

Male and Female Union

**The Centrality of Marriage and Family to
Creation, Redemption, and 'the Good of All'**



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Executive Summary

“Marriage is honored in all things, and the conjugal bed is undefiled.” (Hebrews 13:4)

Advocacy for “strong marriage and family” must be understood not only in the pragmatic terms of empirical benefits. These of course can be demonstrated through adherence to traditional practices, observation, and personal experience, as well as modern research. They include benefits to physical and emotional health, financial stability and provision, personal development and education, and social stability and development.¹

But “marriage and family” in Christian terms must be grasped in more “essentialist” and reciprocal ways. Marriage is not an optional “life choice” or a matter only of “personal experience.” It has not been invented by human ingenuity to provide means for the raising of children, economic sustenance, patriarchal dominance, or the personal benefit of partners. Marriage is essential to human well-being because it is integral, at the core, of Divine Creation and of the understanding of what it is to be human. God engaged in the inauguration and differentiation of Creation in order to “proceed” from Himself; and to establish a place for his “image” to dwell and flourish. The purpose of Creation was to enable the true Image of God (his Son) to unite the created image with God. Thus Union with God is expressed in terms of the Marriage of Christ and His Church. The Church is described as the “Household (oikos) of God” and “the Bride of Christ.” The consummation of history is depicted as “the Marriage Feast of the Lamb.” Thus created human life reflects the Glory of the Life of the uncreated God – the Unity and Economy of the Holy Trinity – and thereby participates in the life of God. Any understanding of human “flourishing” or goodness is incomplete without this foundation of gift and reciprocity.

This understanding is developed in various theological formulations, most notably the “Theology of the Body” of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II, the household imagery of St. Irenaeus, the “nuptial mysticism” of St. Catherine of Siena and others, as well as the rich resources of contemporary political theology exemplified by Oliver O’Donovan, John Milbank, Michael Hanby and others. These theological insights include the “marital structure of the body and the soul” as well as the necessity of social adherence to the Fidelity, Permanence and Fruitfulness of human marriage. Human marriage can only be “binary” – male and female, fatherhood and motherhood, reciprocal and mutually submissive. And this union, matrimony, is the core and foundation of the natural family. Natural Law plays a recovered role in the formation of the essentialist understanding. These and other sources are consulted for fuller development of this theme.

The purpose of this paper then is to provide an anchor for this Conference on the Family – held at Uganda Christian University and under the imprimatur of the Church of Uganda and its Archbishop – in the Christian biblical and theological narratives, for the exploration of historical and contemporary developments in the life of marriage and family. The paper, and the research it reflects, seeks to demonstrate that what we now term “marriage” and “family” are temporal expressions of eternal realities, and thus altered or ignored only with great risk and consequence for persons, families, churches and all social structures. It is hoped that this point of reference will contribute to the explorations of the conference by recalling permanent truths and firm foundations for contemporary challenges.

1. See, e.g., Strong Families, Prosperous States: Do Healthy Families Affect the Wealth of States? , accessed April 30, 2018, <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2017/>.

Introduction

I. The family does not exist for society or the State, but society and the State exist for the family²

In one of a series of papers and sermons given during the Second World War to encourage the British, C.S. Lewis advanced some remarkable claims in the midst of that time of global turmoil and political transformation. He writes that neither individualism, nor the then-rampaging forms of collectivism (fascism and communism) were true to the realities of faith nor of human existence, nor were they good causes for the great battles of civilizations:

No Christian, and, indeed, no historian could accept the epigram which defines religion as “what a man does with his solitude.” It was one of the Wesleys, I think, who said that the New Testament knows nothing of solitary religion. We are forbidden to neglect the assembling of ourselves together. Christianity is already institutional in the earliest of its documents. The Church is the Bride of Christ. We are members of one another. ... Though the private conception of Christianity is an error, it is a profoundly natural one and is clumsily attempting to guard a great truth. Behind it is the obvious feeling that our modern collectivism is an outrage upon human nature and that from this, as from all other evils, God will be our shield and buckler.

The feeling is just. As personal and private life is lower than participation in the Body of Christ, so the collective life is lower than the personal and private life and has no value save in its service. The secular community, since it exists for our natural good and not for our supernatural, has no higher end than to facilitate and safeguard the family, and friendship, and solitude. To be happy at home, said Johnson, is the end of all human endeavor. As long as we are thinking only of natural values we must say that the sun looks down on nothing half so good as a household laughing together over a meal, or two friends talking over a pint of beer, or a man alone reading a book that interests him; and that all economics, politics, laws, armies, and institutions, save insofar as they prolong and multiply such scenes, are a mere ploughing of the sand and sowing the ocean, a meaningless vanity and vexation of spirit.³

This is a jarring claim, especially in the ears of those who live in western, liberal societies, where movements and ideologies have sought to disrupt traditional family and village patterns because they are seen to be limiting to individual freedom. Or, they are deemed detrimental to “healthy social patterns” – which are, in such definitions, insistently “progressive,” since any traditional arrangement is viewed as oppressive or built upon ignorance of scientific insights. Modern liberal societies have, in the penetrating analysis of many thinkers, now fully taken up the idea that healthy human existence is in essence one of autonomous individual freedom, voluntaristic, and self-constructing. And, that past binding norms must be overturned. So marriage and family have become, by law and practice, whatever the participants want to define it to be, even optional and unnecessary. Therefore in many countries it is commonplace to have multiple variations such as “same-sex marriage,” open marriage, no marriage, multiple or polyamorous marriages, all considered viable options for human “choice.” Further, modern liberal ideologies inform and motivate much of the “development” agendas that are on offer to developing countries and aid recipients, since the progressive causes see it as imperative to improve the lot of “less developed societies” and remodel them according to “scientific” norms.⁴

2. Compendium of Catholic Social Teaching, 214.

3. C. S. Lewis, “Membership,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), pp.158ff. Emphasis added.

4. See Obianuju Ekeocha and Robert P. George, *Target Africa: Ideological Neocolonialism of the Twenty-first Century* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018).

However, there is now an emerging and growing number of critics of the foundations and results of centuries of liberalism, who note the decay and crisis of liberal societies and governments -- including the collapse of life-giving associations such as families, churches, and guilds -- and conclude that these results are not because of the failures of insufficient liberalism, but because of its successes.⁵ The liberal life has been achieved in full, and the result is chaos. Those cited here share an insight articulated by Michael Hanby. Referring to the US Supreme Court case that requires all of the United States to recognize the legality of “same sex marriage” Hanby notes that “Obergefell marks a point of no return, a decisive moment when liberal order asserts its sovereignty over reality in a dramatic new way, and when the technological view of nature and the human being which was perhaps still only latent in our founding assumptions acquires the full force of law.”

This is because, as Hanby demonstrates, the liberal definition of being human, and therefore the purpose of social life, is radical freedom:

To be free I must perpetually show, even if I have to carve it into my own flesh, that I am the owner of my body, that I and not the culture, or tradition or another human being, or God or even my given nature determine its meaning. The architects of liberal order did not intend this, of course. John Adams famously said “our constitution was made for a moral and religious people, it is wholly unsuited to the government of any other.” ...The cruel irony, as Pierre Manent points out, is that liberal states tend toward absolutism not in spite of but because of their underlying individualism. They become absolute in the very effort to defend freedom. A state which exists for the purpose of protecting negative freedom exists, in effect, to protect us from all those prior claims which threaten our self-definition, and so it must insinuate itself, so to speak, between me and those agents and institutions which lay claim to me: nature, family, society, the Church, God. In this way the liberal state comes to act as the mediator of all human relationships.⁶

This “open” and malleable definition of both human existence and human relationships is easily identified in many expressions, both popular and theoretical. And such forms of enlightenment typically target sexuality, marriage, and family for special critique. Consider just one example, the recent work *Against Marriage: An Egalitarian Defence of the Marriage-Free State*, by Claire Chambers:⁷

What distinguishes marriage from other relationships? It is not set apart by its durability: unmarried partnerships can be more permanent than married ones. Children are not the sole preserve of marital relationships: in most liberal democratic states, it is just as common for children to be born to unmarried parents as to married ones. Unmarried partners cohabit and are financially dependent. They celebrate anniversaries and exchange tokens of love. Unmarried partners make commitments ... So marriage is not singled out by commitment, or permanence, or children, or love. It is also not distinguished by religion: some marriages are religious; but many aren't. The real distinction between marriage and unmarried partnership is the role of the state. Marriage is a form of relationship recognised and regulated by the state ... When the state recognises marriage, it does three things: it defines, it endorses, and it regulates.

5. See Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); D. C. Schindler, *Freedom from Reality: The Diabolical Character of Modern Liberty* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017); Michael Hanby, “A More Perfect Absolutism,” *First Things*, October 2016. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/10/a-more-perfect-absolutism>; and John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-liberalism and the Human Future* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016).

6. Michael Hanby, “The Truth Will Set you Free: Liberal Order and the Future of Christian Freedom,” lecture. See also “A More Perfect Absolutism,” *First Things*, October 2016. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/10/a-more-perfect-absolutism>.

7. Clare Chambers, “Why Marriage Is Both Anachronistic and Discriminatory – Clare Chambers | Aeon Essays,” *Aeon*, April 28, 2018, accessed April 28, 2018, <https://aeon.co/essays/why-marriage-is-both-anachronistic-and-discriminatory>.

To be fair to Chambers, her book advocates that the state remove itself from any regulation of marriage, and to let all manner of free choices take on their own definitions of desirable unions. But her premise is the same as any liberal approach: In this understanding, marriage is a human construction. But then, ironically perhaps, it is a construction by a political and juridical entity that creates that status for specifically social purposes. Thus the nature and definition of that partnership is not permanent, but can be altered for changing social reasons. Political action is required in the progressive cause to be set towards re-arranging and re-forming human associations. The state here becomes the creator and governor, rather than the protector of a permanent good that is of greater significance than the state, such as asserted by Lewis.

Whatever ideological, sociological, or personal authorities are cited in support of nominalistic and malleable concepts of marriage, they all share at root the emphasis on “rights,” motivated by what Joan Lockwood O’Donovan terms “proprietary individualism.”

As the immediate, exclusive proprietor of his/her physical and spiritual being and capacities, and derivatively, of those external objects necessary to their preservation and development, the modern rights-possessor is typically occupied in controlling, acquisitive, and competitive actions – acts of disposing, using, exchanging, commanding, and demanding. The proprietary subject forms social and political relationships through the formal mechanism of the contract, modeled on an economic transaction undertaken from calculations of self-interest. His/her freedom, prior to and within contractual relationships, consists in independence from or non-subjection to other wills, externally imposed obligations, and natural limitations. The associations produced by the binding agreement of self-possessing individuals conform to the commercial logic of investment corporations and consumer groups, always poised on the brink of litigation.⁸

By being subject to and defined by the individual’s asserted “rights,” and by modern social concepts of human well-being, marriage and family formation becomes only the object of the individual’s pursuit of happiness, and any other goods, social, personal, spiritual, or common, are at best secondary considerations. The protection of such rights then requires the heavy hand of the state to remove all obstacles and restraints to that pursuit.

II. Contrary to modern claims, Marriage is a human “given” central to the understanding of existence, of being, of creation.

Lewis, of course, began his inquiry from a very different starting point than does Chambers or her fellow liberals. His is an understanding of reality in which there is no “secular,” no “natural” realm that stands apart from creation, grace, or God’s judgment. By noting that membership in the Body of Christ – which is the Bride of Christ – defines the Christian, Lewis also points to the principle that the Matrimonial Household is central to the understanding of existence, of well-being, of creation, as well as to salvation and “the good of all.” It is thus a permanent good that is prior to “lesser” goods, such as political life. Its protection and encouragement is the prime purpose of “public life” and is of a higher order. St. Paul commanded in 1 Timothy 2 that “supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and ordered life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is beautiful to God our Savior, who desires all people to be made whole and come to the knowledge of the Truth.” Thus the true conditions of the good for all are to be upheld, and Lewis paints an appealing picture of that good life.

⁸ Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, “Christian Platonism and Non-Proprietary Community,” in Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004), p. 76.

The Christian knows, as did Lewis, that he/she is not the “possessor” nor the Creator of the body, or of life, or even of patterns of relationship, but that “you are not your own, you have been bought with a price, so glorify God in your body.” (1 Cor. 6:19) It is God and his nature that determine the true order of being, and of well-being, which the Lord calls “holiness.” But further, the Christian knows that being adopted into the household of God, through being incorporated into Christ and being under His Headship, is the purpose of salvation. Put another way, one cannot understand creation or salvation, or even existence itself, apart from knowing, overtly and instinctively, the fact and meaning of matrimony and the household, marriage and the family.

Salvation, true restoration to wholeness, is the completion of that which was intended from the beginning – which was disrupted and disordered by the sin of Adam, but which is being re-ordered as it is being reclaimed by God in Christ. God engaged in the inauguration and differentiation of Creation in order to “proceed” from Himself, to establish a material order that received his nature; to establish a place for his “image” to dwell and flourish. Creation was pure “gift” by God, from God, calling into existence that which had not before existed, and giving life. The purpose of Creation was to enable the true Image of God (his Son) to unite the created image with God, the ultimate in Gift. This is in biblical terms, “mediation,” –the bringing together. And the created image of God – humanity – was to multiply fruitfully, filling the earth with continually life-giving expressions of love, and of giving of more life. This concept of Creation requires much more elaboration than can be undertaken here, but as a summary statement this points to the underlying intentionality of the basic condition on which marriage is built. In differentiating male and female from the original creation of “man,” God intends the man and woman to “image” the creative differentiation of the Godhead from that which He has made, as well as the differentiation of the Persons in the trinitarian Godhead, the inter-Personal life of the Trinity. What we think of as “paternity” and “maternity” are united in the Father, but in earthly creation are assigned to a dual expression of personhood, distinct but united sacramentally and in reciprocal relationship.

One commentator on Pope John Paul II’s fascinating reflections titled “Theology of the Body” elaborates that understanding. Even the structure of human bodies, and the narrative of the differentiation of male and female, reveals the essential nature of matrimony:

In discovering the nuptial being of the body, Adam and Eve realized that they were a gift for one another, presented to each other by God. Just as their gift to one another was one of love, so also was God’s gift of the other to each of them one of love. They thus came to realize that in loving one another, in giving themselves to each other, they mirrored the gift of God to them. Their union of love was simultaneously a mirror, a reflection, an image, of God’s love for them. Their union made visible the interior life of God. Not only were each of their bodies taken individually the expression of who they were and a revelation of who God is, but in acting, loving each other, Adam and Eve, made visible the love of God, i.e., the love in the Trinity, itself. Of course, not knowing of the existence of the Trinity, Adam and Eve could not consciously reflect the love of the Triune God, but they were conscious of mirroring the love God showered on them when He created them for each other and, of course, the love shown by God when He created the whole world for them. The Pope remarks that the love of Adam and Eve is “a primordial sacrament, understood as a sign that transmits effectively in the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from time immemorial. And this is the mystery of truth and love, the mystery of divine life, in which man really participates.”⁹

⁹ Richard M. Hogan, “An Introduction to John Paul II’s Theology of the Body,” <https://www.nfpoutreach.org/48>.

St. Paul in his first letter to Timothy denounced the false teachers who “depart from the faith by devoting themselves to the deceitful spirits and teaching of demons,” among which are those who “forbid marriage, and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.” (4.2-5) Any derogation of marriage as defined in Creation strikes at the heart of creation itself, and undermines faith and holiness.

III. Marriage is thus essential to the understanding of identity, personhood, surpassing any other type of human identity.

St. Irenaeus, reflecting on the apostolic teaching such as found in 1 Timothy, challenged the false, gnostic teachings rampant in the second century, A.D., by celebrating Creation in language rich with marital imagery. God brings humanity into existence, and then continually bestows love and life upon us, drawing us towards union with Himself:

And in this respect, God differs from man, that God indeed makes, but man is made; and truly, He who makes is always the same; but that which is made must receive both beginning, and middle, and addition, and increase. And God does indeed create after a skillful manner, while, [as regards] man, he is created skillfully. God also is truly perfect in all things, Himself equal and similar to Himself, as He is all light, and all mind, and all substance, and the fount of all good; but man receives advancement and increase towards God. For as God is always the same, so also man, when found in God, shall always go on towards God. For neither does God at any time cease to confer benefits upon, or to enrich man; nor does man ever cease from receiving the benefits, and being enriched by God. For the receptacle of His goodness, and the instrument of His glorification, is the man who is grateful to Him that made him; (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV.11.2)

The “marital structure of the human being” (including, the nuptial meaning of the body) shows in material and spiritual expressions the nature of human creation. Maleness and femaleness are God’s purposeful expressions of the image of God – in differentiating humanity he shows forth what is unified in the Father. The life-giving and life-bearing energies, unified in God, are granted to humanity, in His image, in maleness and femaleness. God draws out the female from the same substance as the male in his articulation of the human being. It is the uniting of these in matrimony that brings forth the purposes of God in creation activity. The Household of God is reflected in the nurturing of the human household. “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” So said the Lord Jesus Christ, recorded in Matthew 19, in sacramentally ordaining marriage and declaring its permanence.

This is also demonstrated in the negative by the fact that the distortion and corruption of this created reality is the core of the meaning of the Fall – the serpent disturbs the union of Adam and Eve by approaching the woman separately, inviting her to take on the role of the man. Her deception leads to his, and together they then disrupt their “priestly” and stewardly vocation to tend, care for and guard the holiness of the garden; the curse of God for sin then descends upon their union. The tilling of the ground and the bearing of children, their natural ends, are corrupted. These “wounds of the Fall” need to be repaired, and the restoration is promised in the “seed of the woman” – the fulfillment and restoration of the vocation of humanity in the birth of the Son of God who is also Son of Man, the Second Adam.

So, marriage and the household that marriage creates are essential to all social and political organizations of human existence, as has been known across cultures and worldviews, from the beginning. Joshua Hochschild illustrates this in commenting on the ancient natural law principle of “subsidiarity” – that creation is by nature differentiated into intentional and normative forms of association, which are interdependent in situating humanity:

The principle of subsidiarity presupposes that individuals and communities have proper activities, social functions with intrinsic integrity and value. Rather than treating social order as purely conventional or artificial, the product of the choices of sovereign individuals, the principle assumes that certain forms and activities of social order are natural. Marriage, for instance, is not just whatever two consenting adults want it to be. It has an intrinsic nature and authority to which individuals may be subject; as a certain kind of association, it has particular functions and therefore responsibilities – such as the honoring of parents, the fidelity of the spouses, and, in the normal course of events, the rearing of children. It is for this reason that Aristotle’s *Politics* does not begin with a consideration of different forms of government, but with a discussion of the nature of the most basic unit of political order, the family. Only after inquiring into the nature of a healthy household can one know what kinds of laws would appropriately lead individuals and families to their fulfillment.

... an important function of human law is to recognize those functions or gifts determined by natural law. If this is the case, the first responsibility of government is not to establish the just distribution of material resources through force or coercion, but to recognize and foster the natural ordering of social gifts. In a just society, there is a distribution of responsibility for all members to seek the common good; both ruler and ruled are expected to act appropriately, through perception of how the natural law bears on their particular circumstances.¹⁰

IV. Marriage is central to the understanding of salvation and to the identity of the Church and therefore to all humanity

So it should be no surprise that it is impossible to understand redemption, salvation, atonement, the reconciliation of God and humans, apart from the central creational understanding of marriage and the formation of households. This is what those who are in Christ long for, and is really the longing of all humans. It is not just a useful metaphor, a material symbol; rather, the union of humanity with God, as the bride and body of Christ, is the fulfillment of human creation and purpose.

The most elaborate expression of this is given by St. Paul in Ephesians 5: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

¹⁰ Joshua P. Hochschild, “Natural Law, St. Thomas Aquinas and the Role of Reason in Social Order,” in *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching*, David McCarthy, ed. p. 121

It seems then that being the “body of Christ” is dependent on being “the bride of Christ.” By uniting the Church to himself, she becomes His body, just as a man and woman are united in one flesh and become each other’s bodies. Christ gives himself to the Church, and she gives herself to Him. In drawing the parallel between the church and human marriage, St. Paul identifies the way in which a unified body is accomplished: “the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in all things to their husbands.” In this formulation, “headship” is not so much a term of authority as a term of identity. It is by being joined to the Head, Christ, that the church becomes his body. Heading the body of Christ means making it so, effecting its existence, and then presenting it to himself. Likewise, the husband “heads” the woman, not by ruling, but by calling her to himself and together creating the union which establishes the new body of one flesh. This “mystery” (or “sacrament”) as Paul calls it, inextricably links marriage with the new creation, fulfilling all that is intended by Creation.

Hogan elaborates in his exposition of the “Theology of the Body:”

Marriage then is, as the Pope writes, the primordial sacrament because its method and its effect were renewed and taken up in the sacrament of Redemption and in its continued presence through the Church. Founded on the analogy with the sacrament of Creation (the marriage of Adam and Eve), the Church can be said to be the bride of Christ because as “one flesh” with Christ, the Church reveals God and confers grace on humanity. Marriage, the sacrament of Creation, was the foundation of how God works in the world.¹¹

Such was also taught from the earliest years of the Church. St. Augustine, teaching on the crucifixion of Christ as depicted in the Gospel of John, wrote “it is a pregnant word the evangelist has used; he does not say the soldier thrust into his side, or wounded him in his side... but that he opened his side... This blood was poured out for the remission of sins, this water was preparation for salvation’s cup; it made the cleansing water and the good drink... Therefore the first woman was made from the side of a sleeping man and called life, and mother of the living. She signified a great good thing, before the great woe of sin. And the second Adam fell asleep here on the Cross, with head bowed, so that his spouse might be formed from what flowed from his side...”¹²

If no other expression convinces us of this teaching, at least we can hear the heavenly celebration of the church’s fulfillment revealed by St. John in Revelation 19: “Hallelujah! For the Lord, our God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

That salvation – being healed and made whole, being fully united to God in Christ – is not a departure from the forms of creation, or a supplement to them, but is continuous with, and the completion of, creation. This is articulated most convincingly by Anglican theologian Oliver O’Donovan in his seminal work, *Resurrection and Moral Order*. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only the overcoming of death and rising to new life, it is the affirmation and recapitulation of God’s design and intention in creation:

11. Hogan, “Introduction”

12. St. Augustine, *Tractatus in Joannem*, 120:2. Cited in Odo Cassel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2015), p.39

The meaning of the resurrection, as Saint Paul presents it, is that it is God's final and decisive word on the life of his creature, Adam. It is, in the first place, God's reversal of Adam's choice of sin and death: 'As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive' (1 Cor 15:22). In the second place, and precisely because it is a reversal of Adam's decision to die, the resurrection of Christ is a new affirmation of God's first decision that Adam should live, an affirmation that goes beyond and transforms the initial gift of life... The work of the Creator who made Adam, who brought into being an order of things in which humanity has a place, is affirmed once and for all by this conclusion.¹³

Further, O'Donovan argues, the resurrection and all that it indicates requires us to formulate all ethical and social considerations according to it: "The order of things that God has made is there. It is objective, and mankind has a place within it. Christian ethics, therefore, has an objective reference because it is concerned with man's life in accordance with this order. The summons to live in it is addressed to all mankind, because the good news that we may live in it is addressed to all mankind. Thus Christian moral judgments in principle address every man. They are not something which the Christian has opted into and which he might as well, quite as sensibly, opted out of. They are founded on reality as God has given it."¹⁴

V. Marriage is thus central to all of human life: the tasks of Political Theology

O'Donovan's conclusion, that "Christian moral judgments in principle address every man... [and] are founded on reality as God has given it," must be upheld by the Church and all of God's people. Those judgments should be understood as universal, though applied in particular circumstances. This is especially true of moral insights that are at the very center of Creation, Redemption, and the Completion of All Things in Christ. These should form the basis of evaluation and assessment of public policy and even constitutional arrangements, of law, and of all cultures, social customs and practices. Clearly, they must be upheld for those in the Church, though they might not be accepted by those who do not believe – but we also know that belief in something true is not a condition of its truth. Even those who do not hold consciously the same standards are really and truly under the judgment of those standards, as they are truly embedded in creational reality though not recognizing it.

O'Donovan teaches us that the overarching field of "political theology" as being newly understood in many quarters now shows that

political theology in our own time has had as its concern to break out of the cordon sanitaire [of isolated and privatized morality and theology]. When that advocacy has been at its clearest, it has insisted that theology proper is political simply by responding to the dynamics of its own proper themes. Christ, salvation, the church, the Trinity: to speak about these has involved theologians in speaking of society, and has led them to formulate normative political ends... It is not a question of adapting to alien requirements or subscribing to external agenda, but of letting theology be true to its task and freeing it from a forced and unnatural detachment. Political theology tries to recover for faith in God, Christ, and salvation what scepticism surrendered to mechanistic necessity. Theology must be political if it is to be evangelical. Rule out the political questions and you cut short the proclamation of God's saving power; you leave people enslaved where they ought to be free from sin – their own sin and others'.¹⁵

13 Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986) p. 13.

14 Ibid, p. 17.

15 Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.3.

So the people of God can assert the centrality of marriage and the family to creation, to human identity, to a “good life” in society and to ultimate and transcendent realities. There needs to be no apology for it, and there needs to be no accommodation in order to achieve consensus. Of course this does not mean that the Church only cares about matters of family, marriage, birth, sexual and reproductive ethics, and the like, as it can seem in some societies. Political theology touches on all things human and public. Political theology brings out considerations of peace, the nature of community, natural justice and the law. Care for all of creation is under the vocation of human stewardship, as is just provision for all. But the basic realities of the order of creation and redemption should be at the center of the Church’s teachings about life, justice, and righteousness, and should be extended as creational realities for the entirety of the human race. We can find examples of attempts at such articulations in the Compendium of Catholic Social Teaching, e.g.:

214. The priority of the family over society and over the State must be affirmed. The family in fact, at least in its procreative function, is the condition itself for their existence. With regard to other functions that benefit each of its members, it proceeds in importance and value the functions that society and the State are called to perform... The family possesses inviolable rights and finds its legitimization in human nature and not in being recognized by the State. The family, then, does not exist for society or the State, but society and the State exist for the family... Every social model that intends to serve the good of man must not overlook the centrality and social responsibility of the family... In virtue of this principle, public authorities may not take away from the family tasks which it can accomplish well by itself or in free association with other families; on the other hand, these same authorities have the duty to sustain the family, ensuring that it has all the assistance that it needs to fulfil properly its responsibilities.

215. The family has its foundation in the free choice of the spouses to unite themselves in marriage, in respect for the meaning and values of this institution that does not depend on man but on God himself.

216. No power can abolish the natural right to marriage or modify its traits and purpose. Marriage in fact is endowed with its own proper, innate and permanent characteristics.

The insights and teachings of the Church, built on biblical revelation and theological reflection, have been formulated in expressions such as “the nuptial meaning of the body and soul.” They also lead to the conclusion that healthy and ordered human life requires that all people recognize that they are oriented to and defined by the basic fact of marriage. Even those who through various circumstances – the vocation of celibacy, widowhood, separations, or simply not yet married – do not directly experience marriage, are still subject to “marriage,” even if only by virtue of their earthly existence and even if that procreating “marriage” was a single fleeting coupling. The structure of our very bodies reveals this. Everyone originates in some form of “household,” even one that is distorted by sin or disorder. That the household, built on holy matrimony, is the righteous form of the basic human association needs no apology and demands clear proclamation.

VI. Holy Matrimony and the Household

Careful readers will have noted by now that I have been undertaking a subtle terminological shift, preferring the usages “household” and “matrimony” to those of family and marriage. It’s time to come clean and indicate these are intentional shifts, and are appealing for the preference for these terms in teaching and in advocacy. These are truer to biblical concepts, more concrete, and currently less subject to co-option than the more abstract terms employed sociologically.

The term “marriage” is now used to describe a range of contracted connections, and at its root simply means “joining.” As we have seen above and in common experience, the term is used for multiple arrangements sanctioned by civil license, as well as informal arrangements of convenience, and now requires careful definition. It is a reasonable translation of the Greek work “gamos” but now falls short of the fulsomeness of that term. For, as Hebrews 13:4 demonstrates, gamos indicates a universally honored, and inviolable joining of two into one flesh, for the purposes of creation, pro-creation, and glorifying God. So it is time to resurrect the more antique English term “matrimony” as seen, for example, in the Rites of Holy Matrimony in the traditional Books of Common Prayer. The English term indicates not only “joining,” but of the “mothering” purpose of the joining, not only in producing children but in establishing a household for the nurturing and flourishing of all within its bounds. This is “an honourable estate, instituted of God, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified in Cana of Galilee...” And, as in Ephesians and elsewhere in the New Testament, Holy Matrimony is by definition monogamous, lifelong, and inviolable.

The biblical term usually translated “family” is oikos which truly does mean “household” and more fully expresses what is upheld therein. The term “family” is now likewise used broadly, even metaphorically in such phrases as “the family of nations,” or “the Family” (as in the loyalties of mafia clans.) Regularly we hear that a certain association, like a university or a business, is “really a family.” Sociological and legal uses now extend the term to many varied arrangements. Biblically and traditionally, however, the household is the fruitful association established by the joining of a man and woman in holy matrimony (leaving father and mother and becoming one flesh), and then all that is entailed in that – children, cultivation, prayer, nurture, mutual encouragement and love. This is certainly what the Garden was to be to Adam and Eve, but which was disrupted by sin and then set on a cursed course of recovery, and ultimate redemption.

So, I argue that Matrimony and the Household are the essential facts of Creation, human life, and redemption. These are the foundations upon which all other expressions of society are built. Whatever the terms, it should be clear that no derogation of this honorable estate should be allowed by law, policy, or social practice, and all public efforts should be evaluated by that standard. This would extend to anything that can be considered public in modern terms – whether it is policy on land, national security, taxation, development, refugees, or education. Displacement of households for partisan ends is an abomination. Further, the support and encouragement of healthy and proper Matrimony and Households should guide all policymaking. This of course, does not call for the state to govern the family, but rather to do nothing that inhibits the formation of households, and to uphold the means by which that is possible. “The contention,” wrote Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum novarum*, “that the civil government should at its option intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household is a great and pernicious error.” Nor does this call for support of aberrations such as forced marriages, child marriages, or any variations from the true nature of Matrimony. And the civil government should in no way inhibit the calling of the church to proclaim, teach, lead and guide in the formation of matrimonial households.

C.S. Lewis, rather whimsically, argues the proper place even of the challenges of war, compared to the truly permanent things:

The secular community, since it exists for our natural good and not for our supernatural, has no higher end than to facilitate and safeguard the family, and friendship, and solitude... Collective activities are, of course, necessary, but this is the end to which they are necessary. Great sacrifices of this private happiness by those who have it may be necessary in order that it may be more widely distributed. All may have to be a little hungry in order that none may starve. But do not let us mistake necessary evils for good. The mistake is easily made. Fruit has to be tinned if it is to be transported and has to lose thereby some of its good qualities. But one meets people who have learned actually to prefer the tinned fruit to the fresh. A sick society must think much about politics, as a sick man must think much about his digestion; to ignore the subject may be fatal cowardice for the one as for the other. But if either comes to regard it as the natural food of the mind – if either forgets that we think of such things only in order to be able to think of something else – then what was undertaken for the sake of health has become itself a new and deadly disease.¹⁶

“Politics” functions in service to true goods, it is not an end in itself or ultimate practice. Contrary to modern liberal insistence that identity must be realized in public life and in concentrated “democratic participation,” these are only means toward higher ends. It isn’t worth priority attention. This fair warning is echoed more positively in other expressions of Christian social teaching. That matrimony and the establishment of households, fruitfully bearing children, and nurturing responsible social beings, is fundamental:

This particular doctrine, often expounded by the magisterium of the Church, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act. The reason is that the fundamental nature of the marriage act, while uniting husband and wife in the closest intimacy, also renders them capable of generating new life—and this as a result of laws written into the actual nature of man and of woman. And if each of these essential qualities, the unitive and the procreative, is preserved, the use of marriage fully retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to which man is called. We believe that our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing that this teaching is in harmony with human reason.¹⁷

These understandings have to be upheld, for the good of all, and for the integrity of the church. It is ultimately the undermining and disbanding of matrimonial households, whatever the source, that fuels fires of the many personal and social ills of common concern. As above, this is demonstrated empirically, and it follows deductively from the establishment of the fundamental nature of such unions. The contemporary plague of disorders associated with sexual incontinence and abuses is one example, as the basic vows and very nature of matrimony are violated.

Fortunately, this has been recognized by many churches, including those represented in the orthodox Anglican movement know as the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans. Its Jerusalem Declaration of 2008 includes the proclamation:

We acknowledge God’s creation of humankind as male and female and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family. We repent of our failures to maintain this standard and call for a renewed commitment to lifelong fidelity in marriage and abstinence for those who are not married.

¹⁶ Lewis, “Membership,” p. 162.

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, section 12.

For the undermining of households also leads to the weakening of the church, to the corruption of household of God. The building of households is essential to the edification of the church, the dwelling place of God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 3) Not only are local churches expressions of the household of God, but they individually are in many ways the extended household of their “earthly fathers” who lead them.

St. Paul makes this clear in his instructions to the young bishop, Timothy, as he was assigned the leadership of the church in Ephesus. Paul wrote to Timothy “so that you may know how one ought to live in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15) Paul uses the concept of the household throughout his instruction, including the insistence that the leaders had to build their governance not only on personal character and learning, but on their own ordered households. “Therefore a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable ... He must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (3:2ff)

Paul further shows that all households should be ordered and dignified, with a right relationship between the man and woman at the center. This includes living out the creational responsibilities of each, including the centrality of motherhood (2:15) and calling of men to pray and lead towards peaceful and loving order (2:8) Paul even indicates that this right ordering of households works in the processes of redemption, re-ordering that which was disordered in the Garden. (2:13-15)

So, let us build up households both for the sake of the church, and for the good of all (2:1-3). Of course the church counsels those who have fallen, and offers forgiveness and guidance for those who repent. The brokenness of creation is not fully healed, and will not be until all things are united fully in Christ, “summed up in Him.” (Colossians 2). No actual earthly marriage or household will achieve perfection, and some may not actually attain the blessing of being in holy matrimony. But that is not the issue at hand, as the challenges that come to those who think about and study “marriage and the family” are really the claims and goals for “transformation” which flow from other visions of “the good life for all” – systems of belief and practice regarding how human beings should live and flourish in the world we now inhabit.

It is not only sexual libertinism, the claim that happiness can only be achieved by unshackling all restraints on appetite and pleasure, that rivals the centrality of the matrimonial household. Many other visions could be described, many of them built on the premise of “proprietary individualism.” These would include the life of material abundance, of conspicuous consumption. It could also include the vision that technology will merge even more fully with human existence, and improve life spans and even change the shape of the given human body through genetic engineering or “gender transformation.” As well, the openly stated goal of social media enterprises is to “remake human experience through a global community of freely associating individuals.” For others, the good life is expressed by associating exclusively with members of one’s tribe or nation, or socio-economic level, or political party, to the detriment and even destruction of other such identities. Some still cling to collectivist visions of the revolutionary remaking of mankind and society in “scientifically” articulated forms.

Many of these are distortions of good things, of those things created by God and sanctified through prayer and the Word. But if they take the place of the fundamental order woven into creation by God, and of the core of redemption, they become idols which lead to destruction, and are under judgment.

VII. The Mission of the Church in the Temporal Order of God: Interpreting and Instructing Human Freedom and the Common Good

There are many documented cases, especially in North American and European countries, where these teachings are found discriminatory, harmful, and have been penalized either by states or simply by social pressures. There are also clear examples of parts of the Church changing or “lightening” even these essential conceptions, either in order to conform to “developing social norms” justified as further revelation or clarification by God, or in the name of love, compassion, tolerance and encouragement. Other Christian voices, such as that heard in the Jerusalem Declaration, have seen that there can be no change or compromise on these essentials. In *Veritatis Splendor*, his elaboration of the basic structure of moral theology, John Paul II wrote:

[O]ne has to consider carefully the correct relationship existing between freedom and human nature, and in particular the place of the human body in questions of natural law. A freedom which claims to be absolute ends up treating the human body as a raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design... This moral theory does not correspond to the truth about man and his freedom. It contradicts the Church's teachings on the unity of the human person, whose rational soul is ... the form of his body. The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole -- as a person. These definitions not only point out that the body, which has been promised the resurrection, will also share in glory. They also remind us that reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties. The person, including the body, is completely entrusted to himself, and it is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts. The person, by the light of reason and the support of virtue, discovers in the body the anticipatory signs, the expression and the promise of the gift of self, in conformity with the wise plan of the Creator. It is in the light of the dignity of the human person – a dignity which must be affirmed for its own sake – that reason grasps the specific moral value of certain goods towards which the person is naturally inclined. And since the human person cannot be reduced to a freedom which is self-designing, but entails a particular spiritual and bodily structure, the primordial moral requirement of loving and respecting the person as an end and never as a mere means also implies, by its very nature, respect for certain fundamental goods, without which one would fall into relativism and arbitrariness ... By rejecting all manipulations of corporeity which alter its human meaning, the Church serves man and shows him the path of true love, the only path on which he can find the true God.¹⁸

This is indeed true freedom, true human flourishing, the fulfillment of human purpose in the body, which is “maritally structured,” in the household, and in the Body of Christ. We have already noted the instruction of St. Paul that the people of God pray and work for “all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we all may lead lives of peaceful community and just order, godly and dignified in everything.” (1 Timothy 2) Paul’s reasons, that this is good and pleasing to the Lord, as well as “good for all” is given further weight by his instruction. “For there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all...” All of life is assumed in the Incarnation of the Son of God, not just the “spiritual” aspects.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 48-50.

We believe in the resurrection of the body, as well as the total surrender of our lives now to him who gave himself as a ransom. Even more deeply, the “mediation” Paul speaks of is more than simple “representation” before a court of judgment; it is active, live participation by the Man Jesus Christ in the life of the world, and the participation in the life of heaven by those who are in Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself was born into a household, and raised and nurtured there, by parents who cared for and loved him. And no, he did not marry on earth or form a particular temporal household, but he has united with his Bride, the church, in establishing the earthly household of God. So the church’s responsibility is to the Lord first, to assist him in bringing all of life into subjection to Him; and then to serve the world for Him – or rather to be means by which his mediating service moves to all mankind. The church is given the treasures of knowing truth, and is required to represent it in all areas of created life. And, as shown in *Veritatis Splendor*, the truth of the human body in its nuptial purpose and structure, how the human person is to live, is central. To lose or ignore the truth of creation and redemption is to serve incompletely or falsely in what the Lord requires of us.

Mary Eberstadt, an eminent Christian scholar on matters of matrimony and the family, has put forth a challenging thesis to explain the measurable and experienced decline of religion in the modern world, especially in Europe and North America. Often, the measurable decline in overtly religious commitment is attributed variously or in combination to the Enlightenment, rationalism, scientific discoveries, technology, the history of world wars and other calamities, economic changes, and the like. She writes, however

Urbanization, industrialization, belief and disbelief, technology, shrinking population: yes, yes and yes to all those factors statistically and otherwise correlated with secularization. Yet, even taking all those factors into account, the picture remains incomplete... This book is an attempt to supply the missing piece. It moves the human family from the periphery to the center of this debate over how and why Christianity exercises less influence over Western minds and hearts today than it did in the past.

Eberstadt then states her primary thesis. Her “argument, in brief, is that the Western record suggests that family decline is not merely a consequence of religious decline, as conventional thinking has understood that relationship. It also is plausible – and, I will argue, appears to be true – that family decline, in turn, helps to power religious decline.”¹⁹ She goes on to demonstrate through many examinations not only why this is plausible, theoretically as well as empirically. Her conclusion is that “the process of secularization... has not been properly understood because it has neglected to take into account this “Family Factor”-- meaning the active effect that participation in the family itself appears to have on religious belief and practice.”²⁰ Therefore, the diminishing of the size of families, the lack of commitment to families, the decrease in the actual formation of households seen throughout the West – these are causes as much as effects of all the other social changes summed up in “secularization.” At the very basic level of common sense, most religious institutions remain and grow primarily through the participation of families and their additions through childbearing, and by the transmission of the faith from parents to children, much more than by evangelism and new members. So the rearrangement and even disappearance of family life leads to these results.

What this book means to impress is that family and faith are the invisible double helix of society – two spirals that when linked to one another can effectively reproduce, but whose strength and momentum depend on one another.

19 Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2014), “Introduction.”
20 Ibid.

Perhaps we can take this insight and realize an even more penetrating possibility. These effects are not only sociological (households form churches), and psychological; but soteriological and existential: as the centrality of matrimony and the household has eroded in human consciousness, or more importantly, been denied or displaced, so have essential symbolic and experiential means that we have been given in order to grasp and partake of union with Christ and the fullness of salvation, which is the completion of creation. If these goods, holy matrimony and the household, are no longer even recognized in terms of natural law or real life by many, and their appeal has been stolen away by other gods, then even the very core of redemption offered by the church will be ignored by many, or at best weakly grasped. The church offers union with Christ and adoption into the household of God – not therapeutic soothing to build up self-esteem in disordered lives, or a satisfied proprietary individualism. Now thriving churches in Africa and elsewhere might be tempted to adjust to changing social conditions, and like their western sisters shift emphasis and message to accommodate so-called “new realities.” What is wrong with sincere love between two men, who want to be in a committed conjugal relationship? What is wrong with finding ways to show that “modern choices” of singleness, childlessness, and “career-first” desires are within the range of sanctified calling? Is it not enough to be “in a personal relationship with God,” or “spiritual but not religious?” If indeed the core premises of this paper are true, the answers will be obvious.

Conclusion

Thus, for the sake of souls and for the sake of her own obedience, the Church should reclaim and continually re-affirm the honorable calling to enable men and women to enter holy matrimony, to form, holy and consecrated households, and for those households to be formed into the larger Body of Christ, the people of God, the Bride of Christ. These must be proclaimed as vital to human existence, and necessary components of the faith which is accompanied by “knowledge with all discernment” (Philippians 1:9) and thereby become central to the public witness of God’s church. This will be crucial not only to the church’s strength and growth, but to her integrity and faithfulness to revealed truth. By doing so, the Church will serve the good of all, the common good, but more importantly will affirm it is the Great Household of God, the Bride of Christ, which is the Kingdom of God, the life of the Holy Trinity extended and opened to those who will come into it and be united with the life of God.

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