

4-1-1970

The Biblical View of the Sexual Polarity

Ralph Gehrke

Concordia Teachers College, River Forest

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gehrke, Ralph (1970) "The Biblical View of the Sexual Polarity," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 41, Article 20.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol41/iss1/20>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

The Biblical View of the Sexual Polarity

RALPH GEHRKE

Mass Media and the Future of Preaching

DUANE MEHL

A Checklist of Luther's Writings in English

GEORGE S. ROBBERT

Brief Studies

Theological Observer

Homiletics

Book Review

Vol. XLI

April 1970

No. 4

We're not saying that Roy Gesch has a book for everybody.

What we are saying is that he has written six devotionals for six special kinds of people.



Man at Prayer

This new book gives men in the working world the strength and power to deal with the petty aggravations and the harsher realities of the daily routine.

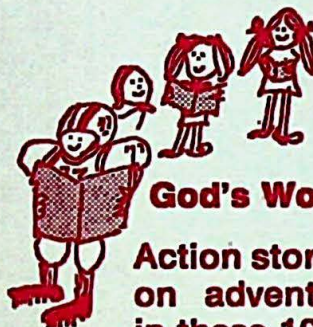
Cloth, \$3.50, No. 6U1139



God's World Through Young Eyes

Action stories take 9- to 13-year-olds on adventures through the world in these 104 devotions.

Cloth, \$3.95, No. 6U1134



A Husband Prays, A Wife Prays

Matched prayer-meditations, written from the view of a husband and of a wife respectively, discuss areas of marital concern.

Twin cloth volumes, \$5.95, No. 6U1126



On Active Duty

These 45 practical man-to-God talks provide moral and psychological power for the recruit or veteran.

Cloth, \$2.50, No. 6U1120



Parents Pray

A parallel format for mothers and for father will engage both in creative thought and conversation on parenthood concerns.

Cloth, \$3.00, No. 6U1132



Help! I'm in College

In the midst of confusion, college 1970 style, this book offers realistic help to students who would like to cry HELPI but usually don't.

Paperback, \$1.95, No. 12U2316

**Concordia Publishing House
3558 South Jefferson
St. Louis, Missouri 63118**



CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Volume XLI

April 1970

Number 4

A Theological Journal of
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Edited by
THE FACULTY OF CONCORDIA SEMINARY
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY is published monthly, except July-August bimonthly, by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63118, to which all business correspondence is to be addressed. \$3.50 per annum, anywhere in the world, payable in advance. Second-class postage paid at St. Louis, Mo. © 1970 Concordia Publishing House. Printed in U. S. A.

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

Contents

The Biblical View of the Sexual Polarity RALPH GEHRKE	195
Mass Media and the Future of Preaching DUANE MEHL	206
A Checklist of Luther's Writings in English, Part II GEORGE S. ROBBERT	214
Brief Studies	221
Theological Observer	229
Homiletics	231
Book Review	236

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

ROBERT W. BERTRAM, JOHN S. DAMM, GEORGE W. HOYER (Homiletics Editor)
EDGAR M. KRENTZ, HERBERT T. MAYER (Managing Editor)
ARTHUR C. PIEPKORN (Book Review Editor), GILBERT A. THIBLE, WALTER WEGNER
DAVID C. YAGOW (Assistant Managing Editor)

*Address all communications to the Editorial Committee in care of
Herbert T. Mayer, 801 De Mun Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63105*

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY *now available on Microfilm*

One of the most pressing problems facing libraries today is inadequate storage space for the ever-increasing flow of publications. To help librarians plagued with the problem we have entered into an agreement with University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Mich., to make CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY available to libraries in microfilm form. Microfilm makes it possible for libraries to use and store an entire volume of 11 issues of this magazine on a single roll.

For further details concerning purchase and date when volumes will be available, write to University Microfilms, 313 N. First Street, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48103.

The Biblical View of the Sexual Polarity

RALPH GEHRKE

The Bible contains a vast amount of information on the topic of sexuality. We can come to grips with its significant features by concentrating on the two great "breakthroughs" which have resulted in the distinctly Biblical views that believers have expressed about the sexual polarity of male and female. Such an approach calls for consideration, first, of that decisive turning point in Old Testament times when Yahwism "demythed" the sexual realm and set up what one might call a creaturely or a creation view of the polarity of male and female. Second, we must consider the breakthrough which occurred at the dawn of New Testament times, when the polarity of male and female was viewed from a specifically Christian perspective.

A basic danger in the approach will be, of course, that it can easily end up with a sort of neofundamentalism which merely outlines what the Bible says without making the distinctions that are necessary to get at what the Bible means. In the first part of his essay *The Bible and the Role*

The author is professor of theology at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill. This essay was presented to the Conference of Lutheran Theological Professors which met at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago on Sept. 21, 1968. It was written at the request of the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council — USA, in order to initiate a series of discussions on the topic of sexuality.

*of Women*¹ Krister Stendahl warns us against a hermeneutic which merely represents the so-called Biblical view, but usually ends up giving us only elements of the ancient Semitic thought world or world view. He rightly predicts that such an approach will end up in nothing but "museum-like conservatism." The warning is in place.

At the same time, however, we should be conscious of another danger. That is the danger of proceeding on the basis of thinking which says, "This Biblical material is very time-bound and in large part reflects outdated world views of that time. Hence it must be, to coin a phrase, 'de-worldview-ized.'" The danger which accompanies that kind of reductionism is that extraneous concerns can easily take over and "call the shots," while key aspects of the Biblical material are disregarded. For that reason this essay focuses on the two turning points where, it would seem, distinctively Biblical views of the sexual polarity have had their origins.

As one ponders the material, one is forced to ask, "Is there not some lasting validity in the view which the Old Testament first and the New Testament later employed to speak of the sexual polarity?" Von Rad, in an essay entitled "Some Aspects of the Old Testament World View"

¹ Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women*, No. 15 in the Biblical Series of Facet Books (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), pp. 10 ff.

(1964),² cautions against attempts to distinguish too sharply between the faith of Israel and her world view since, as he puts it, they "interpenetrated each other quite inextricably." In this essay von Rad points out that the same theological reasons which prompted the prohibition of images in ancient Israel (lest creation be considered the stage of mythical creation-struggles) led to cosmologies which were freed from the mythic and cultic views of the ancient Near East and which allowed Israel to be in continual dialog with Yahweh concerning the world. As a result, Israel's world view was continually in a state of flux, since it had to be saved from becoming a stage for divine mysteries or theophanies and to be freed for those who would look at it with secular eyes as a created thing. This process of "demythization" occurred in other areas of Israel's life and culture, too. For instance, Israel learned to look at the realm of history in a sober, rather objective manner, abandoning older sacral views. In a similar manner Israel learned to look at the sexual polarity.

I

In order, therefore, for us to get at the question, "What was Israel's view of the sexual polarity?" we shall do well first to ask the prior question, "How did Israel's view come to differ from that of her neighbors?" There is good evidence for the assertion that Israel's distinctive view was established only after a struggle with rival views and that it was this struggle

² Gerhard von Rad, "Some Aspects of the Old Testament World View," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trieman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 144 ff.

which resulted in her rejection of every form of fertility cult, cultic prostitution, and the *hieros gamos*. Before this essay takes up what might be called Israel's normative view, as that is expressed in Gen. 1:27 ff., we must consider Gen. 6:1-4, a surprising and puzzling pericope. Hermann Gunkel has said of this passage: "Gen. 6 is so highly mythological that it has aroused apprehensions in the minds of interpreters of earlier and recent times and therefore has had to put up with all sorts of re-interpretations (*Umdeutungen*)."³

The First "Breakthrough" (Gen. 6:1-4)

It is true that some recent commentators, such as Gustav E. Closen,⁴ reduce the stark offensiveness of the narrative by claiming that the so-called sons of Elohim are to be understood in the general sense of "men." Since the Old Testament affirms that men were created in the image and after the likeness of God, why, asks Closen, can it not also call men "the sons of God"? Though his argument has a certain logical force, Closen is unable to cite any instance where the Old Testament refers to men as "the sons of God." Another recent interpreter, Ferdinand Dexinger,⁵ offers a similar mild interpretation, understanding "the sons of God" as heroes. He bases his view on a linguistic contention that

³ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, 3. Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964 reprint), p. 56.

⁴ Gustav E. Closen, *Die Sünde der "Söhne Gottes," Gen. 6, 1-4; ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Genesis* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1937).

⁵ Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne; oder, Engel vor der Sintflut?* (Vienna: Herder, 1966), as quoted by Oswald Loretz, "Götter und Frauen (Gen. 6, 1-4)," *Bibel und Leben*, VIII (Juni-Juli 1967), 125.

the word *elohim* here acts as a superlative and cites parallels from the Ugaritic legend of King Keret. He fails to prove his point, however, when he merely assumes that the *bene ha'elohim* of Genesis 6 are *kings* and when his Ugaritic parallels refer to kings who were considered in some sense divine. Von Rad might seem to come closer to an adequate interpretation when he says that "the sons of God" refers to angels,⁶ but when he later describes such angels as demons (in the manner of Late Judaism and the early church fathers), he weakens his case and at the same time fails to make it clear why *men* or the world of *men* should be punished for the demons' outrage. If that were the original thrust of the narrative, we would expect it to end with the evil angels being punished and cast out of the divine world—which is the conclusion of the versions from the late period. Despite all such *Umdeutungen*, we cannot avoid the simple fact that here the Old Testament is referring to a "myth," one that still smells to high heaven, even though it is, as Brevard Childs contends, a *broken* myth—that is, one that has been "fumigated" or "housebroken."⁷

Recent studies of the pertinent Old Testament and Ugaritic parallels, such as those by Georg Fohrer,⁸ Brevard Childs,⁹ and Oswald Loretz,¹⁰ have persuaded this

⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), p. 110.

⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, No. 27 in *Studies in Biblical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 70.

⁸ Georg Fohrer, "byios," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, VIII (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1969), 349.

⁹ Childs, pp. 49 ff.

¹⁰ Loretz, pp. 123 ff. (see note 5).

essayist that *bene ha'elohim* here most probably refers to those inhabitants of the divine realm who in the Old Testament are ranked beneath the one God of Israel, Yahweh. If this is the case, our pericope tells how they had intercourse with humans of the feminine sex and begat offspring. For that very reason their offspring were extraordinary in strength and reputation and would also have been extraordinary in longevity, had Yahweh's judgment not intervened. It is also clear that this narrative views such intercourse of the sons of God with the daughters of men as an evil disruption of the order which God had established at the creation of man (Gen. 1:27-28 and Gen. 2:18-24). What is really rejected here is any attempt to establish intercourse or relationship between God and man outside the realm of Israel's history. Just as, according to Psalm 19, man must look to the Torah's account of Yahweh's words and deeds in the history of Israel because creation has no word to speak to man, so in a similar manner, according to this pericope, there can be no approach to the divine world by the kind of sexual participation in the world-process which Israel's neighbors fostered. It is not by participation in the vital forces which are supposed to be released in the fertility cult that one gets to know God as He is to be known. Such practices have no place in Israel; they are in fact rejected with curses.¹¹

¹¹ It would be possible to discuss at this point in a longer paper the Old Testament rejection of such perversions of God's good gift of sexuality as are condemned in Gen. 9:20-27 (the narrative about Noah's curse on Canaanite sexual exposure, exhibitionism, and, it seems, homosexuality) and in Genesis 19 (where not only the perversions of sodomy but also the incest

A question to be dealt with more adequately before we leave Genesis 6 is this: "Why does Genesis 6 take up this particularly offensive story?" It is possible to assume, of course, that the pericope was set at the beginning of the flood narrative at a very late stage in the history of transmission, say by the Jahwist (though not all agree on this). If, however, we follow Claus Westermann's recent claim that the material for its protohistory (*Urgeschichte*) was transmitted to Israel as one large block of traditional *Urgeschichte*-material, then we might suggest that the pericope represents traditional material with which the Israelites were obliged to come to terms in their own *Urgeschichte*.¹² In any case a "mythological" narrative like this was necessary to illustrate vividly the wickedness of mankind that brought things to the breaking point before the Deluge. Far from being what had once been described in the heyday of purely literary criticism as a "fairly gross *lapsus calami*" by a sleepy scribe who presumably copied too much of a pagan myth, this narrative is precisely the kind of narrative that was called for. In fact, it still reflects and carries within itself indications that at an earlier stage (when it was a genuine pagan polytheistic nature myth) the intercourse of the sons of God

which produced Moab and Ammon is rejected). In this essay, however, we shall limit ourselves to material that deals with the heterosexual polarity. In passing, it might also be said that an approach to our topic via other passages (for example, sections from Hosea) would add considerable depth; it would not, however, confront us with the sexual views of the peoples which surrounded ancient Israel as drastically as Gen. 6:1-4 confronts us.

¹² Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, in *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament*, I (Neukirchen: Neukirchen Verlag, 1966), 7 ff.

with human females was by no means rejected. Such intercourse produced demigods and "musclemen" like the Greek Heracles or, better, the Greek *gigantes*, the snaky-limbed "giants" depicted, for instance, on the Altar of Zeus at Pergamum. Even in its present form this narrative vividly pictures the proud attempt by Yahweh's rebellious creatures to employ sexual activity to increase their life-potency.

Such an interpretation is corroborated by contemporary ethnological studies, like that of Hermann Baumann,¹³ which points out that myth-thinking man expresses his desire to uphold or strengthen an order of things which is mythically conceived by means of that exchange of vital life-forces which takes place in sexual intercourse. Myth-thinking people identify the exchange of the life-powers of the sexes with the exchange of forces which take place in nature. Thus the cooperative activity of male and female purveyors of life furthers and increases not only their own fertility and strength but, according to this mythical view of things, also that of plants and animals.¹⁴ In the physical and ritual coitus of individual couples (especially of select couples) forces are unleashed which are other than purely sexual or purely procreative. Hence ritual coitus is not restricted to occasions which are to insure fertility but is practiced to insure the success of many other important undertakings. The basic order of things is thought to be connected with the uniting of the sexes; after all, in the *Urzeit* heaven and earth had been united before they were

¹³ Hermann Baumann, *Das doppelte Geschlecht; ethnologische Studien zur Bisexualität in Ritus und Mythos* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1955).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

separated at creation.¹⁵ This means, then, that such a "myth" as the one which surprises and offends us moderns in Genesis 6 was, when it confronted ancient Israel, an excellent illustration not only of how Israel's neighbors conceived of the relations of male and female but also of how that relation was *not* to be conceived of in Israel. To be sure, the "myth" here shocks us as much as does the Noah of Gen. 9:28, lying in his tent drunken, sexually exposed, even mocked by his youngest son; but no one in ancient Israel failed to get the message of either narrative.

Ancient Israel saw in the fertility cults, the cultic prostitution, and the *hieros gamos* of her neighbors illegitimate attempts by humans to increase their vitality, to come into contact with false nature deities, to give themselves the blessing and strength which could only come from Him who alone is God, namely, Yahweh. Hence Yahwism was not afraid to take up and repeat such a "mythological" narrative as this. As it did so, however, it adapted the narrative in such a way that it would, as a broken myth, proclaim Yahweh's judgment on all proud pagan claims that the offspring of such monstrous unions had received supernatural strength and longevity. Hence the Biblical version ends with Yahweh limiting the life of man to 120 years, a far cry from the astronomical reigns ascribed to the early predeluvian patriarchs in the ancient Near Eastern king lists.¹⁶ Yahweh sits in the heavens and

laughs; He has them in derision; and in anger He frustrates the plans which they make to increase their potency by their sexual activity.¹⁷

The world views which Israel received from her neighbors were world views which had to be "demythed" and either put out of bounds by commands like the prohibition of images or absorbed into some connection with the events of Yahweh's history with His people. Similarly, Yahwistic faith was obliged to "demyth" also the sexual realm (the relation of male and female) and, in von Rad's phrase, "free it for those who would look at it with secular eyes as a creaturely thing."¹⁸

The Normative View (Gen. 1:27 ff.)

Since we have discussed at length the Old Testament "breakthrough" as it is reflected in Genesis 6, we shall consider only briefly the resultant normative conception of the polarity of male and female in Old Testament times, which is expressed clearly in Gen. 1:27 ff. We may at the same time touch on the question, "Do maleness and

¹⁷ It is true that no exact parallel to this narrative has yet come to light from Ugarit, but one can still be expected, especially since a similar narrative is attested in Philo of Byblos. See Gunkel, p. 56.

¹⁸ The fact that one of the customary features of Israel's holy wars was a ban on sexual activity (1 Sam. 21:4; 2 Sam. 11:11; see also Gerhard von Rad, *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel* [Zürich: Zwingli, 1951], p. 7) does not mean that God's good gift of sexuality was thereby disavowed in a type of Old Testament puritanism, as many have alleged. This particular prohibition of sex was directed against any Israelite attempts to engage in a type of sexual intercourse which, like that customarily engaged in by pagans before important enterprises, was supposed to guarantee the success of the military undertaking.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁶ "The Sumerian King List," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 2d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 265 ff.

femaleness reflect the image of God?"¹⁹ But I think that question more or less evaporates (as do many of the questions which we moderns put to ancient texts in our modern terminology) once we make two purely formal, nevertheless significant, observations about the first verse of this passage. First, the statement "male and female He created them" is a limitation of the previous statement, "God created man in His own image," and it ought to be so interpreted. Second, the expression "in the image of God" is *not*, in the first instance, a direct statement about man;²⁰ rather, the expression is an adverbial phrase which modifies the verb "create." Therefore, in the first instance it tells us something about God's activity of creating man and hence only indirectly something about man.

The so-called image of God is not conceived of here as a possession of man, some sort of "standard equipment which comes with all models," which exists apart from God and His creative activity. Rather, the meaning of the entire statement here seems to be this: in sovereign freedom God made man to be, of all creatures, His special counterpart, a person (a) with whom He could speak and converse, and (b) who, on his part, could respond and live "in His presence." Man was created by God, one might say, in such a way that

¹⁹ This question is answered affirmatively by O. J. Baab, "Sex, Sexual Behavior," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, IV (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 300.

²⁰ This has been the traditional interpretation in the Western church with the sole exception, it seems, of Claus Westermann, to whom this essayist is indebted for this significant observation, expressed in *Calwer Predigthilfen*, ed. H. Breit and C. Westermann, IV (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1965), 192 ff.

God could have a history with him (and, by implication, so that man could have a history with God). If, then, there is added to the first statement ("God created man in His image") the second statement ("male and female created He them"), this second statement about the sexual polarity of male and female limits and defines that preceding statement. It does so in this way: On the one hand it declares that God is above and beyond sexuality (that is, as far as sex is concerned, God is entirely different from man). On the other hand it declares that the sexual polarity of male and female is a polarity which applies to creatures; it is, in fact, an essential feature of the creature man. Walther Zimmerli comments aptly, "A solitary human is only half a human,"²¹ and the so-called J-narrative in Genesis 2 agrees, as Yahweh says, "It is not good for the man to be alone." Since man is a creature who exists in the polarity of male and female, there can be neither pulling of rank by male over female or by female over male nor any genuine separation of male and female. Rather, man and woman are God's creation precisely in the creaturely relationship which directs them toward one another.

The power which these male and female creatures receive to be fruitful and multiply is a blessing that comes from God and from God alone. He remains the source of that power and blessing even when man rules over and subdues the earth and the animals. But by the time we get this far in our consideration of Gen. 1: 27 ff., we already have indications (more are to come!) that the view which is pre-

²¹ Walther Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1-11; die Urgeschichte* (Zürich: Zwingli, 1957), p. 80.

sented here as the normative view, that is, the view which shows God's will and purpose, is in a sense an ideal view, one that even then contrasted sharply with harsh reality. There are three other indications of this at the conclusion of the passage: (1) There can be no violence and killing for food, as expressed in God's will from the beginning, even though we (and the word "we" includes both ancient Israel and us moderns) cannot imagine such a state of affairs. (2) The Creator's verdict of "good" and "very good" in regard to all His creative works, including man, expresses God's affirmation of the sexual realities of maleness and femaleness as His good creation. This affirmation was made and still is made, however, in a world in which actual reality was quite different. For example, in ancient Israel males habitually and continually pulled rank on females, often with the sanction of hallowed customs of the age. This affirmation that maleness and femaleness are good is an affirmation of faith and an expression of confidence in the Creator, and, like every genuine statement of faith, it was made in the teeth of sad experience of the very opposite. (3) All of God's creatures are directed toward a goal, and here that is Yahweh's own day, His sabbath. It is not saying too much when one says that here the Old Testament points past its own times to the future when all creation will enter into the Lord's eschatological rest. It is this future which, according to Christian proclamation, has dawned in Jesus Christ also for the sexual realm.

II

The final part of this essay addresses itself to the crucial question of how the

advent of the New Testament era affected the view of the sexual polarity which believers had come to know in Old Testament times. There is no doubt that the New Testament presupposes and continues to express the views at which Old Testament believers had arrived, especially the view that the polarity of male and female is a reality created by God. The big question which we must face in the last part of this essay, however, is whether or not the New Testament era has added a dimension which is uniquely and specifically Christian. Does the New Testament connect the sexual polarity of male and female with the divine love expressed in Jesus Christ? Did a genuinely new "breakthrough" in believers' views of sexuality occur with the dawn of the New Testament era?

Again our procedure here will be to concentrate on a basic passage, Eph. 5: 22-33, a passage which illumines both the continuity and the discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament on this subject. In a sense it is a commentary on Gen. 1:27 ff., though it goes beyond that text.

We can gain greater perspective on this key passage, however, if we preface our consideration of it with a look at a typical view of Late Judaism, as expressed in the very popular narrative of Tobit.²²

²² It should be noted in passing that both Late Judaism and the New Testament make their *positive* statements about the relationship of male and female in connection with the institution of marriage. To be sure, the New Testament also makes statements about relations of male and female outside of marriage — even as it also has things to say about perversions of sexuality, both male and female perversions. However, except for the significant statements in 1 Cor. 6:12-20, to which we will return, such

The prayer of Tobias in Tobit 8:5-9 comes at the climax of the book's lively narrative just after the evil demon has been driven from the wedding chamber and just before Tobias there consummates his marriage with Sarah. "Blessed art Thou," Tobias prays, "O God of our fathers, and blessed be Thy holy and glorious name forever. Let the heavens and all of Thy creatures bless Thee. Thou madest Adam and gavest him Eve his wife as a helper and support. From them the race of mankind has sprung. Thou didst say, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; let Us make a helper for him like himself.' And now, O Lord, I am not taking this sister of mine because of lust (*diaporneian*) but with sincerity. Grant that I may find mercy and may grow old together with her." The episode ends: "And she [Sarah] said with him, 'Amen.' Then they both went to sleep for the night." Almost all the motifs concerning marriage in this prayer can also be found in the New Testament, including both the evident preeminence of the male and the significant point that mere sexual desire dare not be determinative of the male-female relationship. To the category of traditional views in Late Judaism belong also many New Testament warnings against lustful desire (for example, 1 Thess. 4:3-5) as well as the statements at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 7 (vv. 2-9), in which Paul asks people to enter the estate of marriage lest immorality (*porneia*) gain the upper hand. The basic idea is clear, namely, that sexual desire is not to be rejected; it is, in fact, the normal duty (1

statements about extramarital sex are *negative* in nature and hence contribute little that is positive to our subject.

Cor. 7:3-5). Nevertheless certain people are advised to lead a celibate life for the sake of the kingdom of God, provided that they have the gift for it (1 Cor. 7:7; see Matt. 19:10-12). Paul advised that course of action simply because sexual desire is a wicked force whenever it attains decisive significance. In this aspect of his teaching, however, Paul does not seem to differ very much at all from the opinion of Tobit and Late Judaism.

The New Testament "Breakthrough"

The significant difference between Paul and Tobit appears, however, when we note that for Tobit marriage, though a divine institution, lacks that special Christian eschatological aspect which it receives in a number of places in the New Testament, particularly the Pauline epistles. Krister Stendahl rightly calls attention to the fact that a breakthrough in the Biblical view of male and female occurred when the unique New Testament view forced itself to the fore, as first attested in the epistles in, of all places, the hierarchical framework of the so-called *Haustafeln*, or Tables of Duties, where wives were traditionally called on to be subject to and obey their husbands.²³ For example, in the midst of such an admonition in 1 Corinthians 11 something surprising happens at vv. 11-12, which Stendahl describes thus: "The detailed argument concerning woman's subordinate position in creation, in relation to her husband, and in the congregation in the presence of the angels, is interrupted by the words: 'Nevertheless, *in the Lord* woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made

²³ Stendahl, pp. 28 ff.

from man, so man is also man born of woman. But all things are from God.' Then the argument about the distinction is resumed, but now, so to speak, in the small letters of natural analogy: 'Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach . . . ?' And Paul lends his argument with reference to the common practice in the churches (v. 16)."²⁴

In a similar manner the traditional order-of-creation view of the sexual polarity was broken through in Gal. 3:26-28, where Paul says: "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no 'male and female'; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This means that in Christ something has happened which transcends not only the polarities between Jew and Greek or bond and free, but even the polarity which is often called an order of creation, the polarity of male and female.²⁵ This new aspect is spoken of also in 1 Corinthians 7 (alongside the more "traditional" statements which we just considered), where Paul states that in a mixed marriage an unbelieving woman is sanctified by a believing husband (and vice versa) and that for this reason the children of both are no longer unclean but holy. Similar "breakthrough thinking" appears, it would seem, in the statements

²⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁵ Stendahl's point is that a church with "the eschatological itch" will draw the conclusions of its faith in its view of the equality of male and female—even though it may take some time for them to become apparent.

which Paul makes in 1 Cor. 6:12-20 in the admonition addressed to Christian males to shun fornication because they thereby corrupt the sanctified and holy bodies which have been touched by the Resurrection.

The Normative New Testament View
(Eph. 5:22-33)

The fullest expression of the uniquely Christian view of the sexual polarity is made in Eph. 5:22-33. Here the sexual polarity of male and female is viewed from the Christian eschatological perspective. The relationship of male and female goes far beyond their helping each other as they grow old together (to use Tobias' phrase). They are here admonished to help each other to salvation, that is, to be what they already are in Christ. It is significant that the passage begins with the traditional hierarchical admonition that wives be subject to their husbands. But this admonition (as well as the subsequent admonition that Christian husbands should serve and love their wives) is only a new formulation and application of the general admonition that Christians should love and serve one another even as God and Christ have loved and served them.

The main thoughts in this admonition in Ephesians go back not only to Paul but ultimately to Jesus and His interpretation of Genesis.²⁶ In fact, it was Jesus who stressed the fact that despite the hardness of people's hearts—a hardness which often ruined God's gracious will for His creatures and one which Moses was forced to deal with by granting divorces—never-

²⁶ See Ethelbert Stauffer, "*gameō, gamos*," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, I, 651 ff., and Matt. 19:4-6.

theless from the beginning God created man as male and female to be *one* flesh. And now Ephesians comes along and elaborates this interpretation of the great Genesis text, applying to it the great Adam-Christ typology and seeing in that ancient word of God about the oneness of male and female a prophetic indication of the unity of Christ and His church. With Günther Bornkamm²⁷ and others²⁸ this essayist holds that the expression "this mystery" in v.32 refers to the Genesis passage on male and female which had just been cited. It means, to paraphrase it, "This mystery of the two being one flesh is great but I take it concerning the unity of Christ and His church." The oneness of male and female, which God purposed at creation but which man ruined, is restored and actualized in the unity of Christ and the church, a unity which, so to say, absorbs into itself Christian husband and wife. This oneness is not something which has to be gradually realized in the new age, but it exists already now. Vv. 28 and 29 state, in fact, that the body of one of the sexes belongs physically to the other and vice versa, since they are united members of Christ's body. Husband and wife (male and female) constitute one body in which the husband is the head and the wife the body, the earthly counterparts of Christ and His bride. (Vv.22-24)

In this relationship of oneness the duty of a husband is to love his wife. The duty of a wife is to "fear" her husband. These duties are expressed, to be sure, in im-

peratives, but the imperatives are supported by indicative statements which indicate that such love is the *natural* thing to expect. When the writer to the Ephesians makes the great statement (v.30) that Christ loved the church and gave up all that belonged to Him to give Himself completely to His bride in self-giving love, he is really interpreting the Genesis text which spoke about a man's leaving his home and cleaving to his wife and the two becoming one flesh. Similarly, Christian husbands are to give themselves up in love to their wives and to care for them. This, as v.33 shows, is but a form of the well-known commandment to love one's neighbor "as one's self." It is the natural thing to do. In other words, the relation of male and female which God purposed at creation is realized in the relation of Christian man and Christian woman, Christian male and Christian female.

The New Testament speaks of the sexual polarity of non-Christian males and females only indirectly. To be sure, non-Christians also live in the created order and, like all men, share in the sexual polarity. But there can be, it would seem, a realization of God's original will and purpose for male and female only in connection with the *Gospel*. Other relations of male and female are imperfect. The partners in them are under sin and under the *Law* (see Matt. 19:4-8), and the Law is simply unable to overcome man's basic lovelessness and to save him from his attempts at self-justification. On the plane of the Law therefore we cannot speak of male and female relationships which really correspond to God's will. Nor is the non-Christian excused if he fails to do the will of God also in the sexual realm. Romans

²⁷ Günther Bornkamm, "*mysterion*," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, IV, 829 ff.

²⁸ Bo Reicke, "Neuzeitliche und Neutestamentliche Auffassung von Liebe und Ehe," *Novum Testamentum*, I (1956), 30.

1—3 tell us that the non-Christian is also under the law and wrath of God.

Summa summarum: Man can do the will of God only as God grants him the righteousness which comes from Christ. But that, praise be to Him, is what God has graciously done. As Paul puts it, "God has done what the Law, weakened by the

flesh, could not do; sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the just requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Rom. 8:3 ff.)

River Forest, Ill.