

ABSTRACT

Stirring the Affections: The Place of Marriage in the Soteriology of
Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards

Benjamin T. Lloyd

Director: Joe L. Coker, Ph. D.

Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards have been hailed as two of the greatest, and most influential, theologians of all time. Against the Roman Catholics, Luther's life and theology provide a new method and way to understand justification. Edwards, emerging in the wake of Luther's Reformation, develops a similar theology of justification but in a Calvinist framework. Through the key metaphor of marriage, both figures illustrate the beautiful union between Christ and the Church. For Luther, this new theology of marriage followed his evangelical conversion, and was warmed by his own marriage to Katharina von Bora. For Edwards, Luther's use of marriage becomes the answer to the question of origin – the reason God created the world. In their two different approaches to the subject, one theological and one philosophical, we gain an insight into the effectiveness of marriage as a picture of the divine reality: Christ's marriage to the Church.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS

Dr. Joe L. Coker, Department of Religion

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: _____

STIRRING THE AFFECTIONS: THE PLACE OF MARRIAGE IN THE
SOTERIOLOGY OF MARTIN LUTHER AND JONATHAN
EDWARDS

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

By
Benjamin T. Lloyd

Waco, Texas

May 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EPIGRAPH.....	iii
PREFACE.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
Martin Luther: Catholicism, Evangelicalism, and Katharina	
CHAPTER TWO.....	29
Jonathan Edwards: Typology, Origin, and Sarah	
CHAPTER THREE.....	60
Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards: A Few Key Differences	
CHAPTER FOUR.....	76
Conclusion	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	79

“True religion, in large part, consists of holy affections.”

- Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*.

PREFACE

Admittedly, at first glance, Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards do not share a strong historical connection and thus some may critique the usefulness of their comparison. However, in the last five hundred years, few have had such significant influence on Protestant thought as Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards. Luther was instrumental in the Reformation, pushing forth new doctrine and frameworks for reading scripture, which have been used worldwide over the past five hundred years. Jonathan Edwards triggered the First Great Awakening, which has thoroughly shaped the American Protestant Church today through its reconciliation of Calvinism and Emotionalism. Both impacted many lives, and were thoroughly positive forces in the Kingdom of God, serving his word faithfully throughout their lives. Martin Luther married an escaped nun, Katharina von Bora, who greatly shaped his understanding of marriage and warmed his theological tone. Amid his battle against Rome, Luther remained a good husband and a wonderful father. Jonathan Edwards was no different. In a different context, eighteenth-century New England was caught up in the licentiousness of the third- and fourth-generation colonists, Edwards tasked himself with renewing colonial America's love for God. Through this, the beautiful young Sarah Pierrepont stood by his side and raised their eleven children. Abolitionist Samuel Hopkins attested to Sarah's care for the Edwards children, and her efforts to ensure travellers and the congregation were well taken care of. I have great respect for both these theologians, and men of God, and seek to investigate their theology with a due sense of charity.

Through the key metaphor of marriage, both figures illustrate the beautiful union between Christ and the Church. For Luther, this new theology of marriage followed his evangelical conversion, and was warmed by his own marriage to Katharina von Bora. For Edwards, Luther's use of marriage becomes the answer to the question of origin – the reason God created the world. In their two different approaches to the subject, one theological and one philosophical, we gain an insight into the effectiveness of marriage as a picture of the divine reality: Christ's marriage to the Church.

I have introduced the theological category of “marital soteriology” to capture how Luther and Edwards allowed the institution of marriage to function in their theology. Through this, I investigate the place marriage held in their theology, what it pictured, and how it shaped or illustrated what they believed about justification and union. To explore their respective marital soteriology, I have examined several works from throughout each author's life, as well as some secondary literature. On Luther, where there is a clearer historical evolution in thought, I have attempted to compile a concise selection of his works that span throughout the main stages of his life. This includes everything from his 1520 treatises, to letters he wrote his wife while away from home. On Edwards, who lived in the wake of a reformed and already developed marital soteriology, I have engaged with several of his works – particularly, his *Notes on Scripture* and the *End of Creation*.

CHAPTER ONE

Martin Luther: Catholicism, Evangelicalism, and Katharina

Martin Luther's theology of marriage underwent important changes over twenty years, through a number of life experiences and his own theological transformation. In this time, he transitioned from a classically medieval understanding of marriage, as primarily a hospital bed for lust, to a relationally rich understanding in which marriage served as an image of the union of Christ and the church. Luther's view of marriage took shape in the context of his emerging evangelical theology, particularly in connection with his new doctrine of justification. While marriage lost its sacramental status in this reimagination, Luther instead elevated it to a new place alongside celibacy, which had historically been held in higher regard.² Meanwhile, his marriage to Katharina von Bora served to enrich and anchor his new understanding. Marriage came to function theologically in the framework of a maturing Martin Luther, by upholding his new and central evangelical doctrine of justification through picturing Christ's union with believers. As a result, marriage presents itself as a fruitful and provocative lens through which to engage his whole theology.

Luther's Early Theology of Marriage: Lust and Function

Luther's early writings rarely mention the subject of marriage. Where it does appear, it is largely functional, serving as a mechanism to contain lust. In short, despite being a sacrament, marriage was inferior to celibacy and served as an institution of logistical necessity created by God to escape the torrent of human lust.¹ This rather utilitarian outlook could have reflected Luther's youth and limited life experience. After

¹ Marjorie E. Plummer, *The Annotated Luther: Christian Life in the World*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Fortress Press, 2017), 24.

all, Luther had entered the monastery at the age of 22 and would have had very limited interactions with any women who might have considered him a legitimate sexual partner until his time at the Wartburg.² However, beyond these personal considerations, it seems clear that Luther's early writing on marriage grew from the soil of the medieval understanding.³

The medieval church followed Augustine in viewing marriage as the sacramental union of a man and woman, and not to be dissolved by anything except death.⁴ Yet, theologically, marriage was not the highest good. To the medieval mind, the virtue of chastity was the primary goal, and celibacy was the best way to attain it. Marriage was regarded as a lesser good than celibacy since it carried and nurtured the strongest temptation to indulge the passions of the flesh. The assumption here was that sexual intimacy, even that within marriage, necessitates lust.⁵ The church, therefore,

² Timothy J. Orr, "Junker Jörg on Patmos: Luther's Experience of Exile in the Wartburg," *Church History and Religious Culture* 95, no. 4 (2015): 448. Luther had entered the monastery on July 17, 1505. This was twelve days after his thunderstorm experience, where he vowed to St. Anne to commit his life in service to the Church if he survived.

³ Plummer notes the similarities Luther's *Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (1519) shares with the popular late medieval *Book on Marriage* [*Ehebüchlein*] (1472). First published by Albrecht von Eyb (a German jurist and humanist), it was frequently republished in the early 16th century. Strikingly, both were even published by same publisher in Augsburg. Plummer, *Annotated Luther*, 19–20.

⁴ "From the first union of the two human beings, marriage bears a kind of sacred bond, it can be dissolved in no way except by the death of one of the parties." Augustine, *St Augustine Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, Fathers of the Church vol. 27 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 31. While medieval thought expanded their understanding of divorce to provide a few ways marriages could be dissolved apart from death, the holy nature of marriage very much remained the same.

⁵ Steven Ozment notes, "A vernacular catechism from 1494 elaborates the third deadly sin (impurity) under the title, 'How the Laity Sin in the Marital Duty.' According to the catechism, the laity sin sexually in marriage by, among other things, having sex for the sheer joy of it rather than for the reasons God has commanded, namely, to escape the sin of concupiscence and to populate the earth." "These ideas on sexuality reached back centuries into the Christian era, when Jerome, writing in the fourth century, compared virginity, widowhood, and marriage. He gave virginity a numerical value of 100, widowhood 60, and marriage 30." Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Double Day, 1993), 153. See also John Giles Milhaven, "Thomas Aquinas on Sexual Pleasure," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 5, no. 2 (1977): 157–81.

used canon law carefully to limit and prohibit sexual activity of many kinds that might even pertain to a married couple.⁶

The common practice of the laity in sixteenth-century Europe bore little resemblance to this virtuous vision. According to polemicists, marriages were often abused and broken, and sexual immorality was rife.⁷ Sebastian Franck (1499-1542) highlighted the dissolute state of German marriages, noting exceptionally high rates of desertion.⁸ Despite this advice being propaganda, for these bishops and lawyers had their own agendas, there is other evidence that backs up some of these views even if they are exaggerated. All of this could be said to seriously undermine the Church's respect for the institution of marriage.

Luther's *Lectures on Romans* (1515-16) and *Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (1519) provide enough material to outline his basic understanding of it at this time. In his lecture on Romans 1, Luther speaks of the supremacy of celibacy compared to married life: "the nobility of the body [...] is ordained for an honourable marriage or for an even more honourable chastity."⁹ This classification appears to draw on Jerome,

⁶ James A. Brundage in, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, humorously highlights medieval canon law which seemingly prohibits sexual acts on almost any occasion. His flow-chart (Figure 4.1) displays the options for sinless sex, which are limited by an exhaustive list of factors including: the day, religious festivals, bodily cycles, motivation and even levels of daylight! James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁷ "Lechery attacked both body and soul, according to St. John Fisher (ca. 1459–1535), and sexual orgasm, the end result of 'the fylthy lust of the flesshe,' robbed men of vital energy and exposed them to dangers both moral and physical. [...] These warnings did little to change behaviour. People stubbornly continued to chase after sexual pleasure [...]. In Venice, for example, there was no decrease in the number of sex crimes during the plague years, even though more than one-third of the of the city's inhabitants perished in the epidemic. [...] Sexual licentiousness had brought disaster to the community." Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 490–91.

⁸ "Divorce and desertion were rife," ["rampant divorce and desertion . . . where one partner abandons the other in emergencies just when they need each other the most." Sebastian Franck, *Sprichwörter*, II, (Frankfurt: Egenolff, 1541), 204v–205, cited in Scott Hendrix, "Luther on Marriage," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 336.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, in Hilton C. Oswald (ed.), *Luther's Works* vol. 25 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 166.

who saw marriage as earthly, and virginity as heavenly.¹⁰ Marriage could still serve as a place for those unable to mortify their sin, in which “carnal man [can] yield to the lusts of the flesh.”¹¹ For Luther, some of the sinful edge to these acts seems to be blunted by the arena in which they are performed. The marriage bed does not remove the sinful desires, it simply takes them “into captivity,” imprisoning lust in a safe environment.¹² Ironically, this casts a rather negative light upon the sacred union of marriage – painting it a logistical necessity to guard against sin, rather than existing as a blessing in and of itself.

In his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-16), however, Luther appears to have begun to think about marriage in a more theologically sophisticated way. In his examination of Romans 7:18, Luther explores the makeup of the human person as a “marriage” of mind and flesh. He first chooses a Christological parallel: by the communication of attributes, the one person of Christ is assigned properties from both his human and divine natures. In the same way, one may be both carnal and spiritual yet still one person. Luther appears to believe that Paul’s use of the dissolution of a marriage as an illustration of freedom from the law (in Romans 7:3) warrants its usefulness in this context too. He observes that the two constituent parts in a person (mind and flesh) can be mapped on to a married couple. The mind is pictured by the man, and the flesh is

¹⁰ “Marriage replenishes the earth, virginity fills Paradise.” Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, vol. 6, trans. W. H. Freemantle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 360. (*Against Jovinianus* 1.7)

¹¹ Luther, *Works*, 25, 332.

¹² Luther, *Works*, 25, 332.

pictured by the woman. When the husband and wife are united, they picture the union of the mind and the flesh: two distinct entities, but harmoniously joined.¹³

In his *Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (1519), Luther repeats his earlier view of marriage's utility in diluting the toxicities of carnal desire. Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer even suggests that, for Luther, married sexuality is the only outlet of the flesh forgivable by the grace of God: all else is eternally condemned.¹⁴ More importantly, Luther also speaks about the sacramentality of marriage in very Augustinian terms, calling it "an outward and spiritual sign" but saying that the sign refers to "the greatest, holiest, worthiest, and noblest thing that has ever existed or ever will exist: the union of the divine and human natures in Christ."¹⁵ Here, Luther is not simply speaking of marriage strictly as a sacrament or as a social tool. He is using it as a theological metaphor. In this passage, marriage is no longer functioning only as an indirect illustration of the self, but as a direct illustration of the two natures of Christ. This is a stronger, bolder statement of the more theological thread in the *Lectures on Romans*. Within a year, Luther would be using marriage to illuminate the centerpiece of his new theology: justification and union with Christ.

The Union of Doctrines: Justification and Marriage

In 1520, Luther published three important treatises which conveyed a major theological shift of doctrine. Intriguingly, this change went hand in hand with how he

¹³ Luther gives an insight into the views on women he held before 1519. By matching men with the lawful mind, and women with the sinful flesh, (in his analysis of Paul's theology of the self), Luther communicates a very misogynistic understanding of the sexes. Luther, *Works* 25, 332.

¹⁴ "Wicked lust of the flesh, which nobody is without, is a conjugal duty and does not deserve condemnation when expressed within marriage, but in all other cases outside the bond of marriage, it is mortal sin." Plummer, *Annotated Luther*, 27.

¹⁵ Plummer, *Annotated Luther*, 26.

wrote about marriage. The concept of marriage, which had already served as a theologically illustrative tool, now came to be a central motif in his mature theology. In the light of his new evangelical convictions about the doctrine of justification, marriage took on a fresh symbolism to reflect the union of believers with Christ by faith alone. This is, of course, not original to Luther: a consistent seam of Scriptural material points to marriage as illustrative of God's relationship with his people (Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel among the prophets are joined by Paul in Ephesians 5).¹⁶ Yet it was as new to Luther's writings as his mature theology of justification. In this way, marriage (as a metaphor of union with Christ and justification within it) comes to stand at the heart of his theology, conditioning and shaping other doctrines.¹⁷ So, where some scholars such as Trevor O'Reggio, attempt to separate Luther's theology of justification from his theology of marriage, this, we will see, is simply not possible.¹⁸

By 1520, Luther's theology had matured and spread to the extent that even Rome took interest. On June 15, the papacy issued a bull threatening his excommunication.¹⁹ In response, Luther promptly released *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.²⁰

¹⁶ See Raymond C. Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Adultery* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016).

¹⁷ Of course, according to Lutheran tradition, it is supposed Luther originally said "The article of justification is said to be the article by which the church stands or falls." Jeffery K. Anderson, *Justification as the Speech of the Spirit: A Pneumatological and Trinitarian Approach to Forensic Justification* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 3.

¹⁸ Trevor O'Reggio, *How Martin Luther Transformed Marriage* (Andrews University: Faculty publications, 2017), 2.

¹⁹ In "June, 1520, bull *Exsurge Domine* [was released] which had cited Luther for forty-one distinct errors, and had given him sixty days to renounce those errors publicly in Rome," Richard J. Serina, Jr., "The Excommunication of Martin Luther: *Exsurge Domine* (1520) and *Decet Romanum Pontificem* (1521)", *Lutheran Quarterly* 34 (2020): 194.

²⁰ In August, Luther had released his address to the Christian nobility, and on October 6th *The Babylonian Captivity* was published.

Receiving this papal bull on October 10, Luther responded by publishing *The Freedom of a Christian*.²¹ At times, these treatises were marked by an encroaching sense of anger. Luther's directed his pointed tone at the false teaching that he believed he had received in the formation of his early years, and the corruption that seemed to plague the citizens of Wittenberg. Whilst all these treatises were primarily aimed at developing and refining his new theology of justification by faith alone, marriage was simultaneously given a new role in his broader theology in service of the doctrine of justification. In the process, Luther articulated a wider and happier theology of marriage.

In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* Luther attacked the church's views on marriage. The clipped tone that characterises this treatise emphasises his anger toward Rome as he denounced doctrine after doctrine.²² In a stark departure from the tradition, Luther rejected the church's teaching that marriage is a sacrament. As Nestingen states, "Luther pointed out that unlike baptism and the Lord's Supper, there is neither a specific promise nor a special physical sign involved with marriage."²³ Luther further observed that marriage was not a strictly ecclesial matter, but one for civil authorities. Its broad availability to all, believer and unbeliever, contributed to his case against its sacramental status.²⁴ In removing marriage from the position it held in Catholic tradition, he did not demote it. His move away from the sacramental title was toward another, higher aim. Marriage took on a theological function, serving as the image of the evangelical heartbeat: "The sacrament is in Christ and the church, not in

²¹ *Freedom of Christian* would be released in November 1520.

²² Erik H. Hermann, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church: The Annotated Luther Study Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 9.

²³ James A. Nestingen, "Luther on Marriage, Vocation and the Cross," *Word & World* 23 (2003): 33.

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 220.

marriage.”²⁵ Hendrix captures one consequence of this theological move: “In one sense marriage was demoted because it ceased to be a sacrament; but in another sense its status was elevated because it was deemed equal to or superior to celibacy.”²⁶

Where Luther negatively dismantled ideas of marriage in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (primarily its sacramental value), the following month he joined it to his new doctrine of justification in *The Freedom of a Christian*. Here, Luther answers the question of justification by faith alone, and in doing so positively constructs his theology of marriage. This positive analysis on marriage lies in contrast with the negative definitions that can be found in his previous two treatises (i.e., marriage does *not* have a physical sign, marriage is *not* just for believers, etc.). In essence, his theology of justification was based on a trusting relationship with Christ: He promises, and we receive in faith. For humans are wretched sinners, who Luther claims are deeply unrighteous to their cores, and so he suggests we are unable to save ourselves, or develop God’s infused virtues. Rather, we must trust in the one who has perfectly upheld the law, and possesses all the virtues, in order that we might receive his righteous status through union with him. By trusting the work of Christ on the cross, the faithful soul holds onto what Christ has imputed to them.²⁷ Luther sees Christ’s freely given blessing of salvation to the Church *in himself* best illustrated in the metaphor of marriage as the spouses come to share entirely in one another. The tapestry that Luther weaves pictures the bridegroom giving over all he owns and has to his bride. Christ, having the offices of priest and king, “shares them with every believer legally in accord

²⁵ Luther, *Three Treatises*, 223.

²⁶ Hendrix, *Luther on Marriage*, 335.

²⁷ Timothy J. Wengert, *Annotated Luther Study Edition: The Freedom of a Christian 1520* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 15.

with the marriage.”²⁸ At the same time, the righteous husband, Christ, takes on himself all the filth, sin, and shame of what Luther called Christ’s “whore-bride.” They come to “hold all things, good and bad, in common.”²⁹ Luther had replaced the “blind and perilous doctrine” of marriage as a sacrament with a divine image which communicated the good news of Christ as King and Priest, now given to the common sinner.³⁰

In marriage, a man and woman come to hold all that one another have - the good, the bad, and the ugly. Through the wedding vows that are made under God, a covenant bond is built upon promises, just as is the gospel itself. Even though the marriage bond is but a “weak shadow” of the union between Christ and the Church, it nevertheless resembles the obedience of faith.³¹ In marriage, the husband tells his wife, “I love you,” and his wife responds, “I trust you and I love you, too.” Just as the couple can trust in the love of the other, the church trusts in her bridegroom, Christ. Husband and wife are made one flesh, becoming a type of “the most perfect of all marriages,” (that between Christ and the church), and imparting to each other the most “delightful sight of victory, salvation, and redemption.”³²

Marriage had earned its happier wider role in Luther’s theology by establishing itself as the central image of the evangelical doctrine of union and justification. It is important to note, here, how the metaphor of marriage now represents something new. Once Luther had used it to explain the two natures internal to Christ, but now he uses

²⁸ Wengert, *Annotated Luther*, 19.

²⁹ Wengert, *Annotated Luther*, 16.

³⁰ “As Christ by His birthright has obtained these two dignities, so He imparts and communicates them to every believer in Him, under that law of matrimony of which we have spoken above, by which all that is the husband's is also the wife's.” Wengert, *Annotated Luther*, 19.

³¹ Wengert, *Annotated Luther*, 19.

³² Wengert, *Annotated Luther*, 17.

it to picture the nature of salvation. Arguably, this is a more suitable use of marriage as a metaphor, as it is a relational one (Christ and the Church), rather than an individual or psychological one (Christ in himself).

The origins of this later use of marriage in Luther are complex. He certainly owes something to his medieval forbears. While Luther clearly departed from the marriage theology of the church in many ways, he self-consciously “sought to retrieve elements of earlier church tradition.”³³ One particular favourite figure of his was the medieval mystic Bernard of Clairvaux.³⁴ Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) went so far to say that a fellow monk’s use of a Bernard quotation was the trigger for Luther’s intellectual path toward the doctrine of *sola fide*.³⁵ It is arguably down to the influence of Bernard that Luther adopted the motif of marriage as a picture of union with Christ.

Bernard’s examination of marriage is generally more concerned with the individual soul’s union with Christ, rather than that of the body of the corporate church (which had been more common in the tradition).³⁶ Using the Song of Songs, Bernard explores the concept of rightly ordered desire, suggesting that the relationship in the scriptural narrative reflects the same desires the soul experiences when God is its ultimate love. As one maintains focus on Christ, the forging of the mystical union gradually occurs alongside the reordering of their desires. Thus, it follows that the

³³ Kilcrease, Jack D, III. “The Bridal-Mystical Motif in Bernard of Clairvaux and Martin Luther,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 65, no. 2 (April 2014): 263.

³⁴ “Bernard was, in fact, noted much more often by Luther and Calvin than by Sibbes. In the early period of the reformation, Luther either cited or referred to Bernard more than five hundred times and shared much in common with him including [...] the motif of marital devotion.” In Ronald N. Frost, *Richard Sibbes God’s Spreading Goodness* (Washington: Cor Deo Press, 2012), 109-110.

³⁵ Philipp Melanchthon, “Praefatio,” in *Corpus reformatorum*, ed. Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider (Halle, 1834-60), 159.

³⁶ As Kilcrease notes, this particular tradition of marriage’s bridal-allegory stretches all the way back to the third century in a commentary produced by Hippolytus of Rome, albeit under a slightly more corporate interpretation (i.e., Christ’s relationship with the Church as a whole, as opposed to the individual soul), in Kilcrease, *The Bridal-Mystical Motif*, 266.

marriage union between God and the soul can only fully occur once the soul itself is fully purified. To increase the soul's air of attraction, Kilcrease notes three main "perfumes" that, for Bernard, can be poured out on the soul by the bridegroom: contrition, devotion and works of piety.³⁷ By drenching herself in sweet aromas, she entices God into full union. The sweetest of these aromas is found in the beginning where she expresses humility to receive these virtues. As she develops these virtues, the full union with God emerges into clearer focus: a beautiful marriage between a perfect God and a newly attractive soul.

In a similar way, for Luther, marriage pictures that same metaphor of Christ's union with the individual believer. Yet for the two men, the metaphors mirror their respective understandings of justification.³⁸ Their categorical differences on the matter of justification, however, are clearly seen in the marriage role of the believer. In the thought of Bernard, the believer's soul (the bride) brings a most positive dowry to the table: "She adorns herself with the perfumes of good works and the sweet-smelling flowers of virtue."³⁹ She is fundamentally beautiful, even if this required divine assistance, and thus is attractive to God. Bernard's explanation resembles the Catholic process of grace and justification, which is anchored in the soul's divinely-assisted growth in virtue to the end of final justification. For Luther, however, the soul is fundamentally ugly. He claims the depravity of the soul has driven her to a place so

³⁷ "The first is pungent, causing some pain; the second mitigates and soothes pain; the third heals the wound and rids the patient of the illness," Kilcrease, *The Bridal-Mystical Motif*, 269.

³⁸ Bernard in some ways upheld the classical medieval view of justification as occurring after an infusion of righteousness. Luther's view is that justification is a divine declaration. See Theo Dierks "The Doctrine of Justification According to Bernard of Clairvaux," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 8, no. 10 (1937): 748–53. See also Gründler, Otto "Justification and Sanctification in John Calvin and Bernard of Clairvaux," in *Truth as Gift: Studies in Honor of John R. Sommerfeldt* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: 2004), 517–35.

³⁹ Kilcrease, *The Bridal-Mystical Motif*, 276.

dark that even the loving bridegroom (Christ) seems unattractive. So, she still brings a dowry, but one of baggage, sin, and shame. Such a dowry demands the Great Exchange: Christ's instantaneous self-donation fully exchanged for the transgressions of humanity. The marriage becomes less reliant on the object of affection, and more reliant on the lover. Unlike in Bernard's thought, the soul does not have to adorn herself in virtue, but rather is loved in all her ugliness to the full.⁴⁰ This is what allows this divine marital union to take place in a moment (the moment of conversion), as the bridegroom takes his bride (the soul), regardless of the soul's vices. Despite God's major role in this marriage, Luther (like Bernard) still demands something on the part of the soul to initiate the relationship: humility. In passive acknowledgement of her own despair, the soul must recognise her need of a saviour from without. Her redemption can only be found in the arms of a loving bridegroom willing to take on her sin and bestow on her his righteousness – virtue she cannot achieve alone. It is here that the soul finds her eternal union with God.

Bernard and Luther both reach metaphorical understandings of marriage which reflect Christ's relationship with the believer. Whilst this image had been mapped out before, it is clear Bernard directly influenced Luther given his unique emphasis on the bride as the individual soul, and their shared starting point of humility for union in marriage.⁴¹ Luther's "new" understanding was perhaps not all that new. His re-discovery of the prior tradition helped marriage to function theologically in his mind.⁴²

⁴⁰ "In this way, he marries her in faith, steadfast love, and in mercies," Luther, *Three Treatises*, 287.

⁴¹ Kilcrease understands humility as the starting for both Bernard and Luther in the preparation for marriage with Christ. This would need very significant qualification, and will be addressed later.

⁴² A future line of inquiry I wish to pursue is the degree to which one can map approaches to a theology of marriage based on apophatic and cataphatic methods. Luther's 'mystical marriage' vision of salvation and union with Christ self-consciously draws upon Bernard and that tradition. Bernard's

David Whitford suggests an alternative source for this new theology of marriage, drawing on Luther's own sexuality. For Whitford, Luther's change of views stemmed from his personal experiences, not a theological re-discovery. By the time Luther had reviewed his *Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* in 1522, in which he gives a more positive account of marriage and sex than ever before, he had survived his traumatic experience in the Wartburg in 1521. Therefore, the impact of these eleven months on Luther's theology is indisputable. Whitford writes that, aware of it or not, "Brother Martin Luther, Augustinian monk, did die during those first weeks in the Wartburg"⁴³ and emerged an entirely different man.⁴⁴ Having been kidnapped for his own safety by Frederick the Wise, after defending his evangelical theology at the Diet of Worms, Luther was denied the martyr's crown. During this season, Luther faced physical ailments, heightened spiritual anxiety, depression, apathy, loss of identity, and most importantly, the full potency of his sexual desire. As Orr notes, "In the secluded

cataphatic mysticism, which is at odds in some senses with the Scholasticism of Luther's day, embraced the beauty apparent and revealed in God's creation. He "identified the church and Christ as partners in the Song of Songs, [disclosing] the gracious love in Christ. [Using] the marital imagery of Ephesians 5:30 to explain how faith functions in realist terms, [...] it served as an alternative to the medieval theology of infused righteousness" (Frost, *Richard Sibbes*, 109–110).

⁴³ "Luther writes, "Indeed, I barely even know who I am." David M. Whitford, *Brother Martin Is Dead: Lust, Sex, & Celibacy from the Wartburg to Wittenberg* (Canvas: 2023), 6.

⁴⁴ "He stripped off his white cassock and black cloak. He was given new clothes and a new identity. "Junker Jörg" – George the Squire – was born. For the next couple of weeks, as his hair grew out and his beard grew in to disguise him, Luther remained secluded in the private apartment. He ate an almost entirely different diet and the new foods wreaked havoc on his body. Alone, scared for his life, feeling ill at times, better at others, he began to write letters. The earliest letters are full of anxiety. They are incredibly personal and frank. He details his intestinal struggles with an almost alarming amount of detail. [...] He wrote Philip Melancthon the most. He pleads with Philip to write. He asks another friend why he has had no news from the outside world. He wanted to leave Wartburg and go out and defend himself but knew that was impossible. So, he sat alone, read, and tried to keep busy. He says he was drinking too much. By the middle of May, his hair had grown out and a beard had come in. He was out of seclusion. He was still plagued by intestinal distress, but also says that he is settling into a routine as he joined the life of the castle. [...] He even attended a hunt. Though as one in hiding himself, he confessed to identifying with the prey more than hunters. He even tried to hide a small rabbit from the hounds, by putting it in his coat. The dogs nearly destroyed the coat later when he took it off. [...] The change in diet, in clothing, in day-to-day routine were stripping one persona away." Whitford, *Brother Martin*, 6.

forests of Thuringia, Luther suffered an exile of both body and spirit.”⁴⁵ Still tied to his vows of celibacy that were part and parcel of monastic life, Luther stepped out into a whole new world. No longer were his desires shackled by his strict monastic routine, nor held at bay by a more pressing agenda. Apathetic and bored, Luther experienced the peaks of sexual temptation and valleys of insignificance.⁴⁶ As Luther himself despairingly put it in a poignant letter to Melanchthon:

Your high opinion of me shames and tortures me since—unfortunately— I sit here like a fool and hardened in leisure, pray little, do not sigh for the church of God, yet burn in a big fire of my untamed body. In short, I should be ardent in spirit, but I am ardent in the flesh, in lust, laziness, leisure, and sleepiness. I do not know whether God has turned away from me since you all do not pray for me. You are already replacing me; because of the gifts you have from God, you have attained greater authority and popularity than I had.⁴⁷

Martin Luther burned with lust, prompting feelings of uncertainty that would slowly rise to a climax in which he would conclude of himself: “I barely even know who I am.”⁴⁸ Plagued by seclusion, his sexual sin ran rampant.⁴⁹ It was not long before he recognised his carnal desires as natural and regretted making his own legalistic vows. This, then, took a great toll on his previous views of monastic vows and celibacy. The notion that Luther’s context stirred radical re-evaluation of celibacy garners particular validity when one considers the number of monks who were leaving the monastery to marry during this time.⁵⁰ These monks were neither random, nor strangers to Luther.

⁴⁵ Orr, *Junker Jörg*, 436.

⁴⁶ Orr, *Junker Jörg*, 436.

⁴⁷ Luther to Melanchthon (13 July 1521), *LW* 48:257, in Orr, 446.

⁴⁸ Letter to George Spalatin (14 May 1521), *WABR* 2: 338 (Nr. 410), in Orr, 438.

⁴⁹ Orr, *Junker Jörg*, 446.

⁵⁰ Orr, *Junker Jörg*, 447.

Andreas Karlstadt (1486-1541) and several of Luther's other colleagues had entered into marriage, prompting him to reassess its purpose and function.⁵¹ Times were changing, and his friends spoke positively to him of these new relationships. Therefore, in Luther's mind, marriage could no longer remain an inferior alternative to a holy, stoic celibacy. As Orr states,

He wrote to Wenceslas Link, the head of the Augustinian Order in Wittenberg concerning those monks who had left the monastery in order to marry, 'No one should be delayed or forced to remain in a monastery against his will. Meanwhile you, like Jeremiah, should remain in the service of Babylon, for I, too, shall remain in this cowl and manner of life, if the world does not change.'⁵²

Here, comparing monastic vows with the tyranny and oppression of Babylon, it is evident that Luther was beginning to reject what he saw had been drilled into him as a young monk. Luther's formative personal experiences with lust had (in part, at least) prompted his denunciation of monastic celibacy. Virginity and purity were two very different things when viewed through the lens of his mature theology of justification.⁵³ No one could be "pure" by their own merit, and the only righteousness that could be claimed was that imputed through the believer's union with Christ. Marriage, then, appeared not to be so sinful after all; in fact, sexual sin now seemed more of a danger under the conditions of his monastic vows.⁵⁴ Marriage was now freed to be, for Luther,

⁵¹ "Karlstadt's wedding makes me very happy. I know the girl. May the Lord strengthen him as a good example to fight and to lessen the papistic unchastity. Amen. And I shall deliver my small present in due time, after Easter." Luther to Nicholas von Amsdorf (13 January 1522), *LW 48:363*, in Orr, *Junker Jörg*, 447.

⁵² Luther to Wenceslas Link (18 December 1521) *LW 48:359*, in Orr, 449.

⁵³ Luther comments on the numerous nocturnal pollutions and impurities occurring within the monasteries, as things unseen by the outside world. Luther, *Works*, 54, 294–95.

⁵⁴ "That most miserable celibacy of young men and women daily presents such great horrors to me that even now nothing sounds worse to my ears than the words 'nun,' 'monk,' and 'priest.' I consider marriage to be a paradise, even if it has to endure greatest poverty." Luther to Nicholas Gerbel

a beautiful illustration of the gospel: Christ's desire for the Church, regardless of her sin.

Was Luther's experience in the Wartburg the reason for his drastic change in theology? It is true that Brecht and others could be accused of underplaying the trauma of this time and the large influence it inevitably had on Luther.⁵⁵ Yet while it is tempting, in the face of these overwhelming experiences, to see Luther's views on sexual morality as largely contextual to his personal life, as Whitford does, we must be careful not to undermine the theological foundations laid prior to his journey in the Wartburg. This was not the first time Luther had expressed his doubts over monastic vows. As Reggio notes, in *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), "Luther explicitly encouraged priests to get married, thus repudiating their vows of celibacy. Luther writes, 'Priests should be free to marry and not to as they choose,' because 'God has not bound them and no one else ought to bind them.'"⁵⁶ Whether advocating for their freedom to marry is seen as explicit encouragement or simply permission, it is clear that Luther's justification theology was already at work in reshaping how he saw marriage and the religious life.⁵⁷ His 1520 treatises, which articulated his new theology of marriage and saw its function in his framework change, were released a whole year before his Wartburg experience. Thus, while his historical experiences contributed to the development of his thought on sexual morality and monastic vows, they could not

(1 November 1521), *LW* 48:333, in Orr, 450. Luther, here, is clear in expressing his developed understanding as to where sin lies, and his positive view on marriage.

⁵⁵ Orr, *Junker Jörg*, 440.

⁵⁶ Reggio, *Luther on Marriage and Family*, 204.

⁵⁷ Later, Luther would even come to see monastic life as a demonic distraction that undercut the purpose and beauty of marriage: "Thus Satan obscured the glorious ordinance of God (namely, marriage) with the glittering phantom of the monks. If there had been God-fearing and pure teaching about marriage in the church, the monks and nuns wouldn't have counted for so much." Helmut T. Lehmann, *Luther's Works: Table Talk* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 349.

have been instrumental. Instead, when considered as part of the larger development in Luther's thinking on marriage outlined above, we may understand sex as woven into the systematic tapestry of Luther's theology of justification and the union of Christ and the Church.

This leaves the possibility that an event prior to the publication of his three treatises was the true catalyst for Luther's theological transformation. Thus, there is need to briefly address the debate surrounding Luther's so-called "evangelical breakthrough." For some authors, the material changes in Luther's theology occurred long before the posting of the 95 theses in 1517.⁵⁸ This perspective sees theological categories such as "the humility of faith" as key to Luther's evangelical theology and would see this maturity manifest in Luther's conclusion in the Heidelberg Disputation (1518). Here, Luther says the key to salvation is that the believer must "fall down and pray for grace."⁵⁹ Luther himself, however, seemed to identify a turning point and theological breakthrough in 1519.

Meanwhile in [1519], I began to understand that 'righteousness of God' as that by which the righteous lives by the gift of God, namely by faith, and this sentence the 'righteousness of God is revealed', to refer to a passive righteousness, by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'The righteous lives by faith'. This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From that moment, the whole face of scripture appeared to me in a different light.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ See Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody Hendrickson, 2009), and, Alister McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), and Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, Trans. E. Walliser-Schwarzbart (Yale: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁵⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 39–58.

⁶⁰ WA 54.185.12–186.21

For Luther, writing in 1545, this was clearly the moment that everything changed, around the fulcrum of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The question of the place of marriage in Luther's theology may serve to support the case for taking more seriously Luther's account of his 1519 experience. It would make sense for Luther's evangelical conversion to be followed by a number of other changes to his theological ideas – how he defined them, addressed them, and ultimately let them function. It is clearly from this time frame that marriage begins to play a wider and deeper role in his theology. This does not undermine Whitford's attentiveness to Luther's personal circumstances, but it does make a strong case for a more explicitly *theological* basis for Luther's new view of marriage.

Within a few years of 1519, one can further see how this theological shift, combined with his time in the Wartburg Castle, played out. In mid-August of 1522, Luther was ready to preach his new understanding of sex and marriage, whilst continuing to denounce monasticism. In a revision of his *Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* (from 1519), now entitled *Living as Husband and Wife* (written in 1522), Luther gives a startlingly positive address on the purpose and meaning of sex.⁶¹ In it, Reggio says, "Luther gave no indication... that sex is unnatural, dirty, perverse or immoral when conducted within the proper context. The sexual drive is powerful and [Luther] says it abides and rules within us and we can ignore it or we will be "bound to" commit heinous sins without an end."⁶² Luther's new understanding of justification—along with his revised position on marriage and sex—is in full bloom in this sermon. With his evangelical breakthrough and the Wartburg experience behind him, he seems a palpably different man from the Luther of the Romans lectures.

⁶¹ Luther, *Works*, 28:28.

⁶² Reggio, *Luther on Marriage and Family*, 208.

In conclusion, marriage had progressed in Luther's thought in both imagery and language. Marriage became far more than a hospital bed for lust and was detached from its old sacramental status. Within a year of leaving the Wartburg, he also no longer dismissed marriage as an antidote for lust, nor praised monastic vows of celibacy. Instead, human marriage had come to embody the heart of the reformer's message: justification by faith alone in union with Jesus Christ.

Katharina von Bora: Marriage Anchored and Enriched

In 1525, Martin Luther married Katharina von Bora, an escaped Cistercian nun. She would further transform and enrich his faith, life, and theology. Perhaps the area of Luther's theology that would be most impacted was his understanding of women, and what that meant for the home life. The image of marriage as a free blessing from a sovereign and loving God comes to fruition, being driven by a levelling theology of justification by faith alone. Through it all, however, the tone of Luther notably softened. Melted by the warm embrace of his "dear wife Käthie," Luther has experienced the joyful reality of marriage, removing it from the theological vacuum he had forged it in.⁶³ In a wedding sermon from 1531, Luther preaches: "marriage is praiseworthy because of children, loyalty, and love."⁶⁴ As Hendrix says, love replaced sacrament as the chief feature of marriage. The love between husband and wife is a good in and of itself. Ultimately, marriage was now characterised by the promise of a healthy home and family life, and Katharina von Bora's influence only anchored its place and centrality in her husband's theology.

⁶³ LW 54:330

⁶⁴ WA 34: 52.5-6 (Eine Hochzeitpredigt über den Spruch Hehr. 13,4).

Luther elevated the position of women in society and the home. Whitford thoughtfully remarks on the sheer difference between Luther's interpretation of Eve in 1523 (through the eyes of a celibate monk), and in 1535 (through the eyes of a husband and a father).⁶⁵ He recognises Luther's many interactions with the family unit and women through his pastoral role in Wittenberg for the broader part of the decade leading up to his *Sermons on Genesis* (1523). This removes any naïve notion that the change in Luther's thoughts of Eve came from a good dose of flirting and female interaction. For Luther was 40 by 1523 and had undergone his fair share of life experiences: from conspiracy to court, exile to exaltation. However, Luther's Eve in 1523 still embodied the medieval stereotype of women: more lustful than men, more susceptible to Satan, and tainted by a knack for disobedience which had rippled eternal ramifications. Enter stage right: Katharina von Bora. Experiencing six pregnancies, the trauma of infant mortality with his daughter Elizabeth, and the day-to-day activities of a husband and father, Luther's view on Eve had dramatically changed by his Genesis Lectures of 1535. There are a number of developments to his understanding of Eve and marriage, most centrally: on the matter of childbirth and on the role of the woman. Whitford observes Luther's commentary on the pains of childbirth as surprisingly encompassing more than just the delivery.⁶⁶ Luther seems genuinely touched at the scope of the punishment designated to Eve. Whilst pregnancy must face the foe of childbirth pains, in his *Table Talk* Luther advances his thoughts yet again. Marriage, previously thought of as a sinful requirement only for the means of reproducing, now does not even require childbirth in order to be a good and sinless union.⁶⁷ In fact, Luther, claims he would "prefer if at the

⁶⁵ David M. Whitford, *The Body and Manifestations of Gender* (Festschrift, 2023), 38.

⁶⁶ Whitford, *Body and Manifestations*, 42.

⁶⁷ *LW* 54:397.

wedding the words, ‘be fruitful and multiply’ were omitted.”⁶⁸ Eve’s punishment does not serve as an obstacle to the primary purpose of marriage, for a marriage does not need to bear that punishment at all to be happy and to achieve its main goal. For marriage is not purely a means for procreation but a means for proclaiming the divine image of Christ and the church. Secondly, Eve’s femininity is not the disobedient, lustful nature it once was. Now, Whitford remarks on the lust with which Luther realises all burn, just as intensely, regardless of the institution of marriage: “The monk who wrote that sex within marriage would quench lust has by the Genesis lectures perhaps discovered, even ten years into marriage, that it could still rage. Concupiscence no longer feels theological in 1535, it feels embodied.”⁶⁹ Luther levels man and woman before the reality of lust: both are impure, and both suffer equally its raging attacks. This serves to emphasise his ideology of marriage. If both are impure, then both are accountable for expressing to one another the grace of Christ, strengthening its relational reality: “The Christian is supposed to love his neighbour, and since his wife is his nearest neighbour, she should be his deepest love.”⁷⁰

The impact of Katharina von Bora and his own marriage can be seen outside of his view of Eve. His *Table Talk* references women and marriage in a positive light over and over, brimming with a joyful tone. Most importantly, marriage is now most certainly “not an act of concupiscence. Rather, the act which attracts sex to sex is a divine ordinance.”⁷¹ Further, to remain unmarried seems a far worse option in the eyes

⁶⁸ Ibid. 397

⁶⁹ Whitford, *Body and Manifestations*, 42.

⁷⁰ Wingren, *Adventspostille* (1522), 120.

⁷¹ *LW* 54:324

of forty-nine-year-old Luther: “you can’t be without a wife and remain without sin.”⁷² Marriage as the remedy for sin has taken on a completely different meaning. It is not where you can safely dispose of your lust, but it is an “ordinance and creation of God,” to exercise sexual harmony, instrumental of sanctification.⁷³ One of the most illuminating passages in *Table Talk* is *In Praise of Women and Marriage* (1537). Here, Luther looks “admiringly at a painting of his wife,” before launching into a monologue on the majesty of marriage.⁷⁴ Without marriage, the “world would have remained empty and its creatures would have been meaningless.”⁷⁵ Not only is marriage elevated, but Eve’s upgraded position is reiterated. Just as the believers suckle on the bosom of the Church for edification, so children suckle on the breast of their mother for gospel nourishment.⁷⁶ Married Luther is neither afraid to advocate the importance of women, nor defend them in the face of patriarchal oppression. Upon hearing “the most holy bishop of Mainz was irritated by no annoyances more than by the stinking, putrid, private parts of women,” Luther re-emphasizes woman’s equal worth in God’s image. “That godless knave, [...] dares to blaspheme God’s creature through whom he was himself born. [...] To defile their creation and nature is most godless. As if I were to ridicule man’s face on account of his nose!”⁷⁷

⁷² *LW* 54:31

⁷³ “When I look beside myself [...] I find that there is nothing but godliness in marriage,” (*LW* 54:161)

⁷⁴ As noted by Lehmann, this was likely a portrait done by Lucas Cranach of Luther’s wife, hung up in plain sight from Luther’s seat, (*LW* 54: 222-3).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ In Luther’s description of Eve, “Here you have the ornament that distinguishes woman, namely, that she is the fount of all living human beings.” *LW* 54:223.

⁷⁷ As stated in a talk entitled, “Women are by Nature God’s Creation,” (*LW* 54:171).

In a number of letters, liturgies, and hymns, Luther proceeds to exalt the role and purpose of woman. Whilst there is an air of light-heartedness in his attitude to the difficulties of life, these did not undermine the significance he attached to the institution of marriage. His reverence for marriage only grew. In his letters to his “dear Käthie,” he uses several other nicknames expressing the joy married life has brought him.⁷⁸ This strikes a different chord to the prison for lust he had once labelled it. This positive tone of luminous life overflows into his toe-tapping hymns, as he marvels at the wonders of family life:

So shall thy wife be in thy house
Like vine with clusters plenteous,
Thy children sit thy table round
Like olive plants all fresh and sound.⁷⁹

Table Talk also holds a lighter tone, and presents a matured Luther, less concerned with going against the grain of his tradition. He continues to develop his evangelical case for the institution of marriage. Startlingly, for instance, Luther freely criticises the early church fathers for their lack of “memorable” writings on marriage.⁸⁰ Their outlooks, he felt, were concerned with sensual pleasures in marriage, but completely overlooked the blessings within. This led to efforts to control their sexual libido as the “holy fathers contended with such juvenile temptations” – all of which proved a futile and embarrassing endeavour.⁸¹ After all, Luther surmised, man cannot

⁷⁸ Luther’s endearing nicknames for his wife included: “Wealthy lady of Zulusdorf; Doctor Katherine (for she was a professional nurse and well-versed in herbal medicine); Dearly beloved housewife; Deeply learned lady; My Lord Kate; Sainly anxious lady.” Margaret Currie, *The Letters of Martin Luther* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908).

⁷⁹ In his hymn, *Happy who in God’s Fear Doth Stay*, LW 53:243.

⁸⁰ LW 54:177.

⁸¹ In, *Annoyances and blessings in marriage* (1533), Luther states, “Jerome was a real monks’ warden. He wrote in a quite ungodly fashion about marriage; he paid attention only to the sensual

be sanctified through the stoic discipline of the flesh, but only by looking at the love of Christ on the cross. The estate of marriage, Luther goes on, has been occupied by many biblical heroes: “Peter had a mother-in-law, and therefore had a wife too. So, James, the brother of the Lord, and all the apostles were married, except John. Paul counted himself among the unmarried and widowers, but it appears that he was married in his youth according to the custom of the Jews.”⁸² Most importantly to our discussion of marriage, is Luther’s notation that “virgins also have temptations and enticements, but if there are fluxes and pollutions the gift of virginity is no longer there; then the remedy of marriage which God has given should be taken hold of.”⁸³ Luther’s theology of justification had finally permeated every inch of his understanding of marriage. Any flux or pollution removes the idealised status of virgin. Considering all monks most likely would have undergone pollutions at some point, Luther cleverly holds the virtue of purity out of reach for man. The only way to achieve such a status is to repent and receive the gracious imputation of Christ’s righteousness. The imputation of righteousness frees up the institution of marriage for all, including the “virtuous.” Ultimately, as Luther’s experience grew, he learned to shed some of the chains that tradition shackled him with, and felt able to seriously take hold of his own marital theology.

Yet, for all Luther’s theological breakthrough and considerable life experiences, the formational Catholic education of his youth still lingered in his thought. As a result,

pleasures in marriage. In truth, the fathers flee to it for no reason except the reality of the flesh. They wished to avoid a drop of voluptuousness and fell into an ocean of sensual pleasures.” And in, *The Tyranny and Burden of Celibacy (1538)* “When he was quite old, Augustine still complained about nocturnal pollutions. When he was goaded by desire Jerome beat his breast with stones but was unable to drive the girl out of his heart. Francis made snowballs and Benedict macerated his harassed body until it stank horribly,” *LW 54:270*.

⁸² *LW 54:425*.

⁸³ *LW 54:424*.

he was not entirely consistent on the matter of marriage. Theologically, this can be seen in a 1535 revision of a wedding ceremony.⁸⁴ Here, Luther – having denied marriage its sacramental theology well over a decade before – claims marriage a sacrament in plain words: “Das ist eine sakrament.”⁸⁵ Whilst this may seem a dramatic return to catholic theology, or hint at Luther’s own confusion as to the place of marriage in the Christian faith, one could argue that by *sacrament* he simply meant *mystery*. Commonly interchanged in the Greek, Luther echoed the mystery of marriage which Paul so frequently taught. Equally, it is arguable Luther felt freer by now to use the word “sacrament” without an overly strict definition, with an aim to continue to hold marriage in an incredibly holy and revered light. Regardless of what Luther intended, it conveys and thus reveals an air of inconsistency in the reformer’s language, and possibly theology. Just what was the place of holy matrimony? Further, in *The Cases of Conscience Pertaining to Marriage* (1532) Luther permits a second wife to a man whose first wife contracted syphilis after bearing seven children. Since the wife was unable to fulfil her marital obligation, Luther authorised the husband to take a second wife for the exercise of his flesh.⁸⁶ Whilst this may seem cruel on Luther’s part, for it suggests the wife’s value lies purely in her utility, Luther does make an effort to nuance his response: “he should not abandon his first wife but should provide for her sufficiently to enable her to support her life.”⁸⁷ But, despite the concern for the wife’s financial safety, it seems Luther indeed returns to a position where marriage is nothing

⁸⁴ Joel F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ LW 54:66

⁸⁷ LW 54:66.

more than a hospital for lust. Since the husband was unable to have sex with his first wife, Luther provided permission for a second wife and this seems based entirely on the fact that the husband still has sexual needs that must be met. In *A Marriage Case and Monastic Pollution* (1538), Luther adopts a similar tone. His description of female anatomy reveals a crude idea of its function: “That’s why girls have their private parts – to offer [man] a remedy so that pollutions and adulteries don’t result.”⁸⁸ Here, the shadow of Luther’s education, perhaps, obscured the light and joy he had found in his new theology of justification and marriage.

Having been a celibate monk, a husband, and a father, marriage played a central role in shaping and communicating the heartbeat of Luther’s theology: justification by faith alone. Katharina von Bora, his children, and the pastoral life had made him more concerned with the beauty of the relationship than it as a functional antidote to lust. Marriage was no longer a mere theological theory, or an issue to argue with Rome, but a joy to behold. In application, his new theology subtly but substantively elevated the role of women and helped continue to redefine marriage as an intimate picture of Christ and the Church. Yet Luther was, admittedly, inconsistent. At times, it seems, marriage reverted to its former place in his thought. These instances, though, seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

Conclusion

Martin Luther clearly felt his doctrine of justification was a re-discovery of something lost – and so was his view of marriage as a theological theme within it. He established a narrative—and a theology—of marriage that departed from the classical

⁸⁸ *LW* 54:295.

understanding of his day. Unlike the medieval views of marriage as a sacrament, Luther linked marriage to his conception of salvation. In this way, marriage's shift from its position as a sacrament was, in actuality, a promotion. Influenced by Bernard, Luther shaped a positive approach to marriage that symbolised Christ's union with the Church. The new understanding of marriage Luther embraced was reflected in his liturgy and letters which esteemed the place of woman and idealised marriage for all – including monks and nuns. By allowing marriage to function theologically, as a central theme, Luther came to believe that marriage communicated the love of Christ for the Church. Gone was the logistical, functional view of marriage of pre-1519 which had relegated it to the position of a mere hospital bed for lust. The meaning of marriage had been transformed by his evangelical breakthrough. And, through his own marriage, his theology of marriage was further anchored and enriched. It is hard to conclude our treatment of marriage in Luther's theology without mentioning this excerpt from his 1531 wedding sermon:

God's Word is actually inscribed on one's spouse. When a man looks at his wife as if she were the only woman on earth, and when a woman looks at her husband as if he were the only man on earth; yes, if no king or queen, not even the sun itself sparkles any more brightly and lights up your eyes more than your own husband or wife, then right there you are face to face with God speaking. God promises to you your wife or husband, actually gives your spouse to you, saying: "The man shall be yours; the woman shall be yours. I am pleased beyond measure! Creatures earthly and heavenly are jumping for joy." For there is no jewellery more precious than God's Word; through it you come to regard your spouse as a gift of God and, as long as you do that, you will have no regrets.⁸⁹

Martin Luther was not a medieval theologian restricted to the echo chamber of his time. These words on matrimony prove this, and show the way he had begun to

⁸⁹ *WA* 34: 52.12-21.

allow marriage to function in his theology. This new place for marriage would influence generations of reformers to come. These men, from Richard Sibbes to Jonathan Edwards, would continue to emphasise the true and ultimate marriage between Christ and believers.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ For Sibbes, see R. N. Frost, *Richard Sibbes: God's Spreading Goodness* (Washington: Cor Deo Press, 2012).

CHAPTER TWO

Jonathan Edwards: Typology, Origin, and Sarah

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was a later Protestant theologian in whose theology the theme of marriage also occupied a significant place. Yet the manner in which Edwards developed his understanding of marriage differed from the evolution of Luther's thought on the subject. Like Luther, Edwards saw marriage as a soteriological pattern and picture, but unlike Luther, there was never a point where Edwards' theology of marriage abruptly changed. His marital soteriology expanded over the years through his theological training and personal experiences.

For the early Edwards, marriage was a key metaphor for the church's union with Christ. Edwards primarily enjoyed the story of Isaac and Rebecca as a type of Christ's commitment to his spouse, and he sought to understand much of the Old Testament through a typological lens. The Canticles (Song of Solomon) was another favourite of his, as he believed it represented a startlingly intimate picture of Christ's relationship with the Church. His post-graduate conversion absorbed him into this lifelong love-affair with God he found in the Canticles, and drove him to a rigorous study of all the Scriptures. Yet for Edwards, marriage was more than just a metaphor to express the union of Christ and her beloved husband: it was the entire purpose behind creation. This places marriage into a yet more existentially eminent position in his theology. In Edwards' thought, there is a reason why literary fairy-tale endings of bride and groom living happily ever after will naturally stir human affections, for the true story of the universe is its progression towards the marriage supper of the Lamb. The overarching narrative of history is the story of the Father redeeming his people in order to "present

to his Son a spouse [...] from amongst sinful, miserable mankind.”¹ This great storyline of creation is driven by God, who, by sharing his glory, wins a spouse for his Son.² In particular, consistent with his typological lens, Edwards examined Genesis 1 and the first Adam to prove God’s purpose behind creation, the Father’s motivation in providence, and the end goal of redemption. For Edwards, marriage functioned *theologically* to express Christ’s union with the Church, and he also used this picture to answer a more *philosophical* question of origin: Why did God create the universe? It is noteworthy that his theology did not remain in a vacuum. Over the many years of loving the beautiful Sarah Pierrepont and pastoring his own congregation, Edwards dwelt richly in his understanding of union and allowed his marriage to express and embody an already robust theology. As a result, marriage presents itself as a fruitful and provocative lens through which to encounter the philosophical mind behind Edwards’ theology.

The Development of Young Edwards

As a boy, Edwards was nurtured by the legacy of Luther’s Reformation. His father, Reverend Timothy Edwards, raised him in the puritan tradition of New England. Timothy, however, had a bent toward revivalism and his energetic preaching shaped his Northampton congregation accordingly. It is no surprise, then, that Timothy’s intense “spiritualism” soon rubbed off on young Jonathan, who was eager to join in the theatrics. At only nine years old, in East Windsor, Edwards recalls a personal

¹ *Approaching the End of God’s Design, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 25, Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 119.

² Daniel Hames and Michael Reeves, *God Shines Forth: How the Nature of God Shapes and Drives the Mission of the Church* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022), 160.

“awakening” which had led to a period of keen religious practices.³ However, as Reeves notes “The fact that [this] phase soon passed would make him, as an adult, suspicious of religious enthusiasm as any sure guide to spiritual health.”⁴ Edwards’ conviction on this matter would prove deeply formative in his life and thought, and he turned to study the Scriptures and doctrine as a more sure-fire way to understanding one’s status before God. This approach to religion would turn out to be far more in alignment with his awkward bookish personality than the booming energetic feel of his father’s church.

Despite his revivalism, Timothy was by no means against the rigors of academic study.⁵ He instructed Jonathan extensively in the core languages. By age six, Jonathan could read Latin and by 12, he was comfortable with Greek and Hebrew.⁶ At the age of 13, Edwards left to begin his formal education, starting at Connecticut Collegiate School and moving to New Haven once Yale College was built.⁷ From Edwards’ view, a number of nuisances hindered his theological training. From another angle, however, these nuisances were the perfect training ground for turning Edwards into “America’s

³ Michael Reeves, *Introducing Major Theologians: From The Apostolic Fathers To The Twentieth Century* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 239.

⁴ Reeves, *Major Theologians*, 239.

⁵ Timothy’s wife, Esther, was equally as academic. She often could be found hosting theological classes for the local women, and took her turn in educating the children when Timothy was away. Kenneth Minkema records Timothy’s letter to Esther, while Timothy was away fulfilling his duties as an army chaplain “I desire thee to take care that Jonathan don’t lose what he hath learned, but that as he hath got the accidence, and above two sides of propria quae moribus by heart, so that he keep what he hath got, I would therefore have him say pretty often to the girls. I would also have the girls keep what they have learnt of the grammar, and get by heart as far as Jonathan hath learnt.” Kenneth P. Minkema, “Informing of the Child’s Understanding, Influencing His Heart, and Directing Its Practice: Jonathan Edwards on Education,” *Acta Theologica* 31, no. 2 (2011): 161.

⁶ Minkema, “Edwards on Education,” 160.

⁷ The average age to begin one’s studies at Yale was sixteen. Clearly Timothy was a rigorous educator, and Jonathan greatly benefitted. Jonathan would go on to graduate valedictorian, but even before this, he was recognised as a bright young man.

greatest” theologian, as many scholars now regard him.⁸ Upon arriving at Yale, Edwards was already dogmatic and opinionated, and freely criticised far greater names than his: William Warburton, Henry Fielding, and even his first tutor at Yale, Samuel Johnson.⁹ He readily flew into battles that some thought were way above his pay grade. In particular, he could not stand Johnson’s publications, which held several typographical errors and “reprobate language.”¹⁰ Johnson, not wanting to be publicly humiliated, was quick to point out Edwards’ small stature in the world of academia and discredited his critiques of soon to be Bishop Warburton¹¹ “Nay, Edwards has given Warburton some smart hits to be sure; but there is no proportion between the two men they must not be named together. A fly, Sir, may sting a stately horse and make him wince; but one is but an insect, and the other is a horse still.”¹² The deadlock ended with Edwards returning to Connecticut College until the “small fly” successfully annoyed the other horse (Johnson) enough into leaving his post at Yale. In the academic arena, Edwards was beginning to try his hand against superior foe and yet was somehow winning. Jonathan, however, had bigger problems than his intellectual tussles. Despite all his intellectual genius and debating, he could not help but feel still not truly converted. Plus, raised as a man of rigorous study, Jonathan was about to encounter something only emotion could describe.

⁸ Reeves, 238. See also, Gary W. Crampton, *Meet Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America’s Greatest Theologian/Philosopher* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2004). And, Paul Miller, “Jonathan Edwards and the Beauty of God.” *Touchstone* 36, no. 3 (2018): 6.

⁹ Vedder M. Gilbert “The Altercations of Thomas Edwards with Samuel Johnson,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51, no. 3 (1952): 333.

¹⁰ Gilbert, “Altercations,” 334.

¹¹ No matter how young Edwards was, Gilbert makes a strong case that Edwards’ critiques were more than valid.

¹² Gilbert, “Altercations,” 335.

Converted and Calvinist

In his senior year (the winter of 1719-20), a near-death illness triggered a period of spiritual turmoil. His reaction, as he records in his *Personal Narrative*, was that he “made seeking [his] salvation the main business of [his] life.”¹³ It was not until Edwards had graduated as valedictorian in the spring of 1721 that he eventually experienced his “true conversion.” In his *Personal Narrative*, Edwards recalled the first time that he felt “That sort of inward, sweet delight in God” which was when he was reading 1 Timothy 1:17.

How excellent a being that was; and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapt up to God in Heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in Him. I kept saying, and as it were singing over these words of scripture to myself; and went to prayer, to pray to God that I might enjoy him; and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do; with a new sort of affection.¹⁴

Edwards was struck by a “sense of the glory of the divine being,” which absorbed him into a lifelong love-affair with the sweetness of God.¹⁵ Edwards’ description of his conversion in terms of sweetness, delight, enjoyment, and affection is crucial. From the moment Edwards believed he had truly encountered God, he used language that saw God as the source and destination of all love and desire. As we will explore, the latter implication will encourage his reader to understand that that is the level God wants to relate to humanity on. Marriage, for Edwards, is designed to capture that wooing of the heart.

¹³ Edwards, Jonathan, *Personal Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 58.

¹⁴ Edwards, *Narrative*, 58.

¹⁵ *Personal Writings, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 16, Letters and Personal Writings 1716*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 792.

First, before we explore the depths of his espousal theology, it is important to note a key change that marked this conversion was his embrace of Calvinist doctrines. Later in life, Jonathan Edwards became well known for reconciling two vastly opposing concepts: Calvin's predestination and the Great Awakening's revivalism. Yarbrough and Adams observe how he merged the two doctrines: "Edwards concentrated his theological efforts less on the steps toward conversion and more on the meaning of conversion itself and on its effects."¹⁶ By focusing on the meaning of conversion, he sidestepped the tricky question of why one should bother to seek Christ if Christ had already sought him (or not sought him, for the unlucky few). Nevertheless, Calvinism initially alienated Edwards after his conversion. Barbour notes that as a youth of childish passions, "he [Edwards] relates that he originally found the Calvinistic principle of absolute sovereignty repugnant- "a horrible doctrine."¹⁷ After all, it would have been hard to join in his father's energetic services as a boy believing that one had no choice on the matter of salvation. No, it was not until his sickness in senior year sparked a desire for safety that he had a change of heart toward the doctrine of sovereignty.¹⁸ Faced with death, Barbour notes his illness provided room to react emotionally rather than rationally to the doctrine of sovereignty.¹⁹ In that moment of uncertainty, he grasped "the true sense of divine excellency," and became infatuated

¹⁶ Yarbrough, Stephen and Adams, John, *Delightful Conviction: Jonathan Edwards and the Rhetoric of Conversion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 9.

¹⁷ Barbour suggests that Edwards' illness sparked his fondness of Calvinism, as it thrust him into a period of vulnerability where he could react emotionally to the doctrine of sovereignty. After dwelling obsessively on the doctrine, his rational mind reached a tipping point, and his emotion took over. Barbour, Dennis H. "The Metaphor of Sexuality in Jonathan Edwards' 'Personal Narrative,'" *Christianity and Literature* 47, no. 3 (1998): 288.

¹⁸ Barbour, "Metaphor of Sexuality," 288.

¹⁹ Barbour, "Metaphor of Sexuality," 288.

with the one who had chosen him and sought him out.²⁰ Between the fragility that prompted his powerful conversion experience, and the understanding of God as a sweet saviour, it seems the beginning of his love affair with the divine wrought the beginning of his admiration for Calvinist doctrines.

In a way, his Calvinism offset his emotional conversion experience, and refreshed his theology of union. As a boy, Edwards had been taught holiness was achievable through his own capability to do good works. The core tenets of Calvinism clearly stipulated man's "total depravity." Hence, in learning of the actual depths of depravity humanity had sunk to, his ability to do good was off the table. Edwards' view of human nature had changed. He wrote that the human heart was "totally corrupt in every part. [...] The heart is under the power of [all manner of evil], is sold under sin, and is a perfect slave to it."²¹ The heart not only was innately corrupt, but actively despised the word of God and enjoyed sin. This formed an intricate theology of the heart's affections. So, to be justified and sanctified, the heart needed resuscitation, and its affections stirred. Piety needed to come from a source outside of the self. The only way for humanity's stubborn "sermon proof" heart to long for the righteousness of God was through supernatural means - divine revelation in the Word of God.²² By absorbing scripture, Edwards preached that the Holy Spirit then "conforms the heart to the gospel, mortifies its enmity and opposition against the scheme of salvation therein revealed

²⁰ Edwards, *Narrative*, 106.

²¹ *All that Natural Men do is Wrong, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 19, Sermons and Discourses: 1734-38*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 344-45.

²² *Living Unconverted under an Eminent Means of Grace, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 14, Sermons and Discourses: 1723-29*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 365.

[and] acquiesce in the revelation of Christ as our saviour.”²³ Ultimately, the glad tidings of the Word could stir the affections of the fallen heart to enjoy Christ again. And, since one simply “acquiesces” to the revelation of Christ, salvation becomes a gift handed to the believer out of love - it could not be earned. Calvinism had eliminated any optimism concerning Edwards’s theology of human nature, and forced him to confront God as the sole source of his holiness. While the eventual maturity of his thought was not fully apparent upon his conversion, it is important to note this is the strand of theology Edwards had embraced. His salvation was secured because he had not done anything to earn it. Union now relied on Christ, not him. This was not a momentary fling with emotion but a true stirring of his affections that would envelop him in a conviction that could not wear off.²⁴

Isaac and Rebecca v. Christ and the Church

Academically trained, and spiritually settled, Edwards began work on some theological tracts and treatises. His early notes entitled *Apocalyptic Writings*, which he began toward the end of 1723, show us some of the first theological understandings of the young and single Edwards on Christ’s marriage to the kingdom: “the Son delivers

²³ Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul By the Spirit of God, Shown to Be Both a Scriptural, and Rational Doctrine (1734),” in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, 121–40. Yale University Press, 1999.

²⁴ While some scholars, such as David L. Weddle, have criticised Edwards’ *Personal Narrative* for being a later account of his conversion that serves his personal agenda of communicating his faith to the community, others have argued its sheer honesty alone means it must be taken seriously. Barbour, for instance, acknowledges the limitations of this source which seeks to offer emotional support to others, but ultimately concludes that as confessional literature its honesty makes it a trustworthy source for his theological outlook. Barbour, “Metaphor of Sexuality,” 286.

the kingdom to his Father, and the marriage of the Lamb is consummated in heaven.”²⁵ While primarily a commentary on the salvific work of the Son, the marital imagery indicates Edwards’ train of thought. The Son redeems those in his Father’s kingdom, and delivers his people from their sin. In doing so, the Son establishes the unbreakable marriage with his bride (the Church), which is consummated in heaven. This union, however, is unique. Despite the well documented unfaithfulness of the bride, the groom is insistent on delivering her from sin.²⁶ Christ has purchased his bride through his atonement for her sin, and made her fit to be his spouse. Brought in before the Father, “arrayed in fine linen, white and clean,” the bride stands stunning in her new purity. The Father then ordains their consummation.²⁷

To better understand this union, Edwards eagerly eyes the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca, seeing them as a “very remarkable type of the marriage of Christ and the Church.”²⁸ Importantly, as mentioned above, Edwards’ Calvinist undertones impact his view of justification. In his typological view of Isaac and Rebecca, Edwards not only presents Isaac as a type of Christ, but emphasises the passivity of Rebecca to illustrate that the Church was chosen by her bridegroom.

Abraham, Isaac’s father, gave all he had to Isaac, just as the Father “made Christ heir over all things.”²⁹ Isaac was the only son of Abraham, and like Christ, was offered up as the sacrifice on Mount Moriah. He carried wood up the mountain, symbolising

²⁵ *A Theology of the Apocalypse, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 5, Apocalyptic Writings 1723*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 52.

²⁶ The Old Testament narrative records in depth the failings of Israel, and her transgressions against YHWH (i.e., Jeremiah 2:23-5:19, Ezekiel 16:1-63, and Hosea 2:2-9).

²⁷ *Theology of Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:132.

²⁸ *Apocalypse Series*, in WJE 5:132.

²⁹ *Apocalypse Series*, in WJE 5:131.

the cross Christ carried, and came back down the mountain three days later, just as Christ returned three days after his crucifixion. Isaac's wife, Rebecca, represents the Church:

Rebecca was "very fair to look upon," and how beautiful is the church set forth in the Scripture to be in the eyes of Christ. And [she was] a pure virgin (*Genesis 24:16*); so the spouse of Christ is as a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. True believers are virgins that follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth. Abraham's steward presented her a chaste virgin to Isaac; so are ministers, the stewards of God's house, to labor, that they may present the church a chaste virgin to Christ.³⁰

According to Edwards, Rebecca's beauty and virginity hint at the purity of the Church. Due to her virtue, Abraham's servant brought forth Rebecca to be presented to Isaac. In the same way, the Father "makes use of his ministers to adorn and beautify souls," so they may be presented to Christ in beauty.³¹ Crucially, it is important to note that the minister claimed Rebecca for Isaac on behalf of his master's will. Rebecca "left her father's house, her kindred and her country, never to return more, for the sake of Isaac, whom she had not seen."³² Edwards' Calvinism shows itself and he demonstrates humanity's passive role in salvation, as the Father sovereignly claims his own. Rebecca, who knew no other way of life but that of her natural disposition (sin), was sought out by Abraham's servant (God's minister) at Abraham's request (the Father's). When she accepted the servant's proposal, and reached Isaac's tent, she was no longer defined by her father's house. Now, she was known by Isaac's divine heritage. Rebecca was made fit to join this heritage through the adornment of gold and jewels that the servant provided, and thus truly merges with Isaac's people once enjoined to him. In similar

³⁰ Apocalypse Series, in WJE 5:131-132.

³¹ Apocalypse Series, in WJE 5:132.

³² Apocalypse Series, in WJE 5:132.

fashion, ministers proclaim the Word to reveal the goodness that awaits outside of sinners' natural abode. Non-believers are brought face to face with this goodness, Christ, and upon receiving the *seed of life*, are transformed with a transcendent love.³³ Ultimately, for Edwards, the Church is chosen by the Father. And, like Rebecca, the believer's role is no more than a passive reception of that irresistible seed, Christ. Even if the soul wanted to, it could do no more to earn its salvation due to the terrible depths of Sheol to which it has plunged. The bride's marriage union with Christ relies upon the Father's election, and Christ's definitive redemptive work.

Song of Songs: A Divine Love Story

The Church's spiritual marriage to Christ is not, for Edwards, to be misunderstood as merely a mechanical election. He does not imagine that believers lackadaisically float along until God decides to have mercy and arbitrarily pluck them from their sin. Neither is the marriage unwanted and reluctantly consummated by a God who views the rescue of believers like a cold shower: good and right, but best hurriedly exited once He has saved the foolish creatures. As for Luther, marriage is the warm and comforting image of the relationship between Christ and believers which both are drawn to enjoy. In *Notes on Scripture* (1722), Edwards presents an extensive analysis of the Song of Songs as an allegory of Christ's union with the Church.³⁴ Since Edwards views salvation as union with Christ, he does not cast it as primarily about moral correction, judicial innocence, or even preservation of life alone. Rather, salvation is

³³ Apocalypse Series, in WJE 5:132.

³⁴ To clear up any confusion, it should be noted that Song of Songs is commonly referred to and referenced by Edwards as The Canticles.

about the transformation of the heart so that it may enjoy and love God. He considers marriage as an instrument designed to echo exactly that reality.

Edwards begins his commentary by establishing Solomon's book as no "ordinary love song."³⁵ Solomon's poetic words embody some of the truest words of the divine.³⁶ They express the greatest love affair in history: the union of Christ and the Church, of which "marriage and conjugal love [are] but a shadow."³⁷ Embracing the lens of the Canticles, Edwards deploys a slightly more sexual tone to describe Christ's intimate desire to be with the Church, to know her, and to be one with her. While the sexual overtones are somewhat pre-formed by the nature of the text as a love song, Edwards clearly amplifies the sexual edge to truly capture Christ's desire for the Church, and to show the Church as a passionate bride. For, if the entire plot of the universe culminates in her marriage to Christ, then God's promise of the wedding feast culminates in their consummation as newlywed husband and wife.

In the Song, Edwards reads the spouse as a society of people because her groom compares her to a city - in particular, she resembles Jerusalem: "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem."³⁸ He then finds a number of allusions to explain why this society cannot be any odd group of people. It must be the Church. The Song contains several distinguishing descriptions of the city: her excellency is

³⁵ *Notes on Scripture, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 15, Notes on Scripture 1722*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 92.

³⁶ Edwards believes the New Testament confirms this song's divinity through a number of the allusions given to the things herein contained. In particular, Christ, in John 4:10-14, "speaking of a well of 'living water,' seems to allude to the *Canticles 4:15* of this song, 'a fount of gardens, a well of living waters.'" Edwards' position on Song of Solomon's authority is strengthened when one considers his edits. He references the contrast in Ephesians - between being drunk on wine, and being drunk on the Spirit - understanding it to *probably* refer to *Canticles 5:1*, "Drink, and be drunken, O beloved." After looking over his work, he decidedly crossed out the term 'probably,' doubling down on his position, and highlighting the genuine authority this poem holds. *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:181.

³⁷ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:92.

³⁸ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:550.

compared to the smell of Lebanon (Canticles 5:15), she is a fountain of life (Canticles 4:15), a wall with breasts like towers (Canticles 8:10), and an army terrible with banners (Canticles 6:10). Edwards concludes that all these images can be found elsewhere in the scriptures as explicit metaphors for the Church. For instance, Hosea prophecies Christ to be as beautiful as the olive tree, whose branches (the Church) will grow smelling as Lebanon (Hosea 14:6). Or, in Exodus, Moses represents the twelve tribes of Israel (the fullness of the Church) by twelve fountains of water (Exodus 15:27). Christ chooses this city, who possesses the most delightful fragrance, to be his bride. It is not just her external appearance that intoxicates the groom. The groom is constantly pruning her spiritual life so that she may be presented pure on her wedding day.³⁹

In Solomon's poem, the Church is often described as "undefiled."⁴⁰ She is a pure, chaste virgin, which echoes forward the image of Mary, Christ's mother. As Mary brought Christ into the world, so the Church fulfils her role of preaching Christ through the "breasts of [her] ordinances."⁴¹ In this, both Mary and the Church (although for Edwards there is hardly a difference) communicate Christ's grace for the nourishment of believers. As new-borns suckle on the breasts of their mothers, so believers suckle on the breasts of the Church who "affords the sincere milk of the Word."⁴² By this, each member of the Church grows alongside one another, strengthened by the Word, until Christ is formed in them. Yet, this is not a painless process. Mary gave birth to Christ in "travail" and "throes."⁴³ There is hardly a difference when Christ is formed in the

³⁹ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:550.

⁴⁰ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:288.

⁴¹ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:288.

⁴² *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:288.

⁴³ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:288.

hearts of the believer: “with those convictions, and that repentance and sorrow for sin, that self-denial and mortification, that may fitly be compared to the pains of a woman in travail.”⁴⁴ Crucially, despite the transgressions of the believer, they can be purified by the Word of God, which is conveyed by the Church. The nourishment available means the Church can be presented as a virgin to Christ on his wedding day.⁴⁵ Here, we can begin to see marriage not only reflecting the deeply intimate union between Christ and the Church, but answering Edwards’ philosophical question of origin. Throughout all of history, Edwards reads the Church as being prepared for her wedding day which is the climax of history. Christ is sanctifying and redeeming his people so they may be fit for the feast God had planned from the beginning of time: the banquet of the newlyweds.

Are gentiles excluded from God’s predestined plan for redemption? Scholars have often categorised Israel in the Old Testament as exclusively ethnic, and accused their God of holding to similar boundaries.⁴⁶ Edwards ensures no one misunderstands his convictions on the matter. God’s eternal and redemptive plan to wed Christ and the Church in matrimony involves the gentiles. The Jews do not loom over them with a superior status that gives them a free pass to the fast lane. To return to Edwards’ Calvinism, all are sinful and have fallen short of the glory of God. Therefore, one cannot be pure before Christ without the nourishment of graces that come through the ordinances of the Church. And, even before the gentiles were “in the church estate,”

⁴⁴ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:288.

⁴⁵ Revelation 14.4

⁴⁶ See J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1957, reprint of 1885 edition), 417, and G. Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," BA 25/3 (Sept. 1962), 66-87, reprinted in E. F. Campbell and D. N. Freedman, *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, no. 3 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970) 100-120.

when they were premature and “without breasts” (Canticles 8:8), Edwards includes them in God’s election.⁴⁷ They were called forth in Isaiah where God tells of his plans to turn the barbaric forests of Lebanon, Amana, Shenir, and Hermon into fruitful fields.⁴⁸ In the Song of Solomon, the gentiles are held captive in the lion’s dens of these wilderness places. They were seized and carried into the lions’ dens, taken because of their foolishness. But God and the Church swear not to forget the “little sister,” and so her imprisonment is short lived.⁴⁹ As a vulnerable adolescent girl, it is the duty of the congregation to protect and adorn her, so they may ready her for the wedding day. Despite her past estrangement, the congregation affirms their participation in God’s plan: “If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver, but if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar” (Canticles 8:9). She will soon grow up, and be grafted into the Church family, to be united with Christ at the wedding day if she will simply “look to him.”⁵⁰ The passive language with which Edwards describes the Church highlights his Reformed perspective on justification. Not only is the gentile role in salvation simply to respond to God’s call that requires faith alone (i.e., looking up), but their place in God’s work of redemption is pre-ordained in the Old Testament simply because God wills it. The congregation affirms the participation of the “little sister” simply because God commands them. God’s desire for his bride does not depend on ethnicity, but solely on faith.

Once joined in spiritual marriage to Christ, the Church can abundantly bring forth good fruit. In Solomon’s narrative, the man’s admiration of the woman’s womb is

⁴⁷ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:178.

⁴⁸ See Isaiah 43:6, and Isaiah 29.

⁴⁹ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:178.

⁵⁰ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:178.

not kept secret, just as Christ's admiration of his bride's obedience is kept no secret: "Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies," (Canticles 7:2).⁵¹ The crops and flowers produced by Christians, in marriage with Christ, are like food to their husband. He delights in the beauty of the lilies and, not gluten free, the taste of the wheat. As long as the Church remains intimate with her bridegroom she will never, "cease from yielding fruit," (Jeremiah 17:8). Edwards clearly believes, first and foremost, that Christ's real admiration of his bride is found in her obedience. When she is able to produce spiritual fruit, Christ almost leaps for joy, as if his wife had just gotten a promotion.

The emphasis on her obedience is crucial to understanding Edwards' view on God's relationship to humanity.⁵² It stems from his covenantal theology that defines the Adamic covenant as primarily rooted in works: "Concerning *Genesis 2:17* ("In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.") Jonathan Edwards asserts, "The words 'signify that perfect obedience was the condition of God's covenant that was made with Adam, as they signify that for one act of disobedience he should die.'"⁵³ The default relationship between humanity and the divine is, here, conditioned on works. Hence, Christ adores his bride when she shows great improvement from her previous past sins. In hope, and excitement, of a future total glorification, Christ atoned for his bride's sin on the cross during his own hour of glory.⁵⁴ As his glory shone forth, his bride took unspeakable joy and happiness in Him. Edwards references the Proverbs to prove the

⁵¹ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:310.

⁵² This shall be explored later in Chapter Three.

⁵³ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:302.

⁵⁴ John 17.1

joy of the Church in Him as comparable to the fruit of a tree.⁵⁵ In other words, as Jesus hung on the tree on Good Friday, he achieved cosmic reconciliation and brought happiness to every believer. Soon, the Church will experience a similar day of glory, and it is on that day that the profits of her fruits will be mutually enjoyed. The Canticles compare this mutual joy to exotic foods and drinks, from wine to honeycomb, to capture the merriness of this day that all of history has been waiting for.⁵⁶

Ultimately, God has already woven the tapestry of history, and its picture is a relational one. It envisages the great marriage between Christ and the Church: “These are the most excellent lovers, and their love the most excellent love.”⁵⁷ What other reason could possibly drive creation? Why else is the world so driven by relationships with friends and family? For Edwards, it is the mystical and beautiful plot line of history to marry Christ and the Church that is being brought closer into existence. From here, they may eternally enjoy each other’s comforting embrace. Given this picture, the sexual language that Edwards uses is not an inappropriate category clumsily deployed, but instead captures the depth of intimacy God has given us to reflect Christ’s desire for the Church.

The Wheels of History and the Ultimate End of Creation

As Edwards pressed further into the potential of marriage to illuminate soteriology, he continued to ask the philosophical question about the world’s origin. His conclusion is that marriage is the driving purpose of all creation, since God planned the union between his Son and a spouse from before the creation.

⁵⁵ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:548.

⁵⁶ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:548.

⁵⁷ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:92.

In one sermon, Edwards imagines the Father's motivation for creating the world being the mission to find a bride for his Son. The existence of the universe is the result of a divine matchmaking enterprise.

The creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end, that the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse, towards whom he might fully exercise the infinite benevolence of his nature, and to whom he might, as it were, open and pour forth all that immense fountain of condescension, love and grace that was in his heart, and that in this way God might be glorified.⁵⁸

The language here is telling. The end result of this quest for a spouse for the Son is the display and outpouring of his love and grace, so revealing and sharing his glory with his bride. Hames and Reeves point out that, for Edwards, the culmination of history is the glory (and glorification) of God: "Not glory taken, but glory given."⁵⁹ Elsewhere in Edwards, this self-giving of the Son is seen as his glory and "God's last great end," indeed "the end for which God created the world."⁶⁰ Again, Edwards writes:

God created the world for his Son, that he might prepare a spouse or bride for him to bestow his love upon: so that the mutual joys between this bride and bridegroom are the end of the creation. God is really happy in loving his creatures, because in so doing he as it were gratifies a natural propensity in the divine nature, viz. goodness. Yea, and he is really delighted in the love of his creatures and in their glorifying him, because he loves them, not because he needs. For he could not be happy therein, were it not for his love and goodness. *Colossians 1:16*, "All things were made by him and for him," that is, for the Son.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 25, *Sermons and Discourses, 1743-58*, ed. Wilson H. Kimmach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 187.

⁵⁹ Hames and Reeves, *God Shines Forth*, 160.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 475.

⁶¹ *End of the Creation*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 13, The 'Miscellanies' 1722*, ed. Harry S. Stout (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 374.

Here, continuing his typological exegesis, Edwards uses Adam, the first man, to picture Christ as the second Adam. The first Adam had been incomplete in the garden. Well into day six, God had not yet declared Adam's situation "very good," and thus creation was arguably unfinished. The changing plot point in the narrative sees God laying Adam to sleep in order to draw life for Eve from his side. In the same way, Christ was not content with his work on earth until he (as the second Adam) had been "put to sleep" in order that, from his side, he might give life and glory to his own bride – the Church.⁶² By this comparison, Edwards illustrates that the plan of history hung on Christ reclaiming his bride. Until then, the story of the universe would not be complete and Christ would remain in search of his bride.

Edwards' theology of a redemption history involves a comprehensive undoing of Adam's actions which plunged humanity into sin. Later in his *Notes on Scripture*, he expands on the mechanics behind Christ's reclamation of his bride to prove the whole of history is aimed at fulfilling God's plan. Having designed the Church to be Christ's spouse, it seems God providentially turns cogs "behind-the-scenes" to orchestrate history and ensure salvation for the Church.⁶³ After visiting a number of depressing passages, from Genesis 3:19 to Ecclesiastes 1:4-8, Edwards concludes with exasperation at how repetitive history truly is: "it is, the whole of it [history] like a wheel."⁶⁴ As one generation rises, another falls. As one winter appears, another summer fades further into the background. These historical and seasonal changes are all done at the turning of the Great Wheel. Edwards uses Ezekiel's vision to elaborate the role of

⁶² *Work of Creation, Providence, Redemption, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 18, The 'Miscellanies' 1731*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 288.

⁶³ "So, it is in the course of things in God's providence over the intelligent and moral world; all is the motion of wheels." *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:374.

⁶⁴ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:374.

the greater wheel in causing the revolutions of other lesser wheels.⁶⁵ Essentially, every process in history involves the revolution of a wheel. From the circulation of man's blood to the course of the tide at sea, both are like wheels. The cyclical life of man, also, is captured in the early stages of Genesis "Dust we are, and unto dust we return."⁶⁶ The Spirit that once entered us returns to the God who it was gifted from, as our bodies nakedly re-enter our "mother's womb."⁶⁷ These processes are, however, all smaller wheels. Like Ezekiel's vision, these wheels are turned by the larger wheel in which they exist. Each revolution is spun by God's providence as he governs his intelligent world. The constant turning of the larger wheel ensures the inevitable cycle of every smaller wheel. It is in this manner that Solomon can recite, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done. And there is no new thing under the sun."⁶⁸ Each spin returns the wheel to "the same point or place whence [it] began."⁶⁹ Despite returning to its same point, Edwards claims the spin has created a general progress in motion toward its destination - not too dissimilar from a chariot travelling place to place. As Edwards puts it, the wheel turns "that a further end is obtained than was at first, or the same end is obtained in a much further degree."⁷⁰ So, just as in Ezekiel's vision, each wheel spins from God and returns to God: "all things come from God, and are formed out of a chaos; and in the end, all things shall return into a chaos again, and shall return to God, so that he that is the Alpha will be the

⁶⁵ See Ezekiel 1. In brief, Ezekiel has a divine vision of four wheels which seem to travel at the direction of the Holy Spirit, who directs the wheels to bring about the omniscient will of God.

⁶⁶ Genesis 3.19

⁶⁷ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:374.

⁶⁸ Ecclesiastes 1:9-10

⁶⁹ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:374.

⁷⁰ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:375.

Omega.”⁷¹ With every revolution, God’s end plan (the greatest governing wheel) is brought one cycle closer to its full existence. “The beginning of the world to the [second] coming of Christ, may be represented as one great wheel performing one revolution.”⁷² This one great wheel that turns history is narrated by a smaller wheel that spins twice throughout its lifespan. It completed its first revolution at the calling of Abraham when God re-planted his Church. The second revolution of this smaller wheel will come to completion at the same time as the bigger wheel finishes its sole revolution – the coming of Christ. To Edwards, this two-act play dictates the shape of history. Nonetheless, it is important to note, while the wheelspin ushers in the final plan of God, its initial motion was caused by a deeper motivation. As Edwards poetically writes:

Those wheels in this [Ezekiel’s] vision are represented as God’s chariot wheels. The world is the chariot of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in which he makes his progress to that glory, that glorious marriage with his spouse, that eternal feast, that everlasting kingdom of rest, and love, and joy, which the Father hath designed him.⁷³

The hope of a marriage feast was always God’s end goal. The Father, in his love, desired to communicate his goodness and share his happiness. He shares life with his Son through the Holy Spirit. Christ, having received this gesture of love, desires to communicate himself forward so that another may partake in his happiness. Humanity became the joyful beneficiary of the Son’s inclination.⁷⁴ Thus, Christ can be said to be incomplete without the Church given his natural yearning to be with his people. In the same way, humanity would have been incomplete without woman for, as two become

⁷¹ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:375.

⁷² *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:375.

⁷³ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:378.

⁷⁴ *End of Creation*, in WJE 13:272.

one, "she is himself."⁷⁵ Nor is the soul complete without the body. God created an order, and a hierarchy, which allows for each head to communicate their own goodness to their partner. Thus, as the great wheel of history slows to a halt, we recognise its turns so that:

The Son might obtain a spouse that he might give himself to and give himself for, on whom he might pour forth his love, and in whom his soul might be eternally delighted. Till he had attained this, he was pleased not to look on himself as complete, but as wanting something, as Adam was not complete till he had obtained his Eve.⁷⁶

For Edwards, God's communication of his own happiness to his creatures was God's end. As the Father communicated his own happiness to his only begotten son, it overflowed into the creation of the world, and the creation of that which would become his bride. Our justification is made clear through Christ's actions before time. We were chosen to be his spouse. In the grand plan for creation, God created humanity primarily for that purpose.

Edwards' understanding of this marriage as the backdrop to reality shapes his ideas on justification. To be Christ's spouse is to share in his inheritance and riches. For, while we are justified by faith, Edwards makes clear Christ was justified by

⁷⁵ *End of Creation*, in WJE 13:272.

⁷⁶ *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:187. See also Edwards' commentary on *Ephesians 5:30–32*: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Christ did as it were leave his Father in order to obtain and be joined to the church; he came down from heaven, and did as it were leave the bosom of his Father. He left the sweet and joyful manifestations of his Father's love, and became subject to the hidings of his Father's face, and even to the expressions of his wrath, and gave himself to his church, that he might be joined to his church, and "that he might present it to himself a glorious church," etc., as *Ephesians 5:25–27*. So he also left his mother, which was the church of the Jews, JE deleted "or the Old Testament." to cleave to the New Testament church as his wife. The Old Testament church was as it were the mother of Christ. Christ was born of the Jews, and the Jewish [church] of old as it were held Christ in its womb. All those ordinances and legal observances, Christ was hid in them, as the infant is hid in the womb. All God's dispensations towards that church, his calling of them by Moses, his giving them such ordinances, his so ordering their state from age to age, was in order to bring forth Christ into the world." *Notes on Scripture*, in WJE 15:232.

works.⁷⁷ We simply share in those works, hidden under the bridegroom's status, as his bride. We cannot go about earning this inheritance through our own efforts. Edwards urges his congregation in his sermon on Romans 4:5 to not have trust in their own "flush of affection" but to trust in Christ's works. He has earned righteousness by his "moral goodness before God," and bestowed that status upon his bride through faith.⁷⁸ The bride, that Christ knew would execute him and force him to tirelessly labour for their salvation, is joined to him in hope of the fulfilment of God's plan: the grand wedding feast.

Motivation for Creation, Providence and Redemption

Just a few years into his marriage, Edwards wrote *The Miscellanies* (1731). Here, in entry 702, he authors one of his most majestic descriptions of the work of creation, providence, and redemption. He summarily expounds on his previous writings and his developed thought was undoubtedly fuelled by the marvellous Sarah Edwards – whose influence we will address more in detail later. At the centre of these concepts lies the glue that holds these works together: the marriage between Christ and the Church. The great spiritual marriage is the end of creation, the motivation for God's providence, and the joy of redemption.

Creation and providence both serve the work of redemption. In this three-stage act, Edwards shows how God's plan is already in action. Creation, for instance, hints at the redemptive manner of God's actions. In the beginning, the world was in utter chaos.

⁷⁷ *Doctrine*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 19, Sermons and Discourses 1734-38*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 193.

⁷⁸ *Doctrine*, in WJE 19:193.

The matter was formless, dark, and lacked order.⁷⁹ Yet, according to Edwards, from out of the confusion and seemingly dismal ruin, Christ arose as the first light of hope. This set into motion the comprehensive undoing of evil, and the reconciliation of creation to order. It was not until the seventh day, when God rested, that “all remainders of chaos were perfectly done away with.”⁸⁰ In this way, the state of the earth in its first week of existence represents the state of the Church. The Church was born into sin and misery. Despite having been brought into redemption through the cross, there are certain cosmic powers of death that still reign in her presently state. In the Genesis narrative, those powers are depicted through the chaotic elements of creation. Darkness, for instance, no longer possesses the world nor has it been utterly abolished. Rather, it was set boundaries, always bordering morning as night and day constantly interchange. Further, the waters that ravaged the earth were not all dried up, but given limits and restraints which enabled good fruit and land to be brought forth in its place.⁸¹ Thus, while the remnant of water and sin exists, the “future triumphant state of the Church” is foreshadowed as redemption is underway and evil powers have been shackled.⁸² Ultimately, this creation narrative shows that the work of creation was and is subordinate to the work of redemption. Throughout history, God has suspended the laws of nature to give place to the designs of redemption.⁸³ Edwards notes how God parted the seas for Israel to escape their captors. God halted the sun and moon in their tracks for military triumph, and stacked the waters to provide a way through to the promised

⁷⁹ *Creation, Providence, Redemption, in WJE* 18:285.

⁸⁰ *Creation, Providence, Redemption, in WJE* 18:285.

⁸¹ *Creation, Providence, Redemption, in WJE* 18:286.

⁸² *Creation, Providence, Redemption, in WJE* 18:286.

⁸³ *Creation, Providence, Redemption, in WJE* 18:290.

land. In all this, God sought to show through his providence that the entire universe was subject to the Church – his bride. Christ longs to bring forth his bride for “exceeding close and intimate union,” so that all that is God’s is hers.⁸⁴ This is particularly visible in Joshua’s narrative of entry to the promised land, and Edwards’ highly typological understanding of the event. God stacked the waters at the river Jordan so that Israel (the Church, Christ’s bride) may pass through out of the wilderness (the sinful misery of earth) and into the promised land (heaven) where they may have a “high and glorious enjoyment” of him.⁸⁵ This redemptive work surely foreshadows the final day, where the ultimate communication of happiness to Christ’s bride will take place at the altar. Ultimately, the spiritual marriage drives all creation, providence, and redemptive actions of God, strengthening its metaphorical picture of Christ’s desire to be with each believer.

Sarah Pierrepont: an Uncommon Union

Since we spent time looking at Katharina von Bora’s influence on Luther, it seems wise to explore Jonathan Edwards’ own marriage to consider Sarah Pierrepont’s influence on his theology. For this, we must revisit Edwards’ early life.

Despite the order and good morals that Timothy Edwards brought to the household, Edwards had a chaotic childhood. He was an only son, growing to be tall, thin, and bookish. He had ten sisters who were all at least six feet tall. Northampton knew them as Timothy’s “sixty feet daughters!”⁸⁶ The rest of his family was no less

⁸⁴ *Creation, Providence, Redemption, in WJE* 18:298.

⁸⁵ *Creation, Providence, Redemption, in WJE* 18:298.

⁸⁶ John Piper, “A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards,” *Reformed Journal* 28, no. 11 (1978): 16.

bizarre: “Jonathan’s grandmother was an incorrigible profligate, his great-aunt committed infanticide, and his great-uncle was an axe-murderer.”⁸⁷ The word unstable comes to mind. Instability was not only found in his family. Theologically and morally, the British outpost of New England failed to live up to the discipline of its puritan reputation. Despite the iron fist that Timothy used to rule over the church of Northampton, licentious youth still roamed the streets, sexual immorality was rife, and violence frequent.⁸⁸ Geographically, New England was trapped in between her Catholic competitors, with the Spanish armies to the south and the French colonists lurking up north. Sitting on the frontier, New England settlers were “prone to Indian attack,” and gunshots could often be heard echoing throughout the night.⁸⁹ Edwards was born, after all, seventy-three years before the War of Independence (1776). For now, the building blocks of the future nation were just thirteen small colonies hugging tightly to North America’s eastern coastline. Between his family life, the moral bankruptcy in Northampton, and the imminent terror that threatened his hometown on all sides, Edwards yearned for some sense of stability.⁹⁰ Thus, having graduated Yale and finished his year-long pastorate in New York, Edwards returned to further his studies – going on to receive an M.A. on the doctrine of imputation. More importantly for Jonathan, a particular young girl was also in New Haven during this time: Sarah Pierrepont. Sarah, although only thirteen at the time, impressed Jonathan with her piety and virtue. Wallace writes “Her chief concern was the things of the Spirit [having become]

⁸⁷ Reeves, *Major Theologians*, 239.

⁸⁸ “A rowdy world of rum, guns, and riotous adolescent antics.” Reeves, *Major Theologians*, 239.

⁸⁹ Reeves, *Major Theologians*, 239.

⁹⁰ The major theological implications of this had led him to finding the doctrine of Calvinism.

remarkably religious at five years old.”⁹¹ Despite her age, Sarah went on to find her way into the endless thoughts of Jonathan, at all times of the day. In Murray’s biography, we read about Edwards’ Greek grammar book.⁹² Used to teach his students, the inside cover revealed a very different and personal use for Jonathan. A poetically scrawled paragraph extolling his new crush, Sarah:

They say there is a young lady in [New Haven] who is loved of that Great Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this Great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight; and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on Him.... You could not persuade her to do anything wrong or sinful, if you would give her all the world, lest she should offend this Great Being. She is of a wonderful sweetness, calmness, and universal benevolence of mind; especially after this Great God has manifested himself to her mind. She will sometimes go about from place to place, singing sweetly; and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure.... She loves to be alone, walking in the fields and groves, and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her.⁹³

Sarah could not have been more opposite to Edwards. She came from perhaps one of the most distinguished families in Connecticut and had enjoyed a top-tier education considering society’s gender norms. Her academic brilliance and social status had no impact on her maternal instinct and softening smile. As Samuel Hopkins (an early abolitionist) recorded when he passed through Northampton, staying at the Edwards’ house, her “peculiar loveliness of expression, [was] the combined result of goodness and intelligence.”⁹⁴ Her impact on Jonathan, a man lacking the “social banter and

⁹¹ Ethel Wallace, “Colonial Parson’s Wife: Sarah Pierrepont Edwards, 1710-1758: ‘And a Very Eminent Christian,’” *Review & Expositor* 47, no. 1 (1950): 42.

⁹² Murray, Iain, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Banner of Truth, Jan. 1987), 92.

⁹³ Murray, *New Biography*, 92.

⁹⁴ Elisabeth D. Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man: The Uncommon Union of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards* (Audubon Press, 2003), 15.

lounging” of his fellow students, cannot be understated.⁹⁵ Emotionally, their two years of dating, followed by two years of engagement as they waited for Sarah to age, was a time of “temptation [...] and evil thoughts,” for Jonathan, who was already prone to stress.⁹⁶ A few weeks out from marriage, his journal proved a place to log his private feelings:

December 29: Dull and lifeless.

January 9: Decayed.

January 10: Recovering.⁹⁷

Marsden notes his dramatic change in mood just three months into their marriage: “By fall 1727, Jonathan had dramatically recovered his spiritual bearings, specifically his ability to find the spiritual intensity he had lost for three years.”⁹⁸

Sarah affected more than just Jonathan’s emotional state. His theology was also shaped by her thoughts and experiences. Even before their engagement, Sarah had recommended a book by Peter van Mastricht that Dodds evaluates as influential in his thought on covenant.⁹⁹ Her theological influence continued long into the years of their marriage. In 1742, fifteen years after their wedding, Sarah had what some scholars have on first glance labelled a “psychological breakdown.” This crisis, that occurred during the “awakenings,” has been dismissed by many historians who reject the possibility that something supernatural could have occurred. Dodds, analysing Sarah as a busied mother finally breaking over the stress of caring for eleven children and their financial

⁹⁵ Reeves, *Major Theologians*, 239.

⁹⁶ Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man*, 19.

⁹⁷ Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man*, 19.

⁹⁸ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 111.

⁹⁹ Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man*, 21.

burdens (for Jonathan’s request to the Church for a permanent salary had been denied), pictures her, “limply needful, grotesque — jabbering, hallucinating, idiotically fainting.”¹⁰⁰ Winslow believed the breakdown to be a sympathetic lurch for Jonathan’s attention: “The fact that his wife was given to these more extreme manifestations no doubt inclined [Edwards] to a more hospitable attitude...”¹⁰¹ Either way, Sarah’s “episode” seemingly revived Jonathan’s own views on revival and emotion. In, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival in New England*, Edwards expresses his support for the supernatural experiences of his wife – despite having so decisively rejected those views of his father all that time ago as a teenager:

The soul dwelt on high, was lost in God, and seemed almost to leave the body. The mind dwelt in a pure delight that fed and satisfied it; enjoying pleasure without the least sting, or any interruption. . . [There were] extraordinary views of divine things, and religious affections, being frequently attended with very great effects on the body.¹⁰²

Her impact on his understanding of marriage was both theological and emotional. She provided a real place to fulfil his abstract ideas on marriage. In their own relationship, Edwards sought to echo the union God ordained between Christ and the Church found in the Canticles. Describing Sarah, Edwards admiringly wrote “when we behold a beautiful body, a lovely proportion, a beautiful harmony of features of face, delightful airs of countenance and voice, and sweet motion and gesture, we are charmed with it.”¹⁰³ The care and sensitivity with which he loved her was well known, and

¹⁰⁰ Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man*, 81

¹⁰¹ Ola E. Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758: A Biography* (MacMillan, 1940), 205.

¹⁰² Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival in New England,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834; reprint, Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:376.

¹⁰³ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 99.

undoubtedly had an effect on some of his ideas on union.¹⁰⁴ His work on Creation, providence, and redemption that we examined above was written only a few short years after his wedding to Sarah. One cannot help but think his inklings were nurtured at least somewhat by the outstanding woman with which he lived with. The theoretical notions he established on paper got teased out into practical application, and his lived experience was channelled into his books and sermons. Of course, it helped that, unlike Christ's bride, his wife was of the highest calibre.

Conclusion

Edwards continued in the wake of Luther's tradition and maintained marriage as a key metaphor for the union of Christ and the Church. In the Scriptures, he found compelling typological and even sexual language to highlight the intimate nature of Christ's union with the Church. The strong desire Edwards describes served to answer his philosophical question of origin, which increasingly piqued his interest. Ezekiel's wheels of history, he believed, turned toward ultimate redemption which would culminate in the ultimate, spiritual marriage. The loving union between Christ and his bride was always the plan, and acted as the sole motivator for all of creation, providence and redemption. God wished to share his glory so that his Son may be known and loved by the church, and so communicate his own happiness to a spouse. His philosophical inquiry did not subtract from his ability to act on his affections. His long, and objectively happy, marriage with Sarah loudly echoes his words on earth's divine forms:

¹⁰⁴ Allen mistakes Jonathan's final words to his wife as not primarily theological, but relational. For Edwards, however, these two could not be distinguished. His theology always stirred his affections and channelled all relational thought. So much so that, on his deathbed, he could say to his daughter, "give my kindest love to my dear wife, and tell her, that the *uncommon union*, which has so long subsisted between us, has been of such a nature, as is spiritual, and therefore will continue forever: and I hope she will be supported under so great a trial, and submit cheerfully to the will of God." Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 494.

“Marriage signifies the spiritual union and communion of Christ and the church, and especially the glorification of the church in the perfection of this union and communion forever.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ *Images of Divine Things, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 11, Typological Writings 1744*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, Mason I. Lowance, Jr., and David H. Watters (New Haven: Yale University, 1957-2008), 52.

CHAPTER THREE

Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards: A Few Key Differences

Although Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards share the status as two of the most influential contributors to Protestant theology, key differences distinguish their underlying thought. Luther was instrumental in the Reformation, recovering the concept of justification by faith alone and encouraging the church to see marriage as a reflection of Christ's unconditional commitment to the believer. Edwards, meanwhile, became the fountainhead for the First Great Awakening, shaping the Church in America for generations to come, and he approached existential questions that emerged in the wake of Luther's legacy. Despite their shared sizeable impact and many theological similarities, Luther and Edwards have some key differences in thought - especially in their marital soteriologies. Their theology of marriage and union came into being in two quite different contexts. Martin Luther wrestled with the certainty of salvation in his Roman Catholic context, which drove him to attack the question of assurance head-on. This formed his ideas on justification, and pushed him to use marriage as a key illustration of Christ's gracious union with his bride. Edwards, on the other hand, was born almost two centuries after the Reformation, on an entirely different continent. The stakes could not have been more different. Preaching to disillusioned, fourth-generation immigrants who no longer possessed the religious enthusiasm of their forefathers, Edwards was concerned with the world's existential questions. Growing up, too, in fertile pre-enlightenment soil, it was not necessarily assurance he was looking for, but the answers to philosophical inquiry about meaning, teleology, and the arc of history. Primarily, for Edwards, as we have seen in Chapter Two, marriage and union served as the perfect material to respond to the question of origin. On the matter of justification,

one central difference can be illustrated through their respective understandings of covenant. Martin Luther saw God's covenant with humanity as rooted in God's unilateral promise, offered in faith. It is God's trust that Adam had betrayed in the Garden of Eden. He had turned his back on a relationship that gave him life, and so faced the consequences. Jonathan Edwards, along with many others in a particular strain of the Calvinist tradition, characterised the Adamic dispensation as a covenant of works. It was the breaking of this covenant, and the failure to maintain perfect obedience, that ruined humanity's relationship with God. This perspective on covenant seems to be an underlying root cause of the subtle differences which emerge in their marital soteriologies.

Luther, Assurance and Marriage

Luther flipped the medieval world upside down when he broke from Rome. The Roman Catholic papacy that had governed the continent for centuries fell to the ideas of the reformists, which can be traced back to the ninety-five theses of the German priest. As Luther searched the Scriptures, and wrestled with his own conscience, he recovered what he believed was a concept of old: justification by faith alone.¹⁰⁶ Through Luther's ideas on justification, he rocked the core foundations of the Catholic church and their systems of grace. Marriage, for instance, was no longer a sacrament to deliver portions of grace as the believer isolated their lust in a sin-free environment. Nor did it hold the same picture of unity of Christ's divine and human natures - especially not through the symbolic representation of mindful man and fleshly woman. Instead, marriage became a deeply relational picture of Christ's unconditional commitment to

¹⁰⁶ While antiquity had not formed this doctrine in the same snappy terms as Luther (*sola fide*), he argued that many of the greats had alluded to it (i.e., Augustine).

the Church. More than that, marriage was a constant reminder of Christ's saving union with the Church. In daily life, husband and wife preached to each other the grace and forgiveness of their true bridegroom. Just as husband and wife remain together through difficult circumstances, so Luther claimed Christ sought his Church at all costs - choosing her out of love, not because of her beauty. We have seen that the believer does not choose to be beautiful (in fact, for Luther, it is impossible for the soul to not be ugly by itself). It is only through relationship with Jesus that she is made instantaneously as pure as the Son. In a society fearing for their salvation, Luther used marriage to answer the question of assurance. Justification was not something achieved by human works. Indeed, nothing sounded so ridiculous to Luther who clearly saw the weakness of the human will. Instead, Christ's death had imputed his divine righteousness to those who believed in him, so that one did not have to worry themselves about holding to a law. Christ had fulfilled the law, and the soul simply needed to trust in him. Thus, Luther illustrated the saving grip God had on his bride whom he loved - not because of her works, but because of Christ's desire for his bride.

Edwards and Origin

Jonathan Edwards, an equally influential figure to the life of American theology today, picked up Luther's marital language – a theology that showed deeply in his personal life. Edwards' context of New England, however, differed from the medieval Roman Catholic world where Martin Luther dwelled. Luther's encouragement to all believers to read the Scriptures had led to the drastic multiplication of biblical interpretations. Not all of these interpretations fell under the umbrella of “appropriate exegeses” for confessional states. The Church of England, for instance, having been created as a broad compromise for Catholics and Protestants alike, still had its doctrinal

restrictions. Fines and persecution often ensued for those who desired to really test the Church's toleration, and thoroughly believed tradition had led to long-held scriptural misunderstandings.¹⁰⁷ Not ready to face imprisonment, or sometimes death, many 'separatists' fled to the newly discovered Americas amidst the religious turmoil of the day. The Americas became a safe haven for the persecuted Church in the wake of the ideas Luther had put forth concerning the believer's priesthood.¹⁰⁸ The strongly convicted first-generation immigrants, who had risked their livelihoods traversing the Atlantic, were seemingly failed by their future generations. By the time Edwards was born in 1703, the third and fourth generations no longer all keenly followed traditional religious practice. Rather, the streets were crawling with licentious youth and riotous behaviour, and a lot of spiritual engagement was done purely desiring a physical experience and the manifestation of the Spirit's gifts.¹⁰⁹ In this period of uncertainty and instability, Edwards turned to show how everything was part of God's grand redemptive plan and purpose. Albeit through his more explicit works, such as *A History of the Work of Redemption* (a series of sermons he preached in 1739 that were later compiled into a publication), or his personal *Notes on Scripture* (1722), Edwards approached history religiously. There was no such thing as secular history. With such a strong emphasis on God's sovereignty, Edwards understood everything as fitting into God's larger plan of redemption. More than just answering how it fit into God's overarching narrative, Edwards was interested in why the story started in the first place.

¹⁰⁷ Barry R. Levis, "The Failure of Comprehension Between the Church of England and Dissenters, 1688-1690: Politics and Liturgy." *Journal of Church and State* 63, no. 4 (2021): 618.

¹⁰⁸ While Luther himself never used the phrase 'priesthood of the believer', his theology clearly encouraged all to interpret the scriptures and claim for themselves a personal relationship with God.

¹⁰⁹ Reeves, *Major Theologians*, 239.

He concluded, as we evaluated above, that all was set into motion through God's desire for his Son to take a spouse. It is in this way that marriage becomes a key factor in the answer to origin. Marriage was *the* end in creation, providence and redemption.

Covenant Theology

Perhaps a more robust difference is the underlying language used to define covenant. For both these figures, God has given marriage to humanity as a picture that describes his unilateral relationship with his people. Christ gives all that he has to his bride, just as a man shares his deepest affections with his bride. So, marriage becomes a key metaphor for the unconditional union between Christ and the Church. However, it is important to consider Luther and Edwards in their respective schools of thought. Undoubtedly, the larger frameworks at play when considering justification, such as Edwards' covenant theology, heavily influenced his conclusions. While Luther's core distinction between law and gospel drives his theology, Edwards embraces Calvinist covenantal thought. This strand of theology has traditionally defined the Adamic covenant as a "covenant of works," and claims it was followed by the creation of a "covenant of grace," after the Fall.¹¹⁰ As a result, Edwards' reformed scholastic influence arguably somewhat undercuts his powerful expression of marriage as a metaphor for union. It changes the fundamental, default relationship between God and humanity. No longer did God create man in unconditional love, but with an expectation of perfect obedience for the maintenance of his righteousness. Luther's, and Edwards', theological frameworks also serve to explain a few key differences seen so far in

¹¹⁰ Jeffery C. Waddington, "Jonathan Edwards's 'Ambiguous and Somewhat Precarious' Doctrine of Justification?" *The Westminster Theological Journal* 66, no. 2 (2004): 359.

Chapters One and Two - namely, the mechanism of Christ's justification, and Edwards' arguably more philosophical approach.

Luther's Gracious God

While Luther had a less robust theology of covenant and decrees than the later reformers, his understanding of union and the framework with which he read Scripture was highly developed. Fighting against the Roman Catholic theologians who came a little before his day, such as William Ockham and Gabriel Biel, Luther despised the medieval theology that carried the slogan, "To the one who does what he can, God will not deny grace."¹¹¹ This spoke of Catholic understandings of justification. For Biel, justification was achieved by cooperating with the terms of God's covenant, not by being declared just. Humankind must merely hit the low bar that God has set out for them, and God will almost overlook the remainder of their sin. In other words, as man morally betters himself throughout life, God will come to accept him as justified and, almost reluctantly, choose to be in union with the sinner who hides behind the terms of the covenant.

For Luther, justification could never follow sanctification. At the core of his Reformation theology lay justification as a free act of love from Christ which spurns on all other actions in the Christian faith. After his own evangelical conversion, Luther taught justification and sanctification as two very distinct concepts. Not soon after Luther was transferred to the new university in Wittenberg, a place "without established traditions," he began to experiment as a professor and test new ways to read the

¹¹¹ Harrison Perkins, "Reconsidering the Development of the Covenant of Works: A Study in Doctrinal Trajectory." *Calvin Theological Journal* 53 no. 2 (2018): 296.

scriptures.¹¹² The monopoly that scholasticism had gained over the centuries dominated elsewhere. It was in the safe abode of Wittenberg, while he prepared learning materials for his classroom, that Luther gained an appreciation for the rhetoric of scripture. In comparison with the logic that had become part and parcel with scholasticism, the rhetoric of scripture focussed less on formulas and quantitative knowledge, and more on theological principles. As Rosin notes, the logic of scholasticism had claimed:

The key word is “ergo” - “therefore” - a system based on logic. If God gives law and if God makes no mistakes, therefore there must be some way for you to keep it. If God gives law, and if God also gives grace and faith, therefore salvation must be some combination of faith and the keeping of the law, that is, of faith and good works. It is all logical. It is all quite natural. Actually, it is also Aristotle...¹¹³

The rhetoric of Scripture, on the other hand, emphasised theology as a *dennoch* (that is, *nevertheless*) not a therefore.¹¹⁴ We do not keep the law so as to *therefore* receive our salvation; rather, we cannot keep the law, but *nevertheless* God delights to impart his righteousness to us. Otherwise, the believer (as Luther personally found) would constantly be forced to return to the formula of salvation – confessing, praying, and laboring, never quite knowing if they were secure. Thus, Luther began to change the way he looked at scripture. The commandments of God became not necessarily a moral exhortation, as much as they served as a reminder of our sinfulness and our need for Christ. This constant acknowledgement of our moral incapacity pushes humanity to a place of despair. It is from this place that we may be humble enough to recognise the truth of Christ’s justifying righteousness. Christ imputes his perfect righteousness to

¹¹² Robert Rosin, “Luther Discovers the Gospel: Coming to the Truth and Confessing the Truth.” *Concordia Journal* 45, no. 2 (2019): 57.

¹¹³ Rosin, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, 56.

¹¹⁴ Rosin, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, 58.

humankind simply because “he desires to turn us away from everything else, and to draw us to himself.”¹¹⁵ So, it is from the justification of God alone, that is freely gifted in love, that any chatter of sanctification may come about. The Law serves to humble us and guard us, and the gospel injects us with the good news of Christ’s work that has already been done. Made new in Christ, we can begin to desire to hold the law for God’s sake, but there should be no overly-eager expectations that we actually can. Or that, even if we could, it would earn us a greater status or union than that which we have already received by the cross.

Despite the graciousness of God’s righteousness, humanity still must feel the burden of living under the weight of Adam’s sin. Humanity remains in a liminal state between death and eternity. As Luther highlights “We dwell in the flesh, and the old Adam is always a stir in us.”¹¹⁶ The “old Adam” often excites us to sin and reveals the completely corrupt heart believers once had without Christ. Thus, while our righteousness has been secured, we still battle through the process of sanctification. Our souls ache and groan, trapped in flesh that withholds us from our complete transfiguration. But crucially, as the Heidelberg Catechism states, “Sinners are beautiful because they are loved; they are not loved because they are beautiful.”¹¹⁷ Humanity need not fret that they still struggle in their sin, for their salvation is gifted from a God that does not demand perfect obedience for relationship.

This is the default relationship between God and humanity. God chooses to love us, not because of anything beautiful in us, but because he so wishes. This train of

¹¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Large Catechism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1935), 46.

¹¹⁶ Luther, *Large Catechism*, 153.

¹¹⁷ Martin Luther, *The Heidelberg Disputation*, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 121 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-2009), 1:212.10-11.

thought can be traced all the way back to Luther's *Genesis Lectures*. God's creation of man was not fundamentally law driven, nor did it come with a condition of perfect obedience to Adam. Rather, mankind was created "the tenderest of creatures," in the image of God.¹¹⁸ Luther highlights the incredibly personal nature of the *imago dei*: "Adam in his being not only knew God and believed in his kindness, but also lived in a life that was wholly godly, that is: he was without the fear of death or of any other danger and he was content with God's favour."¹¹⁹ It was because Adam knew God intimately that he lived his life "wholly godly." His discontent with God's covenant led him to break the trust in their intimate relationship. Its primary consequence was not voiding a contractual law, which God had been holding over Adam, but experiencing evil having rejected God.

Luther's understanding of the place of Law is illuminated by his commentary on Galatians. The Judaizers in Galatia had "forsaken the grace of Christ for the law of Moses."¹²⁰ They pressed the need for the Mosaic Law, and rejected Paul's gospel, on the account that without the Law one cannot be saved. As Luther puts it, it is "as though Christ were a workman who had begun a building and left it for Moses to finish."¹²¹ The Roman Catholics, in Luther's eyes, had much in common with these Judaizers in Galatia. Both insisted righteous work on the part of the believer was necessary for true union with God. It echoed Biel's *quid pro quo* theology of covenant. In fact, according to Luther, the papists go one step further than the false apostles for they omit faith

¹¹⁸ Miikka E. Anttila, *Luthers Theology of Music: Spiritual Beauty and Pleasure* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 113-16.

¹¹⁹ WA 42:47, 9-11.

¹²⁰ Martin Luther, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997), 9.

¹²¹ Luther, *Galatians*, 18.

altogether in the “faith and works equals salvation” equation.¹²² In Galatians 1:14, Paul recalled his own meticulous observance of the Law. Martin Luther empathises with Paul’s sentiment, claiming his own zealous following of the “papistical laws and traditions of his fathers.”¹²³ In reading the next few verses, Luther and Paul find further common ground. These works ravaged the conscience and exhausted the body. Luther understands added works to create a twisted gospel, orchestrated by Satan. For the Law and Gospel cannot exist simultaneously. Either Law remains, and the glad tidings of the Gospel are cut off, or Christ was victorious and the Law loses its power. As a theological exercise, Luther challenges the reader to imagine if he could achieve the fulfilment of the law through the lens of the first commandment – “It would do you no good. A person simply is not justified by the works of the Law,” Luther exclaims.¹²⁴ The demands of the law are irrelevant to one’s justification. Rejecting the Catholic doctrine *grace de congruo*, he mocks the “religious coterie” of the Pope, who obnoxiously believe that we can do good works in the first place.¹²⁵ For instance, they claim that good works (done before or after grace has been obtained) will earn merit from God. God, not a debtor, and definitely accrediting good deeds where done, will make sure to give the believer their douse of grace when he gets around to it. What a vision of man’s ability to do good! Luther, in stark contrast, wishes his view of mankind to open the eyes of

¹²² Luther, *Galatians*, 19.

¹²³ Luther, *Galatians*, 24.

¹²⁴ Luther, *Galatians*, 40.

¹²⁵ “The papists say that a good work performed before grace has been obtained, is able to secure grace for a person, because it is no more than right that God should reward a good deed. When grace has already been obtained, any good work deserves everlasting life as a due payment and reward for merit. For the first, God is no debtor, they say; but because God is good and just, it is no more than right (they say) that He should reward a good work by granting grace for the service. But when grace has already been obtained, they continue, God is in the position of a debtor, and is in duty bound to reward a good work with the gift of eternal life. This is the wicked teaching of the papacy.” Luther, *Galatians*, 40.

the pope, “If they could see evil rooted in the nature of man, they would never entertain such silly dreams about man’s merit or worthiness.”¹²⁶ One must categorically deny the idea of self-merit if they are to accept the words of Paul. The Law is by no means a formula or a measurement to examine how good one has been that week. If anything, it acts as the litmus test to emphatically declare how *bad* you have been that week. The Law was created, and has an expiration date, and hence cannot have bearing on justification. Justification comes through far more relational means. Upon recognising your depravity at the word of the law, repentance follows to the glorious God who wishes to freely gift your righteousness:

In order to have faith you must paint a true portrait of Christ. The scholastics caricature Christ into a judge and tormentor. But Christ is no law giver. He is the Life giver. He is the Forgiver of sins. You must believe that Christ might have atoned for the sins of the world Galatians 2 with one single drop of His blood. Instead, He shed His blood abundantly in order that He might give abundant satisfaction for our sins.¹²⁷

Wiping the fog off our sinful lens, we can view a truer picture of Christ. Not a distant and far-off judge, but a loving life giver who shed his blood to enable our participation in the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is in the righteousness of *faith* that the Christian has victory over law, conscience and death.¹²⁸

In the same way, Christ was also not justified by his works. Jesus did come down to pay the price of man’s sins but Christ is the Son of the Father, and is God, and first and foremost this is where his righteousness comes from. Luther affirms, “When we teach justification by faith in Christ, we confess at the same time that Christ is

¹²⁶ Luther, *Galatians*, 40.

¹²⁷ Luther, *Galatians*, 41-42.

¹²⁸ Luther, *Galatians*, 11.

God.”¹²⁹ The Son of God existed long before the creation of the Law and thus it does not have the power to justify, or make righteous the Son. His righteousness is from his innate identity as the Son of God.

This theology of union, which discards the contributions of our measly works, is arguably more relational—and bears closer resemblance to its earthly picture in marriage—than the scholastic logic which demands the development of virtue. Luther pictures Christ’s grace as an opponent of the law that cannot exist at the same time. Salvation, for the believer, can only come in repentance at their understanding of how sinful they are.¹³⁰ In this, Christ wholly imputes his innate righteousness to the soul. Through this, Christ and the Church may be united outside of the law. The Church may continue in her sin, for the law no longer has bearing on her spiritual status, nor did it ever. From Adam to present, Luther states the marriage of Christ and the Church is not reliant on the Church: “Sarah, the Church, as the bride of Christ bears free children who are not subject to the Law.”¹³¹

Edwards and the Scholastic Reformers

The reformed scholastic influence on Edwards arguably somewhat undermines the metaphor of marriage as a picture of Christ and the Church. His particular covenant theology risks a change to the default relationship between God and humanity. It serves to redefine Christ’s primary purpose in the incarnation and the mechanism of his justification. Ultimately, Edwards’ philosophical approach combined with his scholastic influence serves to dampen the ability to illustrate Christ and the Church.

¹²⁹ Luther, *Galatians*, 76.

¹³⁰ “Grace remits sin [and the] law reveals guilt.” Luther, *Galatians*, 9.

¹³¹ Luther, *Galatians*, 118.

The scholastic reformers, and thus Edwards, held to a three-covenant system: the Covenant of Redemption (that is, between the Father and the Son), the Covenant of Works (that is, between Christ and Adam), and the Covenant of Grace (that is, between Christ and his people after the Fall). Conditionality is a major theme in these covenants. A promise without a condition is an “absurdity and contradiction.”¹³² For Edwards, the covenant of redemption is reliant on Christ’s works for fulfilment. To satisfy the Father, and “earn” the redemption of his spouse, Christ is contractually signed to perfect obedience in the incarnation. Through this, humanity achieves grace and salvation through the transaction Christ upheld. Hence, the covenant of grace is distinct, but flows, from the covenant of redemption. Where the covenant of redemption promises, “justification, the privileges and benefits of his children, the eternal inheritance and kingdom,” the covenant of grace supplies the chance for “communion” with Christ.¹³³ For Edwards, then, justification may come by Christ alone, but it is Christ’s works which enable him to complete the contractual requirements made with the Father. It is this righteousness and merit that is then bestowed to humanity. In a way, we hide in Christ’s works. Yet, our role in the covenant must also be acknowledged. We must perform the role of accepting the offer and “closing with him as a redeemer and a spiritual husband.”¹³⁴ Only upon this acceptance, can the covenant of grace be realised in the believer.

¹³² “All the promises of each of these covenants [the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace] are conditional. To suppose that there are any promises of the covenant of grace, or any covenant promises, that are not conditional promises, seems an absurdity and contradiction.” Gilsun Ryu. “The Federal Theology and the History of Redemption in Jonathan Edwards’s Biblical Exegesis,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 4 (2018): 788.

¹³³ Ryu, “The Federal Theology and History of Redemption,” 789.

¹³⁴ Ryu, “The Federal Theology and History of Redemption,” 790.

Yet, the covenant of grace was not the initial plan. With the first Adam, God instilled a covenant of works which relied upon “Adam’s standing.”¹³⁵ The covenant of works was the preceding cog in the history of redemption. Adam, Edwards states, was “under the covenant of works so, that if [Adam was] perfectly righteous, [Adam could] challenge salvation.”¹³⁶ Ryu notes how this, on first glance, sounds like humanity’s salvation could technically come through works. Yet, Edwards make a sharp and important distinction. Never was Adam intended to be able to keep the covenant of works, but rather so that in his failure “God has plainly declared the impossibility of obtaining life by that covenant,” so that we might know the grace of which we are undeserving.¹³⁷ The covenant now plays a similar role to Luther’s Law by reminding us of our incapability in achieving it. The covenant of grace follows the covenant of works so that instead of striving to work for our redemption, we may sign under Christ’s name in the “contract” of redemption. Through this, God validates our signature on the condition of Christ’s ability to take our place. In doing so, Christ fulfils our part of the contract, and satisfies God, earning his and our righteousness.

Ultimately, we may see that the default relationship between the Father and Son, and between Christ and man, is defined by obedience. The covenant of redemption demands fulfilment through someone perfectly keeping the law. Unlike Luther, who simply believes the law was a guard and a protector for God’s people that reveals their sin, Edwards believes it has an active purpose in the history of redemption. Even though the covenant of works was never intended to be upheld by Adam, it was created in order that Christ was able to complete its requirements. Ultimately, Christ’s relationship to

¹³⁵ Ryu, “The Federal Theology and History of Redemption,” 791.

¹³⁶ Ryu, “The Federal Theology and History of Redemption,” 791.

¹³⁷ Ryu, “The Federal Theology and History of Redemption,” 792.

humanity is dependent on his works which justify him before the throne of God: “we are justified by that righteousness of Christ, that consists in his obedience, and that we are made righteous or justified by that obedience of his, that is his righteousness, or moral goodness before God.”¹³⁸

For Edwards, Christ is justified by his own obedience in which the believer is allowed to partake. For Luther, Christ is justified *de facto*, simply being the Father’s Son. His righteousness is innate and eternal, and this is what is imputed to humanity in the marriage union. Edwards, due to his philosophical approach and scholastic influence, claims Christ earned his justified status on the cross, gaining a righteousness that is abstract and outside of Himself. This has a level of impact on the usefulness of marriage as a metaphor for Christ’s union with the Church. For Edwards, our union is dependent on Christ’s works which define his, and our, relationship with the Father. Hence, spiritual and earthly marriage becomes almost contractual and could be said to face limits in the unconditional love it can express. It is Edwards’ scholastic influence that pushes him to engage in these extra-biblical categories and claim a covenantal system that relies on a conditional work. Marriage, just like the union of Christ and the Church, becomes a legal bond which relies on man’s work on the behalf of his bride. The man must fulfil his duty to preach to his wife the covenant of redemption that God has established. For Luther, the promise of union expressed in marriage avoids getting tangled in the weeds of a covenant conditioned on works. Therefore, marriage does not rely on the works of man, or in him fulfilling his duty. Instead, marriage relies solely on the love for one another between a man and his wife. Just as Christ internally yearns for his bride, and this is what constitutes union, so it is the man’s desire for his wife that

¹³⁸ *Justification by Faith Alone, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 19, Sermons and Discourses 1734-38*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008), 193.

forms marriage. Sure, works and obedience to one another follow in marriage, but it is not wholly reliant on a transactional contract. It is a far more relational picture, for Luther, that rests in the identity of Christ being the Father's son, or man being Christ's.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

I believe having a clearer definition of marriage's spiritual meaning can help strengthen and bolster human marriages. For this reason, Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards' marital soteriology can give much to the Church today. The western Church has remained largely quiet on the increasing divorce and abandonment rates amongst believers.¹³⁹ Whether this is out of embarrassment, subject taboo, or sheer ignorance, Luther and Edwards provide a clear theology of marriage which can breathe fresh air into pastoral issues that are suffocating in the hands of the preacher's obliviousness. Their firm protestant understandings of justification, illustrated by the key metaphor of marriage, can serve to amplify their biblical interpretations on marital and sexual union. Hopefully, with a better knowledge of Luther and Edwards, the Church can freely encourage joyous commitment and a love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things," (1 Corinthians 13:7).

According to Luther, marriage directly reflects the commitment Christ upholds to the Church. Through this metaphor, Luther teaches salvific assurance to the sinner: one's justification is equally unconditional as the groom's wedding vows. The Gospel functions as good news because it turns the primary job of the Christian into a passive enjoyment. The protestant no longer has to struggle with assurance, and navigate the formulaic works and grace equation of Catholicism, but can freely receive their justification in Christ. Enjoying Christ and his creation becomes the "tough task" of the believer. As we passively receive Christ's justification, we are spurred on to share the

¹³⁹ Mary E. Konieczny, "Individualized Marriage and Family Disruption Ministries in Congregations: How Culture Matters," *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 2 (2016): 146.

same joy of forgiveness that we had once received. For Luther, it is only once we have tasted of Christ's mercy that we can actively take that mercy to others. If marriage is to illustrate this happy commitment, then divorce is most definitely not on the table for the believer. Marriage must reflect a union that forgives the sinner, regardless of their transgressions, and in this way can attempt to communicate a deeper and richer union – one between Christ and his Church.

Edwards' marital soteriology is explicitly sexual. The conjugal desire, that he observes in the Song of Solomon, echoes the intimate union of Christ and the Church of which Luther wrote. Christ's longing for his bride can often best be paralleled with Adam's need for Eve – without her, he is incomplete. Christ's desire to be with her is so overwhelming that humanity's sexual desires can often come the closest to illustrating his intense love. In this way, our sexual lives become tools to communicate the love of Christ. For instance, if one engages in sexual activities with several partners, it cheapens the depiction of Christ's love. Christ's love for his bride becomes careless, given to anybody he fancies, and has no real exclusive intent behind it. Yet, if one manifests their sexual desires with one person then their actions describe Christ's love with a deeper sense of richness. Christ's love for his bride becomes intentional, directed, and a rare but cherished resource.

Finally, it is worth noting how Edwards' philosophical question of origin can emphasise the importance and gravity of marriage. Individual human marriages become many smaller wheels in Edwards' system of cogs, which turn toward one great redemptive end: the marriage between Christ and his spouse. In honouring our spouse, we communicate the grand reality that awaits at the culmination of history. As our marital wheel, so-to-speak, turns forward, it comprehensively undoes the evil and chaos

that sin wrought. Not only that, but it hints forward at God's final redemptive plan: the great wedding feast!

This spiritual understanding of marriage answers the questions of assurance and origin, and highlights the happier role it can play in the day-to-day lives of society and believers. The Church can freely preach a good-news message about marriage and encourage believers struggling in their own union – with Christ, or their spouse. And, they can receive that message with this hope. That one day, we shall all partake in the long-awaited wedding ceremony with Christ as his bride, and feast on the heavenly banquet that follows.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Jeffery. *Justification as the Speech of the Spirit: A Pneumatological and Trinitarian Approach to Forensic Justification*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2021.
- Anittila, Miikka. *Luthers Theology of Music: Spiritual Beauty and Pleasure*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013.
- Augustine. *On the Good of Marriage*. Translated by Charles Wilcox. Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992.
- Barbour, Dennis H. "The Metaphor of Sexuality in Jonathan Edwards' 'Personal Narrative.'" *Christianity and Literature* 47, no. 3 (1998): 288.
- Brundage, James. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Crampton, Gary W. *Meet Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America's Greatest Theologian/Philosopher*. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2004.
- Dierks, Theo. "The Doctrine of Justification According to Bernard of Clairvaux." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 8, no. 10 (1937): 748–53.
- Dodds, Elisabeth. *Marriage to a Difficult Man: The Uncommon Union of Jonathan and Sarah Edward's*. Audubon Press, 2003.
- Franck, Sebastian. *Sprichwörter*, II. Frankfurt: Egenolff, 1541.
- Frost, Ronald. *Richard Sibbes: God's Spreading Goodness*. Washington: Cor Deo Press, 2012.
- Gilbert, Vedder. "The Altercations of Thomas Edwards with Samuel Johnson." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51, no. 3 (1952): 326-335.
- Yarbrough, Stephen and John Adams. *Delightful Conviction: Jonathan Edwards and the Rhetoric of Conversion*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Gründler, Otto. "Justification and Sanctification in John Calvin and Bernard of Clairvaux" in Marsha L. Dutton, Daniel Marcel La Corte, and Paul Lockey (eds.), *Truth as Gift: Studies in Honor of John R. Sommerfeldt*. Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2004.
- Hames, Daniel, and Michael Reeves. *God Shines Forth: How the Nature of God Shapes and Drives the Mission of the Church*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022.
- Harrington, Joel. *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

- Hendrix, Scott. "Luther on Marriage." *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, (2000): 335–50.
- Hermann, Erik. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church: The Annotated Luther Study Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016.
- Jerome. "St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works." *A Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 6. Translated by W.H. Freemantle. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Kilcrease, Jack. "The Bridal-Mystical Motif in Bernard of Clairvaux and Martin Luther." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 65, no. 2 (April 2014): 263–279.
- Kimnach, Wilson H., Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds. "A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul By the Spirit of God, Shown to Be Both a Scriptural, and Rational Doctrine (1734)." In *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, 121–40. Yale University Press, 1999.
- Levis, Barry. "The Failure of Comprehension Between the Church of England and Dissenters, 1688-1690: Politics and Liturgy." *Journal of Church and State* 63, no. 4 (2021): 590-618.
- Luther, Martin. *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- . *Dr. Martin Luther's Large Catechism*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1935.
- . *Luther's Works*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown. 75 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–
- . *The Heidelberg Disputation*. In *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 121 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-2009).
- . *Three Treatises*. Translated by A. T. W. Steinhäuser. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970.
- Konieczny, Mary Ellen. "Individualized Marriage and Family Disruption Ministries in Congregations: How Culture Matters." *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 2 (2016): 144–70.
- Marsden, George. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. Yale University Press, 2004.
- Melanchthon, Philipp. 'Praefatio', in *Corpus reformatorum*. Edited by Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider. Halle, 1834.
- Mendenhall, George. "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *BA* 25/3 (Sept. 1962), 66-87.

- Milhaven, John. "Thomas Aquinas on Sexual Pleasure." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 5, no. 2 (1977): 157–181.
- Miller, Paul. "Jonathan Edwards and the Beauty of God." *Touchstone* 36, no. 3 (2018): 6-13.
- Minkema, Kenneth. "Informing of the Child's Understanding, Influencing His Heart, and Directing Its Practice: Jonathan Edwards on Education." *Acta Theologica* 31, no.2 (2011): 159-189.
- Murray, Iain. *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*. Banner of Truth, Jan. 1987.
- Nestingén, James. "Luther on Marriage, Vocation and the Cross." *Word & World* 23, (2003): 21–38.
- O'Reggio, Trevor. *How Martin Luther Transformed Marriage*. Andrews University: Faculty Publications, 2017.
- Orr, Timothy. "Junker Jörg on Patmos: Luther's Experience of Exile in the Wartburg." *Church History and Religious Culture* 95, no. 4 (2015): 435–456.
- Ozment, Steven. *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Perkins, Harrison. "Reconsidering the Development of the Covenant of Works: A Study in Doctrinal Trajectory." *Calvin Theological Journal* 53, no. 2 (2018): 289-317.
- Piper, John. "A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards." *Reformed Journal* 28, no. 11 (1978): 13-17.
- Plummer, Marjorie. "A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage Revised and Corrected by Dr. Martin Luther, 1519" in Hans Hillerbrand (ed.) *The Annotated Luther: Christian Life in the World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017.
- Reeves, Michael. *Introducing Major Theologians: From the Apostolic Fathers To the Twentieth Century*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015.
- Rosebrock, Matthew. "Luther's Visual Theology: The Lectures on Galatians and Cranach's Law and Gospel Paintings." *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 4 (2016): 332-339.
- Rosin, Robert. "Luther Discovers the Gospel: Coming to the Truth and Confessing the Truth." *Concordia Journal* 45, no. 2 (2019): 46-60.
- Ryu, Gilsun. "The Federal Theology and the History of Redemption in Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Exegesis." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 4 (2018): 785-803.
- Serina, Richard. "The Excommunication of Martin Luther: *Exsurge Domine* (1520) and *Decet Romanum Pontificem* (1521)." *Lutheran Quarterly* 34, (2020): 194–208.

- Waddington, Jeffrey C. "Jonathan Edwards's 'Ambiguous and Somewhat Precarious' Doctrine of Justification?" *The Westminster Theological Journal* 66, no. 2 (2004): 357-372.
- Wallace, Ethel. "Colonial Parson's Wife: Sarah Pierrepont Edwards, 1710-1758: 'And a Very Eminent Christian.'" *Review & Expositor* 47, no. 1 (1950): 41-56.
- Wellhausen, Julius. *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1957, reprint of 1885 edition.
- Wengert, Timothy. *Annotated Luther Study Edition: The Freedom of a Christian 1520*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016.
- Whitford, David. *Brother Martin Is Dead: Lust, Sex, & Celibacy from the Wartburg to Wittenberg*. Unpublished paper, shared via university learning platform 2023.
- Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vols. 1-26 (Yale Univ. Press, 1957-2008).