be retained in the general resurrection? What body might we expect for someone shorn of an undersized penis and brought up as a girl, who has decided to make the best of a bad gender-assignment despite experiencing gender dysphoria? *Quite simply, it is neither possible nor desirable to specify what resurrection bodies will be like; but the one thing they will all share will be a redeemed body story rather than an unproblematically ‘perfected’ body by human standards.* ...Conceivably, the pain and prejudice attached to a particular physical configuration will melt away without thereby erasing either the beauty of that specific configuration, or the genealogical importance of the life lived in this body in its joy and woundedness.⁶⁹

Cornwall believes that an eschatological vision of inclusion is a powerful motivator to aid Christians seeking justice for the intersexed in the present. Such communities of care bring healing not only to those intersexed persons who have experienced exclusion and shame but can also work to heal the non-intersexed of their own bodily anxieties.

⁶⁶ Brown, 10-11.

⁶⁷ Cornwall, “Kenosis,” 195-196; citing Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*,

6.

⁶⁸ Cornwall, “Kenosis,” 184.

⁶⁹ Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*, 189; emphasis added.

Evaluating the Contributions of Mollenkott, Hester, and Cornwall

Mollenkott, Hester, and Cornwall have provided important and thoughtful contributions to the challenges which intersex raises for Christian theology and ecclesial communities. They are right to point out the injustices that have been and continue to be perpetrated in societies which privilege unambiguous bodies, one sex over another, and certain gendered behaviors over others. They raise prophetic voices, calling Christians to account for our failings in these areas, preaching repentance, and culling the scriptures and the history of Christianity for resources in order to stem the tide of injustice and work for the inbreaking of God's eschatological justice. Evaluating the devastating effects of sex/gender abuse around the world, *New York Times* correspondents Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn have surmised:

In the nineteenth century, the central moral challenge was slavery. In the twentieth century, it was the battle against totalitarianism. We believe that in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality around the world.⁷⁰

Certainly Mollenkott, Hester, and Cornwall are right that working with God to bring about Christ's eschatological justice should include not just equality for women but also justice and equality for the intersexed whose contributions and abuses have yet to be recorded in most histories. And yet, questions remain how best to accomplish this.

Despite their careful attention to the voices of some intersexed persons and a number of insightful contributions for bringing about greater measures of justice, the proposals of Mollenkott, Hester, and Cornwall come with baggage likely to prejudice more conservative Christians against even their more modest contributions. The structural changes they recommend, namely, the dismantling of "heteronormativity," go

⁷⁰ Kristof and WuDunn, xvii.

well beyond opening up space for the intersexed in our communities. While they disagree in their proposed solutions, Mollenkott and Cornwall both work from the premise that, because intersex challenges the binary framework, that framework should be eliminated.⁷¹ Cornwall writes,

intersex does not only exist as an example of something which stands between two distinct things; actually, it problematizes the model of their being two distinct things in the first place. Intersex shows that human sex is not a simple binary; and, since any exception to a dualistic model necessarily undermines the model in its entirety, this makes essentialist assumptions about what constitutes ‘concrete facts’ even more precarious.⁷²

Because they view “heteronormativity” as the central problem, they are working not only to open up space for the intersexed but also to dismantle entirely the system upon which Christian marriage has been established. They supply no rationale for heterosexual coupling beyond procreation and no reason for marriage—the permanence of the sexual bond—beyond personal preference. Following Kathy Rudy’s work, in *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics* Mollenkott writes,⁷³

the pertinent question is not whether we are living monogamously or in communities where loving support exists in a different pattern, but whether our acts unite us into one body and whether our contexts enable our lives to transcend meaninglessness.⁷⁴

And again,

To expand on one of Kathy Rudy’s statements, ‘When sex acts [or identities or even performances], whether gay or straight [or otherwise], monogamous or communal, function in a way that leads us to God, they ought to be

⁷¹ “In short, intersexual people are the best biological evidence we have that the binary gender construct is totally inadequate and is causing terrific injustice and unnecessary suffering.” Mollenkott, 51.

⁷² Cornwall, “State of Mind,” 17.

⁷³ Kathy Rudy, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

⁷⁴ Mollenkott, 162.

considered moral. The family does not guarantee such moral status, and indeed sometimes prevents us from fully participating in community...⁷⁵

How to discern which acts lead us to God is a question Mollenkott neither raises nor answers. While it is true that the family does not guarantee the moral status of sexual acts—abuse within the family is of grave concern for all Christian theologians—it is not evident that dismantling the family is the best solution.

Cornwall, also following Rudy, makes a case for polyamory and communal sexual activity. She qualifies her ethic by saying,

There might still, and always, be aspects of some behaviors held to be incompatible with certain tenets of Christianity: it would be difficult to argue that any kind of non-consensual sex, such as rape or sex with children, could be deemed just or pleasurable for everyone concerned.⁷⁶

Like Kessler and McKenna, they are quick to look to technological interventions in matters of procreation as a reason to dismiss the good of heterosexual marriage.

McKenna and Kessler write,

Some people, at some points in their lives, might wish to be identified as sperm or egg cell carriers. Except for those times, there need be no differentiation among people on *any* of the dichotomies which gender implies. Because the reproductive dichotomy would not be constituted as a lifetime dichotomy, it would not be an essential characteristic of people. Even the reproductive *dichotomy* might someday be eliminated through technology.⁷⁷

Georgia Warnke makes a similar jump from intersex to the infertility of some, the non-reproductive choices of others, to reproductive technologies:

Finally, with the present and future birth technologies of sperm banks, artificial insemination, artificial wombs, and cloning, and with the availability of these to ‘men’ as well as ‘women’ our current identities as male or female, as well as heterosexual or homosexual, seem at the very least unnecessary.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁷⁶ Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty*, 220-221.

⁷⁷ Kessler and McKenna, 166.

⁷⁸ Georgia Warnke, “Intersexuality and the Categories of Sex,” *Hypatia* 16, no. 3 (Summer 2001),

While some point out the theological good of adoption, they fail to address the reality which Dennis Hollinger accurately describes:

In adoption we are responding to a tragic or unfortunate situation with a loving acceptance of a child in our midst... we are not giving moral sanction to the situation in which the child was conceived. Often adoption is necessary because procreation has been pulled apart from the other dimensions of sex... To agree to surrogacy [and a number of other reproductive technologies], however, is generally to put our ethical approval upon the severing of procreation from the other dimensions of sex.⁷⁹

For Hollinger, sex is not exclusively tied to procreation, but also is intended by God to mean marriage, love, pleasure, and the complementarity of male and female.⁸⁰ Raising children within their own loving biological family is the ideal with which we tamper only at our peril. Loving adoptive families provide a necessary and salutary service in response to the breakdown of the original ideal. Discarding the family in order to correct gender injustice may inadvertently introduce other social problems. Bringing justice to the family seems, to me, to be the wiser course of action.

“Compulsory” Heterosexuality and Binary Gender Model

Cornwall, Mollenkott, and Warnke follow Judith Butler in her assessment that “gender identity” is a “regulatory ideal” resulting from “compulsory heterosexuality.”⁸¹ Butler’s is a strong critique. While I do believe that the Christian Scriptures reveal heterosexuality as a God-given good, and while I concede that heterosexuality was virtually compulsory in ancient Israel, Jesus’ statement in Matthew 19:12 opened up space not only for the alternative gender identities of eunuchs but made heterosexuality no longer compulsory, for naturally born eunuchs, eunuchs made so by others, and those

⁷⁹ Hollinger, 215.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24.

who make themselves eunuchs. Some scholars have attempted to connect the figure of the eunuch to homosexual, bisexual, and queer sexualities.⁸² They are certainly correct in noting that many non-Jewish eunuchs were sexually active in these ways. Still, their arguments suggesting that Jesus was overturning the goodness of heterosexuality must be recognized as arguments from silence, especially in the face of the weight of biblical evidence for heterosexual marriage and against alternative sexual activity.⁸³

Although it may sound medieval to many postmodern theorists and theologians, I am still ready to defend the goodness of heterosexual marriage, not entirely on account of its procreative potential but certainly viewing procreative complementarity as a major part of the divine design for sexuality. Like Grenz and Hollinger, I value the Roman Catholic position which emphasizes both the “unitive and procreative” meanings of marriage, while demurring with these same Evangelicals (and some Roman Catholics) that the meanings of marriage do not need to be united in every sex act in order to be

⁸² Some, in order to recommend celibacy for eunuchs, others in order to overturn heterosexual ethics: “This flouting [of heterosexual norms] is particularly evident in the part played by eunuchs in the history of salvation. Nancy Wilson from a lesbian perspective and Victoria Kolakowski from a transgendered perspective argue that eunuchs are our queer antecedents.” Stuart, 44.

⁸³ As I stated in my introduction, the debate over Christian sexual ethics is beyond the scope of this dissertation, especially as it has been handled adequately elsewhere. Eugene F. Rogers Jr. has provided a number of thoughtful, theological defenses of homosexual unions in his anthology, *Theology and Sexuality*, along with his own essay, “Sanctification, Homosexuality, and God’s Triune Life,” in the same volume *Theology*, 217-246. While I appreciate his, and others’, careful work, my own position remains closer to those of Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?*; Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians*; and especially William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*. Like Webb, who acknowledges that his vision of gender egalitarianism is his best reading of Scripture but could be mistaken, I acknowledge that I may also be mistaken in my reading of sexual activity as restricted to heterosexual marriage; nevertheless, as much as I have great respect and love for certain lesbians and gays whom I know, and my heart breaks with them for the pain most have experienced, I cannot in good conscience affirm a practicing homosexual lifestyle from the Bible. I am unsympathetic to more radical proposals, such as those found in Elizabeth Stuart, ed., *Religion is a Queer Thing*. Stuart rightly observes that debates over gay marriage are really discussions as to how far heterosexual marriage can be stretched. She laments that this fails to address bisexual persons as well as others, e.g., those who advocate polyandry and communal sexuality (Stuart, 2). I must agree with her that marriage does remain the model for Christian sexual ethics, including the debate over gay marriage.

valid.⁸⁴ Still, it is important to state that my defense of heterosexual marriage is not the basis for my retaining the usefulness of the categories of male and female even if these are related.

I agree with Warnke, Mollenkott, Hester, and Cornwall that Christians stand under a moral imperative to address gender injustice, injustices which include the marginalization, oppression, and unnecessary medicalization of intersex persons. I do not agree that “intersex... undermines the model in its entirety.”⁸⁵ Simply because sex/gender categories do not neatly fit all human persons and have been used to oppress valid variations from the norm, I am unconvinced that they are therefore useless categories for societal, ethical, and theological discussions. Warnke dismisses the usefulness of sex categories even for medical research and care.⁸⁶ Although it is true that some men, such as those with Klinefelter’s syndrome, might need mammograms in order to screen for breast cancer, such recognition does not require testing all men or rejecting evidence that most women require such exams. Rather, it requires careful attention to the needs of each individual. Statistically significant differences remain useful for medicine, politics, psychology, and sociology so long as they are not employed in oppressive ways. Intersex certainly requires an alternation of the binary model. It necessitates opening up space in between the categories of male and female. Instead of two discrete categories, intersex shows how these overlap in various ways.

⁸⁴ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 152. “I personally affirm the Roman Catholic view that sex is by its very nature procreative. But I find no biblical or logical justification for contending that an inherently procreative act cannot employ stewardship in attempting to prevent conception, as long as the methods themselves are not unethical.” Hollinger, 105. See also McCarthy, 43-44.

⁸⁵ Cornwall, “State of Mind,” 17.

⁸⁶ Warnke, 134-135.

Intersex research adds weight to critiques of essentialist understandings of sex/gender differences without making the categories of male/masculinity or female/femininity meaningless. Dr. Melissa Hines, Director of the Behavioural Neuroendocrinology Research Unit at City University in London, England, shows how discussions of sex/gender differences remain useful so long as they are understood as “two overlapping distributions for males and females, with average differences between the two groups.”⁸⁷ Hines is well aware of intersex and its challenge to the gender construct (including an entire chapter on intersex conditions in her text) and yet she continues to view statistical research on sex/gender difference as valuable. Her example shows how statistical averages for physiology and behavior in men and women can be helpful for understanding humankind so long as we balance such observations with the recognition that

few, if any, individuals correspond to the modal male pattern or the modal [sic] female pattern. Variation within each sex is great, with both males and females near the top and bottom of the distributions for every characteristic. In fact, although most of us appear to be either clearly male or clearly female, we are each complex mosaics of male and female characteristics.⁸⁸

Recognizing that “few, if any, individuals correspond to the modal” (the statistical average) can help liberate everyone from oppressive gender stereotypes so long as we are willing to differentiate between statistical norms and ethical or aesthetic ideals. Statistical research on gender can be helpful for self-understanding or the understanding of others, provided the proverbial shoe fits. Of course, when it doesn’t, but we insist that it should or it must, we become like the “ugly stepsisters” in the Brothers Grimm’s original *Cinderella*—cutting off our toes and heels (or the toes and heels of others) in order to fit

⁸⁷ Hines, 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

into the glass slipper, in our attempts to find love, friendship, get the job or the promotion. Mollenkott describes the pain:

What I have learned in my most recent studies is that gender normality is a myth as long as it is forced to locate itself within a binary paradigm that fits very few members of the human race. I am not the only person who limited, shrank, and truncated aspects of myself in an attempt to fit that paradigm. Millions have done the same; and some have killed themselves or been murdered because of their inability to pass gender muster. Many transgender youngsters have run away from home or been evicted by their parents, have lived on the streets and been used by predatory adults, and have become HIV positive. Others have been institutionalized for no other reason than their inability to satisfy society's gender expectations.

So much pain. So much waste of human potential. It cannot continue.⁸⁹

Even while debates continue to rage over the most effective and moral means to address Gender Identity Disorders and non-heterosexual orientations, those holding to traditional Christian sexual ethics still have a responsibility to address the oppressive ways in which sex/gender ideals (e.g., strong male rational-initiator-leaders, beautiful female intuitive-receiver-followers) are held up as moral or biblical imperatives.⁹⁰

Resisting Sex/Gender Perfection

I believe Cornwall raises some particularly helpful insights in questioning how visions of “perfection” (whether of unambiguously sexed bodies or gendered visions of health and beauty) can work against the healing and wholeness which all individuals require. At the same time, it is her acknowledgement of the fears of the non-intersexed which leads me to question her model of *kenosis* of sex identity as the best possible solution for promoting equality within the church and society at large. For many, an

⁸⁹ Mollenkott, ix-x.

⁹⁰ For a quick entry into the debate concerning the ethics of sex reassignment surgeries for transsexuals, compare the Evangelical Alliance Policy Commission's brief text, *Transsexuality* (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2000) to Susannah Cornwall's, "'State of Mind,' versus 'Concrete Set of Facts': The Contrasting of Transgender and Intersex in Church Documents on Sexuality," 7-28.

unambiguously sexed body, while it may be the cause of some unsolicited privileges, can nevertheless remain a source of personal insecurity. Certainly, many women have been willing to “give up” their sex identity in favor of a masculine or androgynous ideal.⁹¹ The intersexed are not alone in needing to come to terms with their own embodiment—the possibilities and limitations, abilities and disabilities, temptations and strengths, trials and joys which vary according to each individual. As Kessler noted in her study of intersex, there is a connection between the medicalization of intersex and the medicalization of beauty/perfection in contemporary American society: in everything from orthodontics to nose jobs to silicone implants.⁹² There are myriad anxieties arising from human embodiment, particularly attending sex, gender, and sexuality. Calling for the *kenosis* of the privileges of the non-intersexed may begin to move us in the right direction but more is needed for the healing of the human community.

CHRISTOLOGY, IDENTITY, AND *IMAGO*

De-centering and Reconciling Identities “in Christ”

Christology and Reconciliation in the Conflicts of Identities

Evangelical theologian Miroslav Volf, in his study *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, looks to christology to cut through the Gordian knot of conflicts surrounding personal identity in the postmodern world. He insists that while revisioning social arrangements is an important piece of working toward justice, theologians must also attend carefully to “fostering the

⁹¹ Brown, 81.

⁹² “Surgical solutions for variant genitals need to be seen in the context of a cultural tide that is shrinking rather than expanding the range of what is considered normal for all parts of the body. ...Imperfections [are] remediable today with the early help of a skilled surgeon.” Kessler, *Lessons*, 157-158. She argues correctly that “[i]f we want people to respect particular bodies, they need to be taught to lose respect for ideal ones.” *Ibid.*, 118. For a similar critique of medical fixes for “normal” (i.e., natural) deviations from the (statistical) norm see Elliott, *Better Than Well*.

kind of social agents capable of envisioning and creating just, truthful, and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will thrive.”⁹³ His reflections stem from the battles which rage on the basis of ethnic identities but many of his insights apply to some of the conflicts which sex and gender identities bring to communities. He is conscious of the connection.

I will explore *what kind of selves we need to be* in order to live in harmony with others. My assumption is that selves are situated; they are female or male, Jew or Greek, rich or poor—as a rule, more than one of these things at the same time (‘rich Greek female’), often having hybrid identities (‘Jew-Greek’ and ‘male-female’), and sometimes migrating from one identity to another. The questions I will be pursuing about such situated selves are: How should they think of their identity? How should they relate to the other? How should they go about making peace with the other?⁹⁴

I would add the query, How do we go about making peace with ourselves—with our hybrid identities or anxieties attending our sex, gender, and sexuality whether we are intersexed or non-intersexed or other?

Volf notes how in times of peace, diverse groups can and have lived together, sometimes merely coexisting, sometimes helping, sometimes even mixing and marrying. But in times of conflict identities become hardened, loyalties are demanded.⁹⁵ While theological/ethical “culture wars” are not identical to ethno-religious conflicts, it is still true that in contemporary battles of sex, gender, and sexuality there is little room for middle positions.⁹⁶ Certainly intersex persons have found themselves as both players and

⁹³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 21.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21; italics original.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

⁹⁶ I experienced this personally when I was scheduled to present a lecture entitled: “What We Can Learn from the Intersexed,” at the annual meeting of Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) in St. Louis, 2009. Although I had already signed the CBE statement of faith indicating my commitment to heterosexual marriage and celibate singleness, a few individuals questioned my integrity and one attempted to have my workshop removed from the conference agenda. Without reviewing my materials, this particular scholar insisted that there is “nothing that we can learn from the intersexed” and that I must have a covert,

pawns, casualties and crusaders in the culture wars at hand. Reflecting on the effects of war on personal identity, Volf writes:

...I have Czech, German, and Croatian ‘blood’ in my veins; I grew up in a city which the old Hapsburg Empire had made into a meeting place of many ethnic groups ... But the new Croatia, like some jealous goddess, wanted all my love and loyalty. I must be Croat through and through, or I was not a good Croat.

It was easy to explain this excessive demand of loyalty. After forced assimilation under communist rule, the sense of ethnic belonging and cultural distinctness was bound to reassert itself. Moreover, the need to stand firm against a powerful and destructive enemy who had captured one-third of Croatian territory, swept it clean of its Croatian population, and almost completely destroyed some of its cities, left little room for the luxury of divided loyalties. The explanations made sense and they gave reasons to believe that *the disturbing preoccupation with the natural self was a temporary phase, a defense mechanism whose services would no longer be needed once the danger was past*. Yet the unsettling questions remained: did I not discover in oppressed Croatia’s face some despised Serbian features? Might not the enemy have captured some of Croatia’s soul along with a good deal of Croatia’s soil?⁹⁷

Volf’s analysis illuminates the experiences of some intersex persons who claim that “intersex” as an identity category has arisen from negative experiences of medical intervention in order to address the medical establishment and promote better care.

Kessler identifies a correspondence between medicalization and identity. She quotes

Morgan Holmes, an intersexed member of ISNA Canada:

“Was I intersexed before I was medicalized?” [Holmes] compares herself to a woman friend with a three-and-a-half-inch clitoris that escaped “correction.” Holmes’s friend refuses the intersex label for herself, claiming that this would be an additional burden, making her even more of an outsider than her lesbianism already does. I suspect that her rejection of the label has more to do with an identity fit. She was not diagnosed; she was not “surgicalized”; she

subversive agenda. To their credit, after reviewing a manuscript of my presentation, CBE decided to keep me in the program. Participants in the wars over sexual ethics wanted my singular allegiance and wanted to quash anything that appeared to threaten or problematize their arguments.

⁹⁷ Volf, 16-17; italics added.

does not feel like an intersexual. Holmes's own argument confirms this: "It is partly in the naming that bodies become intersexed."⁹⁸

For some intersexed, the invading army represents the medical establishment and/or parents who consented to surgicalization and suppression of the truth. Others look to the oppression of the binary sex system or heteronormativity and those who uphold them. Whatever is the case, their experience supports recent developments in philosophical notions of identity which suggest that personal identity is not simply an essence which resides within individuals; rather, identity comes into being through relations.⁹⁹ Heeding the insight that identity formation arises in relation to others as well as Hester's and Cornwall's contentions that healing for the intersex is less about medical intervention and more about the healing of communities (i.e., small support groups of other intersexed persons as well as larger communities which include the non-intersexed) we must work simultaneously on structural changes to address the injustices perpetrated upon the intersexed as well as education and reconciliation among intersexed and non-intersexed alike if we are to work toward building just, equitable, healing communities.

Just as some intersexed persons have had their personhood, identity, and even lives threatened by the binary sex system; it is also true that some non-intersexed persons—especially those comfortable with the binary sex system—may feel threatened by the presence of the intersexed. Identities which were once secure feel secure no longer. Given such a situation how is reconciliation to take place? How do we reconcile personal identities and anxieties, as well as the reconciliation of relations between persons? Volf argues that this kind of radical reconciliation is only possible through the

⁹⁸ Kessler, *Lessons*, 89; quoting Morgan Holmes, "Homophobia in Health Care: Abjection and the Treatment of Intersexuality," Paper presented at the Learned Societies CSAA meetings, Montreal, June 1995.

⁹⁹ Volf, 19.

cross of Christ—the cross understood as providing solidarity with the oppressed, atonement for the oppressors, and the embrace embodied in Christ’s outstretched arms.

...the most basic thought that [the metaphor of embrace] seeks to express is important: *the will to give ourselves to others and ‘welcome’ them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity. The will to embrace precedes any ‘truth’ about others and any construction of their ‘justice.’ This will is absolutely indiscriminate and strictly immutable; it transcends the moral mapping of the social world into ‘good’ and ‘evil.’*¹⁰⁰

Volf does not deny the need to struggle to identify good and evil, truth and justice, but insists that the way we proceed is essential. We must follow

...the ‘wisdom of the cross’: within social contexts, truth and justice are unavailable outside of the *will to embrace* the other. I immediately continue to argue, however, that *the embrace itself*—full reconciliation—cannot take place until the truth has been said and justice done.

...The practice of ‘embrace,’ with its concomitant struggle against deception, injustice, and violence, is intelligible only against the backdrop of a powerful, contagious, and destructive evil I call ‘exclusion’ ... and is for Christians possible only if, in the name of God’s crucified Messiah, we distance ourselves from ourselves and our cultures in order to create space for the other.¹⁰¹

How, then, do we distance ourselves from ourselves in order to draw near to ourselves and near to others in the embrace of healthy reconciliation? How do we distance ourselves from identities as personal and “constitutive” as sex, gender, and sexuality in order to reconcile ourselves to ourselves and others? Once again, christology provides the way forward.

Putting to Death Identities in Christ

Christology does not provide a facile answer to questions of personal identity. Nevertheless, it does offer wisdom for the wrestling. On the one side, christology calls

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 29; italics original.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 29-30; italics original.

for a death to self which seems to challenge any notion of personal identity. Returning again to Galatians, we find Paul declaring, “I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”¹⁰² Volf recounts Jewish scholar, Daniel Boyarin’s concerns as to how a particular reading of Galatians 3:28 (“no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female”) can be understood as calling for the death of personal identities. Despite granting the possibility of a positive intention, i.e., an “equality at the expense of difference,” Boyarin argues that this vision nevertheless

contained the seeds of an imperialist and colonizing’ practice; Paul’s “universalism even at its most liberal and benevolent has been a powerful force for coercive discourses of sameness, denying... the rights of Jews, women, and others to retain their difference.”¹⁰³

Volf responds that the cross and life “in Christ” can be read differently.

Far from being the assertion of the one against many, the cross is the *self-giving of the one for many*. ...From a Pauline perspective, the wall that divides is not so much “the difference” as *enmity* (cf. Ephesians 2:14).¹⁰⁴

Spiritual writer Beldan Lane insists that in the Christian life “nothing is more important or more difficult” as discerning what to “put to death” and what to cultivate.¹⁰⁵

Finding one’s identity in Christ may require the death of certain identities, even “good”

¹⁰² Gal. 2:20

¹⁰³ Volf, 46; citing Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), 234, 233.

¹⁰⁴ Volf, 47; italics original.

¹⁰⁵ “Attentiveness and indifference are, respectively, the constructive and deconstructive poles of the spiritual life. They tell us when to pay attention and when to let go, what to concentrate on and what to ignore... They stand in paradoxical relationship to each other, these two disciplines of the spirit: how to pay attention and how to not pay attention (and when to apply which of the two standards). Nothing else is more important or more difficult in one’s faltering practice of a life of prayer.” Belden Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford: University Press, 1998), 188-189.

identities, especially those which have become idols or false selves—identities in which we put our confidence when our security should rest in God alone.¹⁰⁶

In her book *Men and Women in the Church*, Sarah Sumner illustrates how even a secure sex/gender identity, such as male or female, can prove to be a stumbling block when it comes to transformation into the image of Christ.

When Jim and I were first married, I wanted him to be my Superman. I didn't like it when he felt afraid. I wanted him to rescue me from my fears and not have any fears of his own. My picture of marriage called for me to be human and for him to be superhuman. For me to be vulnerable, and for him to be invulnerable. I expected our marriage to be a comforting refuge where I would be held safe in the arms of my hero and where he would be admired by me. Jim would be Zorro, and I'd be Cinderella. And we would serve Christ in our home.

I am on a journey of repenting from my worldly view of marriage. I am letting go of my selfish expectations. I am surrendering my selfish desire to feel sorry my husband doesn't save me from my fears. I am in the process of learning to accept the full responsibility for my stuff. And through it all, I am discovering a new vision of marriage, one that's based on love instead of fantasy.

...From the time they are boys, men are challenged to attain manhood. Their consciences are trained by society and church and also by women such as myself. Every time I long for my husband to sweep me off my feet so that I don't have to walk on the difficult path of Christlike suffering, in essence I am asking him to prove that he is a man so that I won't have to prove that I'm a Christian.¹⁰⁷

A secure sex/gender identity can be just as much a stumbling block to transformation in the image of Christ as an unclear sex/gender identity. Whatever the identity, it must be placed under the scrutiny of the Scriptures by the help of the Spirit in order to discern what must be put to death and what must be cultivated.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰⁷ Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Christian Leadership* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 89.

De-centering and Re-centering Identities in Christ

Rather than insisting on the death of personal identities, Volf argues that while ethnic, racial, national, sex/gender and other identities remain; they must nevertheless be de-centered in the life of the believer.¹⁰⁸

What happened to the self in the process of re-centering? Has the self been simply erased? Has its own proper center been simply replaced by an alien center?... Not exactly. For if 'Christ lives *in me*,' as Paul says, then *I* must have a center that is distinct from 'Christ, the center.'¹⁰⁹

Re-centering entails no self-obliterating denial of the self that dissolves the self in Christ... To the contrary, re-centering establishes the most proper and unassailable center that allows the self to stand over against persons and institutions which may threaten to smother it.¹¹⁰

It may be that certain identities must be recovered before they can be de-centered.

Such was the critique which Daphne Hampson lodged against the imitation of Christ's *kenosis* when she argued that asking women to empty themselves or die to themselves, when they have never been permitted to develop as genuine selves, is destructive rather than life-giving. As Susannah Cornwall has noted, Sarah Coakley has countered that Hampson's vision of *kenosis* is misconstrued. In contrast, Coakley insists that *kenosis* "can be an important element of holding vulnerability and personal empowerment together, precisely by creating the 'space' in which non-coercive divine power manifests itself."¹¹¹ Volf's analysis of "preoccupation" with identity as a temporal phase, no "longer needed once the danger was past," may also provide a way forward.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Volf, 70.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 70; italics original.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 71.

¹¹¹ Cornwall, "Kenosis," 187; citing Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 5.

¹¹² Volf, 16-17.

Heeding the voices of Hampson, Volf, and Coakley, we may surmise that the affirmation and acceptance of an “intersex identity” and even the construction of an “intersexed Christ” (such as that proffered by Virginia Mollenkott) may be the first step along the path of healing and reconciliation for some Christian intersex persons. It is an affirmation of the full humanity of intersex persons, their place in society and in the community of faith. I believe that reflection on the possibility of an intersex Christ reveals a confidence that Christ stands with the intersexed, that “his” humanity does not stand over against them, that Jesus is with them in their struggles for identity, for love, for acceptance, for wholeness. The vision of an intersexed Christ (as also the vision of a Black Christ and female Christa) is useful for challenging the orthodoxy and hegemony of a male/masculine Christ to whom many cannot relate—either via similarity (as a male in the image of a male Christ) or via complementarity (as the female bride). It enables those who put too much stock in maleness and masculinity to put these idols, and the “false selves” constructed upon them, to death. At the same time, new theological constructions must also be held with care. Each must heed the warning which Elaine Storkey raised against feminist christologies—that just as Christ became incarnate to become like us, Christ is at the same time unlike any of us.

It may be that liberation feminism has been bewitched by the very anthropomorphism which it warns against. For it needs to recognize that, though Christ is God-with-us in our humanity, pain, new life and joy, God in Christ is not ultimately like us, any of us. There is no need to hold against the features of Christ’s particularity some checklist, so that we can be assured of our inclusion in the mystery of divine love. For God does not incorporate into Godself our gender, time, language, ethnicity, religion, skin-color, lifestyle—nor confront us with any other which undermines our own. God does not need to be re-imagined in our image.¹¹³

¹¹³ Elaine Storkey. “Who is the Christ? Issues in Christology and Feminist Theology,” *The Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell (London: T & T Clark International, 2003), 122.

Holding these poles in tension allows us to find the security of recognition that Christ stands with us in our humanity while preserving the distinction which allows Christ to stand over against us as God and Messiah—able to judge our just and unjust actions, things spoken and unspoken, done and undone. Holding these poles in tension can liberate us from old oppressions all the while protecting us from erecting new systems of tyranny. Holding these poles in tension creates space for a new self, with a new center, what Volf calls “a de-centered center.”

Through faith and baptism the self has been re-made in the image of “the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me,” Paul writes. At the center of the self lies self-giving love. No “hegemonic centrality” closes the self off, guarding its self-same identity and driving out and away whatever threatens its purity. To the contrary, the new center opens the self up, makes it capable and willing to give itself for others and to receive others in itself.¹¹⁴

This openness of the self to others recalls the relationality of the Trinity, whose relationality is imaged in the eschatological-ecclesial self to which Grenz has been pointing. Volf describes it with different language as a “catholic personality”:

Spirit re-creates us and sets us on the road toward becoming what I like to call a ‘catholic personality,’ a personal microcosm of the eschatological new creation... A catholic personality is a personality enriched by otherness, a personality which is what it is only because multiple others have been reflected in it in a particular way. The distance from my own culture that results from being born of the Spirit creates a fissure in me through which others can come in. The Spirit unlatches the doors of my heart saying: “You—are not only you; others belong to you too.”¹¹⁵

Drawing again on the language of trinitarian studies, Volf writes, “Everything in the idea of perichoresis—or ‘mutual interiority,’ as I prefer to put it—depends on success in resisting the slide into pure identity.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Volf, 71.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

While we need not put to death our sex/gender/sexual identities, all of us—male, female, and intersex—must place the privileges and pain associated with these identities under the cross of Christ—dying to pride and privilege in the *kenosis* which Cornwall has recommended but also dying to the need for revenge, to insecurities, to self-hatred, and despair. One Christian intersex woman describes how this process has enabled her to come to terms with her own intersexuality.

I too am intersexual. I lived in anonymity for years, sincerely committed to a scripturally conforming role, while denying my own existence. You see, I was the leader of the Baptist Women's Bible study who experienced the utter hate and repulsion shown me by those who should have drawn nearest me. God's grace alone has compelled me to step into the light, in accountability, and declare who I was, who I am, and who I am in Christ. The genetic puree' of my life is simply the way God has formed the "clay pot" (Isaiah 64:8), only now with the "broken handle" removed. My heart's desire as a woman of God, a spiritual being, (not merely physical), is that the work of God might be displayed in my life. By eternal perspectives the whole jumbled genetic stew just doesn't matter.

God created the eunuch (intersexual) unique. Join me to stop destroying unique lives while demanding conformity to a standard that is genetically impossible.

We must conform only to Christ's Image.¹¹⁷

The cross de-centers as well as re-centers the self. It is a de-centering and re-centering available and necessary to all—male, female, and intersex—in order that we may be renewed in the image of God in Christ.

Imago Christi: Love, Purity, and Mystery

Being remade into the image of Christ entails not only a death to (certain parts of, certain identities of) self, but a de-centering of personal identity which makes space for rebirth, the re-centering of a healthy identity, an identity rooted in Christ—more

¹¹⁷ Intersex Support Group International, "Director's Page," (1999-2002), <http://www.xyxo.org/isgi/director.html>.

specifically, an identity rooted in the love God lavishes upon Christ and those in Christ.

As the apostle John wrote,

See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.¹¹⁸

John's words highlight three features of life in Christ: the centrality of love, the necessity of purity, and the continuing mystery of human identity. Although each of these deserves lengthy exploration, a few terse comments must suffice to conclude.

The love of which John speaks is the love of God for us—the love that provides the proper ground for our love of self, death to self, de-centering and re-centering of self, and loving (i.e., relating in mutual-interiority to) others. This is the kind of love which Mollenkott, Hester, and Cornwall have also heralded, the love of God which enables us to work in love for justice in the world.

At the same time, being remade into the image of Christ—growing in the imitation of Christ—entails more than love, more than working for social justice. As John wrote, “all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” Being remade in the image of Christ entails not only faith in the love of God and the forgiveness offered to sinners on the basis of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, it includes offering this love to others as well as the choice to grow in purity, in holiness. This is where my own proposal parts ways with Mollenkott, Hester, and Cornwall, for I believe that being remade in the image of Christ requires not only just dealings and the reordering of societal oppressions but also the cultivation of personal holiness—a life of

¹¹⁸ I John 3:1-3

worship,¹¹⁹ prayer, humility, kindness, generosity, and sexual chastity—monogamous chastity within marriage and celibate chastity outside of marriage. This kind of holiness has value for the community and the individual.

The Christian call to virtue is as old as the Gospel, but in light of the present study it is imperative to recognize that, whatever its etymological root, *virtue* does not arise from *vir*.¹²⁰ Although the hierarchical scale upon which masculinity was modeled in the classical period imposed an oppressive system which devalued women, intersex, and unmanly men; nevertheless, the classical model did recognize an important truth about humankind: We are not as we should be. Mark R. Talbot explains that every culture—no matter its religion—operates under this assumption. It is the basis upon which child-rearing and education are founded. “[H]uman beings, as we arrive in this world, are probably less what we can and indeed must become than any other creaturely being.”¹²¹

Yet what all societies want done with their young makes clear what kind of creatures we should be. In this sense, we can say that human societies view their members as ‘meant’ to function in particular self-regulating ways.¹²²

Talbot explains that even non-Christian thinkers, such as Richard Rorty, grant that in order to reach our potential as human beings, we must be guided by what Rorty names, a “final vocabulary.”

¹¹⁹ Richard Lints has developed a strong case for understanding the image of God as underlying the challenge of idolatry throughout the Old and New Testaments. “Both concepts carry a sense of worshipping something outside the self as well as being influenced by that object of worship. This then explains in part the continuous concern of the biblical writers with idolatry as the natural devolution of persons who chase after gods they’ve created in their own image. It also opens the door to a fresh examination of Jesus Christ as the perfect image.” Lints, “Introduction,” in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, 10.

¹²⁰ *Vir* is Latin for the human male.

¹²¹ Mark R. Talbot, “Learning from the Ruined Image: Moral Anthropology after the Fall,” *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, 166. Talbot clarifies his “must become” in footnote 12 by saying that “we will not even survive if we don’t develop in specific ways.”

¹²² Talbot, “Ruined Image,” 166.

A “final vocabulary,” he tells us, consists in some “set of words which [we] employ to justify [our] actions, [our] beliefs, and [our] lives”; these are the words “in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts, our highest hopes”; these are the words “in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives.”¹²³ The fact that Christians, then, are committed to a particular ‘word’ on life does not distinguish them from anyone else; the need to be committed to some such word is a feature of distinctively human being that we share with everyone.¹²⁴

For Christians, this final vocabulary is be found in the Word made flesh—in the person and story of Jesus Christ, in God who took up human nature in order to redeem and perfect all of us, men, women, and intersex.

It may be that virtue was conflated with *vir* in the ancient world observing that one of the most powerful rhetorical devices effective for motivating men to change their behavior is shaming them with accusations of being or becoming effeminate.¹²⁵

Unfortunately, it is a rhetorical device still employed by preachers today. Although arguably effectual, the conflation of virtue with manliness replaces the gospel of holiness and maturity with a hierarchically-gendered system of oppression—shaming men into virtue instead of calling men, women, intersex adults and children to grow in holiness, being conformed to the image of God in Christ.

Christ Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) into whose image all Christians—male, female, intersexed—are “being transformed into his likeness with every every-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (II Cor. 3:18). Despite its potential effectiveness as a rhetorical strategy for men, growth in

¹²³ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.

¹²⁴ Talbot, “Ruined Image,” 175.

¹²⁵ “The success of the Western Christian ideology of masculinity derived in no small part from the ability of the men who crafted it to maintain a cultural connection with more traditional Roman formulations of masculinity while at the same time criticizing the inability of those traditional formulations to respond adequately to the social disruptions of late antiquity and offering a new model to potential members. The ideology of Christian masculinity *did* attract male converts.” Kuefler, 13.

holiness must not be misconstrued as growth toward manhood. Holiness must be separated from any gendered understandings of virtue—masculine, feminine, intersex, or transgendered. Holiness must not be presented as pink, blue, or purple. Christ is the model for all. All Christians are to model his victory.¹²⁶ All Christians receive his inheritance as sons.¹²⁷ All Christians become his bride.¹²⁸ These mixed metaphors illustrate the universal call to conformity to Christ but they do even more than this; they also testify to the mystery which remains in any exploration of the Christian life, no less in any exploration of the *imago Dei*.

Eastern Orthodox theologian Sister Nonna Verna Harrison (in her exploration of the *imago Dei* for Christian formation entitled, *God's Many-Splendored Image*), writes of the different facets of the *imago* recognizable in the Scriptures, Christian history, and contemporary thought. She explores the splendors of: 1) human freedom and responsibility conditioned by finitude; 2) the love of God, forgiveness of Christ, and renewal in the Spirit; 3) spiritual perception and relationship to God and others; 4) virtue cultivated over a lifetime; 5) royal dignity—a dignity that “belongs equally to all who are human... the intrinsic value, honor, and splendor of the children of God that lies hidden at the inmost core of every human being;”¹²⁹ 6) the gift of human embodiment; 7) responsibility for creation; 8) creativity and scientific advancement; and 9) human identity as fundamentally unique yet situated within wider human communities—“just as the divine

¹²⁶ I Cor. 15:54-57; Eph. 6:10-17

¹²⁷ Gal. 3:26-4:7

¹²⁸ “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Eph. 5:25-27

¹²⁹ Nonna Verna Harrison, *God's Many Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 188.

Trinity is three distinct persons in one essence.”¹³⁰ She agrees with Stanley Grenz and John Paul II that the image of God is ultimately found in Christ, “the origin and center of a new humankind, a new community.”¹³¹ And yet, as she closes, she reminds her readers that the *imago* will always remain a mystery—for in this, too, humans image God.

As Gregory of Nyssa says, human identity is an unfathomable depth of mystery, which is itself an image of the inexhaustible and boundless mystery of the divine being and life.¹³² This means that the divine image at the core of what we are as human remains multifaceted and is open to transformation in a future that is now unknown to us.¹³³

This mystery leads us not only to humility but also to worship and to hope.

To live according to God’s image and likeness in the ways this book describes is to be truly alive. And we can dare to hope to become more fully alive in ways that we cannot now imagine. The human likeness to God is participation in God’s life and immortality; it is abundant new life here and now and eternal life with God in the age to come.¹³⁴

CONCLUSION: INTERSEX AND *IMAGO* BALANCING THE BINARY IN THE ALREADY/NOT YET

This dissertation, “Intersex and *Imago*,” has attempted to explore a small slice of the many-splendored image of God, particularly the social view of the *imago* as it relates to human embodiment: to sex, gender, and sexuality. This study has shown that there is even more mystery with which Christians must wrestle as sex, gender, and sexuality are being recognized as more complex and elusive in the postmodern period.

It can be disconcerting to have one’s presuppositions challenged—particularly presuppositions so closely tied to personal identity and theological assumptions, as

¹³⁰ She continues, “When people live together in the likeness of the Trinity, as far as is humanly possible, they hold in balance likeness and difference, harmony and mutual respect, giving and receiving, equality and leadership; in this way justice can flourish. Then diversity strengthens community which community enables diversity to flourish.” *Ibid.*, 190.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹³² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Humanity* 11.2-4.

¹³³ Harrison, 194.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

notions of sex, gender, and sexuality tend to be. To take up a defensive posture and resist change would be a natural and reasonable reaction, and yet, other aspects of the image of God require a different response. As Sister Nonna argued, the virtues “compose the most important dimension of the divine likeness for which every human being is called...

Above all, we need the virtue of humility to keep us grounded and open to help and guidance from God and other people.”¹³⁵ Humility and love for the other, particularly a love for the intersexed whose presence among us has been overlooked, marginalized, and outright oppressed, behooves us to make space for them and to listen to their concerns.

This dissertation has attempted to heed the voices of the intersexed who are calling for recognition and inclusion in the human family as well as for better medical care—easier access to medical records, collaborative medical intervention, and a moratorium on non-consensual surgeries (chapter 1). In light of their voices, I have worked to show that Christian theological anthropologies, even conservative Evangelical and Roman Catholic theological anthropologies, do not necessarily stand in the way of these goals. On the contrary, Christian theological anthropology can aid the case of the intersexed by showing that intersex persons have been among the human family and recorded in the history of Christianity for millenia (chapter 1), that the intersexed were honored by Jesus (who raised them up from symbols of shame to become icons of radical discipleship), that the intersexed have participated in church leadership and public service in the Church and Christian societies, and that they have provided resources for thinking theologically about the significance of sex, gender, and sexuality in this life and the life to come—both in the early church and the middle ages (chapter 2), and again in the postmodern period (chapters 3 and 6).

¹³⁵ Ibid., 188.

Having established the validity of including the intersex in the human family *as intersex*, I went on to explore how intersex can challenge, correct, and help to construct a better theological anthropology for the postmodern period. I urged Roman Catholic and Evangelical theologians to move beyond discussions of the woman as paradigmatic “other” to include other others; revising the place of Adam and Eve as progenitors rather than paradigms of human difference-in-relation (chapter 4). I then argued that theological discussions of the social *imago* must retain their basis in the social Trinity— inclusive of sex/gender difference as one important difference in the community without grounding relationality (human or divine) on sex differentiation or sexual desire/activity and without conflating the related but discrete categories of sex, gender, and sexuality (chapter 5). Moving from the binary pattern of Eden to the “not male and female” of the Eschaton, I worked to show how christology and eschatology both challenge and enrich our notions of human personhood made in the image of God in Christ, especially as it relates to sex, gender, and sexuality. I argued that, rather than dismantling the categories of male and female, space should be opened up for the addition and inclusion of intersex whose humanity was also taken up by Jesus Christ in the incarnation. I concluded by suggesting that while sex, gender, and sexual identities are not erased by identification “in Christ” they must, nevertheless, be de-centered, in order to promote the healing of individuals and reconciliation in the community so that male, female, and intersex can emulate and participate in the mutual-dependence of the perichoretic love of the Trinity in purity (chapter 6). In all, great mystery remains, even as we begin to explore the possibility of thinking beyond the binary framework of humankind made in the image of God.

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