

Healing the Gender Wars: A Scriptural View

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Ever since I can remember, shame has been connected to sexuality. My mother was ashamed to tell me about sex. I was ashamed to talk about any girl I might have tender feelings for. The boys spoke about budding sexual maturity either with bravado or with embarrassed silence. An erection was a great embarrassment that no amount of fear could control. It almost seemed like sexuality was something that was forced on a person, an irresistible attraction. At least it seemed my mother felt that way, and my father spoke nothing about it. Sexuality seemed almost to be a tabooed subject that grew stronger the more it was kept secret.

How different that seems to be from today when everyone talks about sex and people live together almost as a matter of course. Yet the mystery and conflict have not gone away. Broken marriages are escalating, and there is little sign that the misuse of sexuality (incest, adultery, sexual abuse of many kinds) has lessened. Instead of the former mystique we now are in danger of "profaning" sexuality by our blatancy. We seem to have regressed to what used to be called "polygamy"-- many relationships according to how one feels. We have slipped into a kind of "shamelessness" that flaunts the taboo, but that deadens one to the sacredness of sex.

In a word, sexuality is both sacred and profane. It is sacred because it opens us to the mystery of life and love -- domains of God -- and to the deep vulnerability of one another. It is profane because it touches our animality and threatens to overcome our reason by instinctual drives that can overwhelm us. It is a source of the greatest happiness by freeing us to give and receive love, but experience shows that it is also a source of the greatest sadness and conflict, and our deepest shame. It would be inconceivable if God said nothing about such an essential part of human reality. It would be inconceivable if God had not given us a way of healing. I have been asked to present what Scripture says about this, and to examine what healing has been given?

It would be impossible to present even briefly every aspect Scripture addresses. I will simply present how Scripture presents the problem in the Creation accounts, how gender conflicts continue with the Patriarchs and kings despite God's interventions to save. Then we will show hints of a solution beginning with the Exile, and concluding with the unique contribution of Jesus. This will open for us different aspects of male-female relationships that we find in Scripture and in our own lives and the conflicts these cause. I will then examine these in light of my own experience to see how healing might proceed.

The Gender Wars in Scripture

I. The Problem as Presented in Genesis:

There are actually two accounts of creation given in the Bible, one written in the time of David by the so-called Yahwist (Gn 2:5-3), the other written most likely during the Exile by a priestly writer (Gn 1-2:4). In the Yahwist account, Yahweh addresses everyman, unmediated by a particular authority. The priestly account stresses the holiness and transcendence of God.

In the earlier Yahwist account, woman is formed from man's rib, and it was woman who first fell and led Adam also to sin. That account has led some to argue that woman is subordinate to man,¹ but the resulting subordination is presented as the result of the Fall, and not as God's original intent. God's original intent was that man and woman would be on intimate terms with God and would be helpmates for each other--their "face to face". They would be fruitful and have abundant offspring, and would be in harmony with the earth. The later priestly account (Gn 1-2:4), written most likely after the Exile, goes even further. Humans are there said to be created in God's own image, "male and female He created them." Not only is woman made in God's image, the relationship between men and women is said to be God's image. Scripture says, "Let *us* make humans in *our* image," as though the whole heavenly court was involved in their creation. In this view, men and women are not just to "walk familiarly" with God in the garden, as in the Yahwist account, but are actually to manifest in their relationship the very nature of God. Jesus himself appeals to this original intent when he forbids divorce. Divorce had been permitted by Moses "because of the hardness of your hearts," Jesus says, "but it was not so in the beginning." "What God has joined together, let no one put asunder." (Mt 19:2-12). This was God's basic intent, an intent God never abandons and must guide healing today.

But the Genesis account goes on to describe how humans sinned and how relations between men and women were corrupted as a result. This account itself has occasioned much debate. What was the sin? Was it necessary for them to grow up and become "aware?" (as Jung argued). Was it simply describing what humans naturally are -- subject to concupiscence, suffering and death. Is "original sin" really sin, or simply the natural state of humanity? We need to look closely at the text itself. First, God commanded them *not* to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil "lest they die." There is no indication God is "baiting" them, or that he didn't want them to grow up (*pace* Jung). They were not to "know good *and* evil", that is to indiscriminately experience evil and good, nor to decide for themselves what was "good and evil" instead of trusting God. Faced with the choice of God's word (the tree of life) or their own desires (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) they chose their way. Losing that intimate relation to God, they "woke up to their nakedness" and "shame." They covered themselves and hid. Shame was born.

We can all understand what followed. When God confronted them, they made excuses and sidestepped responsibility for what they did. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Adam and Eve were no longer gifts for one another opening each other to God's love, but had become occasions of sin and shame for each other. As a result of their disobedience, a curse came upon them. The woman's pain in childbearing would be multiplied, she would cling to her husband and he would dominate her, and the ground itself would be cursed and bring forth thorns and thistles. Thus, they were led away from grateful receptivity into control and clinging, and their fruitfulness would now be through pain, while the earth itself would resist their efforts to till it. On each point, God's original intent seemed tragically distorted and corrupted by their disobedience to God's word. Still, God promised redemption. In the end the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.

Sin did not stop with Adam and Eve. It had a history as is illustrated by Gn 4-11. It increased and spread over the earth, and the rest of Scripture illustrates how it continued throughout Israel's life.

They were cast out of paradise. Cain killed Abel out of envy and fear his gift was unappreciated. Cain's violence increased in his offspring. His grandson Lamech boasts of his killing: "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold." (Gn 4:24) The need for love grew into lust, which was expressed mythologically. "The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair, and took to wife such as they chose." (Gn 6:2) God saw that human thoughts were constantly on evil, and brought on the flood. But even that did not change things. Noah was a second Adam. Noah's own son Ham, the forebear of Canaan, committed a sexual sin in "looking at Noah's nakedness" and brought a curse on his offspring. Human depravity continued even though God gave a rainbow promising not to destroy humankind again. And the perversion of sexuality was intimately connected to the prevailing sin. Women were most blamed. Their monthly cycle was seen as defilement. Actual subordination of women to men took place.

Through it all, God repeatedly intervenes to restore what was originally intended. In Genesis, this is portrayed in the stories of the Patriarchs (Gn12 to the end). God begins with Abraham, calling him out from his family in Haran to lead a life of obedience to God's word, thus reversing Adam's sin. He is promised abundant offspring, but Abraham's faith in God's promise is severely tested. For a long time it fails to materialize. In her doubt Sarah gives her maid Hagar to Abraham and she conceives Ishmael.

Then Hagar taunts Sarah who then abuses her till she runs away. The ancestral fear and jealousy continue. Still, prompted by God, Hagar returns. Finally, when Ishmael is twelve, Sarah is promised a son in her old age. When Isaac is born, Sarah refuses to share his inheritance with Ishmael and sends Hagar and Ishmael away with God's consent. God also blesses Ishmael for Abraham's sake, but will fulfill His promise to Abraham not by the natural means they choose, but by their adherence to God's word.

As Paul says later, we are not children of slavery but of the free woman. We are "children of the promise" (Gal 4:28). Even the natural bond to children needs to be sacrificed to God, as Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac, so that the child can continue to fulfill God's promise. I had a close woman friend I was called to surrender to God through just this story. Only then could she be "given back" to help me learn the way of God's love.

The promise and testing is continued with Isaac. He marries Rebecca, and they are split over which of the twins (Esau or Jacob) will receive the blessing where the blessing is the major part of the inheritance and authority in the family. It is Rebecca who gets the dream that Jacob will have ascendancy. When he received Isaac's blessing by stealth, he is sent to Laban because of Esau's revenge. Jacob falls in love with Rachel, Laban's younger daughter, but after seven years work for her, Laban gives him Leah by stealth. True love does not come without suffering. Jacob works another seven more years for Rachel and another seven to develop his own flock. He is then called by God to return and be reconciled with Esau. But even with that reconciliation, his own sons are divided because of their envy of Joseph whom he favors as Rachel's son. The enmity between siblings continues.

Finally, Joseph, though clearly naive, brings healing through his faithfulness to God despite his brothers' hatred and being falsely imprisoned. He becomes a wise manager of the earth, a faithful husband to his Egyptian wife, a reconciler of his brothers and his father. It is his

faithfulness in seeing God's intent that helped him forgive his brothers. As he said to his brothers, "What you intended for evil, God intended for good -- the salvation of many" (Gn 50:20). Joseph shows us God's way of healing. He focuses not on the hurt or human failing, but on God. God is faithful despite our faithlessness, and God raises up people to restore God's dream. Adherence to God despite hurt and trials ultimately leads to the restoration of God's original intent. That's the point but it is a truth too quickly forgotten, and it is finally made possible only in Jesus and the gift of God's Spirit in our hearts.

II. Male-Female Relationships after Genesis.

Exodus picks up the story where Genesis left off. After years in Egypt, Israel has turned from Yahweh to Egyptian cults and has become enslaved. To free them again, Yahweh calls them out of Egypt to worship Him in the desert, but at their first delay, they relapse and worship the golden calf. How hard it is to keep our eyes on God's promise! In the wilderness they repeatedly grumble and doubt, and must be purified through a day by day trust in God for forty years!

Finally, they are empowered to fight their way into the Promised Land, but no sooner are they there than they turn away to the fertility cults of the Canaanites--the people in the area that is now Palestine that included Sodom, Gomorrah, and Jericho. Judges, one of whom is a woman, Deborah, are raised up to fight for them, but they again fall back. Sexuality remains an abiding temptation, as we see in the betrayal of Samson by Delilah. In the end they ask for a king rather than continue to trust Yahweh. And very soon the kingship itself is contaminated by David's sin with Bathsheba. Solomon is led away from his fidelity to Yahweh because of his 700 wives and their various religions. The northern kingdom split off and degenerated, going the way of foreign cults whose clearest representative is Jezebel and her 450 priests of Baal--a Canaanite fertility god--whom Elijah had killed. Through it all, the mother goddess cults and women are seen as a great temptation to abandon Yahweh. The original sin of Eve and Adam seems constantly to be repeated.

At the same time, there are faithful women who are named as a significant part of God's plan and who are mentioned later in Jesus' ancestry. Matthew's genealogy points out 4 of them: Tamar (who conceived Perez by her father-in-law Judah because he refused to give her one of his sons after the death of her husband), Rahab (the prostitute who protected Israel's spies in Jericho before its destruction), Ruth (the Moabitess who chose to return to Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi and married Boaz), and Bathsheba herself -- all leading up to Mary Jesus' mother. God had also worked through Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel. After the Exile the Books of Judith and Esther present heroines who were instrumental in saving Israel, and the mother of the seven sons in the book of Maccabees who urged her sons to accept death rather than abandon the law (2 Macc 7). These women remained true to Yahweh despite their trials and corrupted ancestry, and they became sources of blessing for all. No matter what our situation, faith in Yahweh heals.

The Exile marked a purification of Israel's institutional focus and a turn to a more individual focus. After the Exile we find a major shift in Israel's view of women, especially in its view of marriage and divorce, monogamy and celibacy. Marriage was looked at from the man's point of view. As heads of their families, fathers arranged the marriages. Thus, Isaac sent his son Jacob to Laban for a wife, and Laban gave his daughters. The woman took the man as her "Lord"

(Baal). She belonged to him, though she could not be sold as other property. Adultery was seen as against the husband's rights, and was punishable by death. The husband could divorce his wife (Dt 24:1): for adultery and misconduct (according to the rigorist Shammai school), for any reason (according to the liberal Hillel school). After the Exile, there is a trend opposing divorce and a focus on fidelity to one's wife. In Mal 2:14-16, Yahweh says: "I hate divorce." This position is reinforced by Jesus. As we saw, he spoke out clearly against divorce as against God's will "in the beginning" (Mt 19:3-9). Divorce was allowed, he said, "because of the hardness of your hearts." That hardness (their stony hearts) would be removed by God's Spirit, Ezekiel had written earlier.² Not mere moral effort but God's Spirit heals male-female alienation. Jesus also interiorizes the law against adultery (Mt 5:27ff), indicating that the basis of faithfulness in marriage is a heart that is pure and centered on God.

We see the shift also in Israel's view of monogamy? Dt 21:15 presumes that the possession of 2 wives is normal. With the emphasis on offspring, plural marriages were common. Kings and rich men could afford more wives. 1 Kgs 11:3 says that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines!). After the Exile, monogamy was considered more perfect. Thus, Tobit 8:6-8 explains the words of Gn 2:24 as recommending monogamous marriage. There is also a tendency later to portray Yahweh's relation to Israel in a monogamous way.³ By NT times monogamy was common practice. Jesus never addresses the question of polygamy.

Finally, there are even hints of recognizing of celibacy? Celibacy is foreign to the Old Testament focus on bearing children (esp. sons). Yet we find hints in 2nd and 3rd Isaiah (Isaiah 65:4-5; Isaiah 54:1) which affirm a greater name and more children to those without a husband. Jesus announces celibacy "for the sake of the Kingdom...for those to whom it is given," (Mt 19:12) and states in Lk 20:35 that, "in the age to come [the resurrection, which is at work now] there is no marriage or giving in marriage, because they are like the angels." Both marriage and celibacy are seen as God-given different ways of following God's call.

Jesus' view of no divorce and celibacy came as a shock to his disciples. They were not accustomed to seeing marriage that clearly from God's point of view. Marriage was an everyday experience whose problems they knew very well. How they had to grow spiritually to understand it is hinted at in the shift of Paul's writing from 1 Corinthians to Ephesians. In 1 Cor 7:28ff he says that those who marry will have worldly troubles, for the married man "is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife" (1 Cor 7:33). In Ephesians 5, on the other hand, Christ's love for the church is the very ground of husband and wife's love. As Christ is faithful and self-surrendering, so Christian marriage is faithful and self-surrendering. Instead of being a distraction from God, in Ephesians one is to find God's love through the other.

Ultimately, it was Jesus' death/resurrection and sending his Spirit into their hearts, that brought about this restoration of God's original intent for male-female relationships. The Fourth Gospel makes this clear. At the cross, Mary is "woman" and is given as "mother" to the beloved disciple. In his dying, Jesus hands over his Spirit, and out of his pierced side, as Eve from Adam's side in the garden, comes forth blood and water as source of sacramental life. Mary and the church are the "New Eve" who with the "New Adam" give birth to many beloved disciples. And in the garden Mary Magdalene is told *not* to cling to Jesus--as the first woman would do after the Fall--for Jesus had not yet risen. She was to go to his disciples -- to find Jesus in his followers. Through

his death Jesus makes real God's unconditional, intimate and fruitful love which restores male-female relationships to permanent commitment and to being a bridge to intimacy with God and a blessing to offspring. Our restoration requires that we participate in this dying and rising process.

As John's Gospel makes clear, the evangelists had the whole of Israel's history in view in writing about Jesus. We cannot jump stages. We find in our own lives something of each of the steps to Jesus and the way to restoration cannot bypass those stages.⁴

There is the *parental stage* of Adam and Eve and their distortion of mother-father love through shame and separation from God. Then there is the *spousal love* (that I have called "familial faith") illustrated by the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and the kings, and continued in Israel before the Exile. Men in this stage could have several wives, and the view of God was not yet clearly monotheistic. During and after the Exile there emerged a more *individualized stage*, in which monogamy and no divorce, and the inner purification of love illustrated in the Book of Tobit were stressed. This was the time when the feminine aspect of God was hinted at in 2nd Isaiah and highlighted in Wisdom literature. In Jesus we find a further *stage of individuated ministerial partnership* with women (that I have called "communitarian faith"). This is a kind of "spiritual family" that seems unique to Jesus' ministry. And finally, in Jesus' death/resurrection and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Mary and the Church form a creative partnership with God to give birth to believers through their intercession. There *male-female spiritual communion* reveals the very image of God. What God intended in the beginning, that male and female be the "image of God" is finally realized in Jesus and Mary and the healed church and their missionary creativity.

These five stages continue to live in each of us, I believe, and their confusion and distortion through sin helps explain the gender wars. It also indicates the way to healing. In the second part of this paper I would like to examine how this is so and what healing is needed.

Discerning the Root of the Gender Wars

I. Stages of Sexuality and Spirituality:

Why is it that the Fourth Gospel sees a return to Genesis in his description of Jesus' death/resurrection and giving of the Spirit? From beginning to end, male-female relationships are deeply involved in God's action. God is not present only at the end. God is present at each stage, and there is a desire for union in God from the very beginning. This is also shown in the history of sexuality and spirituality. They have always been closely connected yet never identical. The step into manhood and womanhood is ritually enacted so as to integrate the powerful energies of sexual attraction into the good of the community, but also in coordination with the life-principle of nature. This led to seeing God in light of gender relationships. Gods and goddesses were thought to interact in the heavens much as humans did on earth. The Judaeo-Christian tradition strongly opposed this view. Yahweh is source of all life and has no consort. Yet it remained a constant temptation that Israel had to confront. Israel struggled against intermarriage with non-Jews, and their nature religions. Still, the symbolism of married love is not lost in Israel. Bridal imagery reemerges in the prophets to symbolize Yahweh's fidelity to his unfaithful people (cf. Hosea,

Ezekiel, etc.) and is picked up in the N.T. as a living analogy for Christ's relation to the church (Eph 5:25-33). Thus sexuality, which primarily involves a bodily union with a partner of the opposite sex, also affects our union with God. Both are involved in our coming to wholeness and holiness and the release of our creative energies for building up God's people. The misuse of sexuality is a major cause of infidelity to Yahweh. Its right use in marriage and celibacy is a major help for opening fully to God. Hence the importance of becoming ever more discerning in this area.

This confusion between our need for God and our need for one another is perhaps the deepest cause of gender conflict. Added to this is the fact that the five aspects of human sexuality that we found in Scripture are often indistinguishably confused together. Our parents are our first God-image, but they are also behind our choice of a marriage partner and indeed our search for our individual call. God is involved in our wholeness and integration of inner masculine or feminine as well as in our call to co-ministry. Often the "stickiness" of relationships (a "falling in love" or "fatal attraction") is due to a projection of our desire for God or to find ourselves onto finite relationships. Unless these aspects are distinguished in order to be reconnected, only confusion may result. One wants an "unconditional love" such as only God can give, yet one fears being "swallowed up" by the people we look to for that love. One feels that to "lose" the other means losing "one's self" as though the other were one's inner anima or animus. But each stage is distinct. If we fail to discern when we are looking for a savior or for our true self in our human friend, only disillusionment and fruitless pain will result. No wonder we love and hate the other at the same time. Only by distinguishing these aspects can we rightly integrate them. We will examine each in turn, beginning with the final stage.

1. Our search for God in Gender Relationships:

God's love is free, unconditionally faithful, universal yet particular, and creatively self-giving.⁵ Ultimately, that is what we are looking for in every male-female relationship. We want to be free yet fully secure, to be "special" yet not imprisoned, to be fruitful with our beloved yet not constrained by our offspring. What we miss is that these qualities are opposites and can only be realized in God. I recall my deep hurt when a close woman friend, that I had discerned was a God-given relationship, decided to break off our relationship at Easter. My disillusionment was not so much her breaking off, but feeling that God broke it off and how could that be if God is unconditionally faithful? It took deep healing to see that God is also free, and that real fidelity demands freedom. As I let the relationships go, it eventually came to a deeper understanding.

That experience made me wary in relationships. Could I trust anyone else? What did God really want? Was she really acting in God? It took some time with the help of a director to distinguish what was of God and what was due to her own need for healing and mine. A similar wariness happens with people whose parents were religious but also judgmental and abusive. They are attracted to authority figures that are similarly authoritarian. They are caught between opposing that control and feeling guilty about their rebellion. In my experience, what needs to happen is for such people to see that all true authority comes from God and that God's way is revealed in Jesus. Jesus did not control people but left them free. "Falling in love" that leads to a desire for sexual expression in spite of being married or vowed to celibacy is another such area. Our quest for God is a desire for total self-gift. If that is identified with sexual expression, failure to attain sexual expression will feel like a separation from ultimate love, whereas acting on that

desire collides with our state in life. No wonder our “loves” bring such disillusionment and betrayal of our hopes. When, by God’s grace, the identification of sexual love with divine love is broken, one is freed to an individuated, spiritual bonding, a “love of restraint” that is grounded in God. This spiritual love separates us from being determined by lower levels, like sexual drives or emotional needs, even though these still play an important role. It frees us to a kind of sacrificial love that I have called individuated relationships.

The Book of Tobit is a beautiful example of the purification that is needed for such a love. Tobit is a second Job figure in Israel after the Exile. He is dutiful and faithful, but he experiences several devastating mishaps -- a bird’s dung blinds him, he loses his money, he is alienated from his wife. He sends his son, Tobias, to a distant relative Raguel, to get a deserved inheritance, and it so happens that Raphael in disguise, is sent with him as guide. Raguel’s daughter, Sarah, is also an eligible wife, but she has had seven husbands and all have died on their wedding night because of Asmodeus, an evil spirit possessive of Sarah (like the “giants” of Genesis). On the way, a fish bites Tobias’ foot, and Raphael tells him to keep it because the heart and liver when burned can drive out evil spirits, and the gall when applied to eyes can heal cataracts (such as his father’s blindness). And so it turns out. Raguel does give Tobias Sarah as wife after explaining the danger involved, and before they come together, they burn the fish’s liver and heart and Raphael binds Asmodeus in the North Country. Then, on returning home, Tobias rubs the fish’s gall on his father’s eyes and Tobit says: “I see you my son, for the first time!”

This story is filled with symbolism of the purification of sexual and human love. The fish is symbol of the unconscious. Its heart and liver (source of “life”) need to be burned (purified by fire) to be freed from distortion of idolized humanity (Asmodeus). Then Sarah and Tobias can come together with a love “that has no lust” but is for God’s honor and glory. (See Tobias’ prayer in Tb 8:5-7). The gall traditionally represents bitterness and if Tobit looks at bitterness in the eye, his own blindness (his inability to see because of unresolved pain) is healed. He sees with new eyes, just as if we look at Jesus “raised up” as the serpent in the desert, we will be saved. Only through the pain of that purification will we love with a holy love, a sacrificial love that puts God first.

Such a Spirit-centered love can coincide with marriage, though it calls for spiritual individuating for both partners, since it is not exclusive or constrictive. It is like God’s love, special, faithful, open to being life-giving to everyone, creative and releasing creativity. We will return to the question of discernment in actual relationships after considering the other aspects that bring confusion.

2. Parental Love and Development:

Closely connected to God’s love is the confusion between our child need for a father’s or mother’s love and adult sexual expression. Children need to be held, to feel trust, to have a secure sense of bonding. When this need is deprived, there will be a physical need for touch, a “skin hunger,” that can easily be misunderstood as a need for sexual expression. This confusion can lead to tragedy and an abiding distrust of men and women. The need for a father or mother is very different from the need for a sexual partner. The parental bond is to free children to become their true selves and be bonded to another. The child is not ready for sex, whether it be a real child or an inner child. That would be incest, which even in world religions is taboo and seen as regressive

and an obstacle to healthy growth.⁶ The child's unfulfilled need for total, unconditional bonding and belonging remains into adulthood if unhealed; and another's desire to parent will lead them to want to give that bonding. Unless boundaries are clarified, the dependent one will become ever more needy and possessive and fearful of abandonment (for he or she was abandoned), and the parental figure will begin to feel trapped and unable to set personally appropriate boundaries for fear of devastating the other.⁷ As this tension becomes unbearable, it can lead to breaking off the relationship. The needy person is then confirmed in a deeper sense of parental abandonment, making it all the more difficult to trust "parental" helpers in the future. One's hatred and fear of the other sex is then only deepened.

What is needed is a *bonding* that is *not* sexual, a secure base that will not be misused sexually and which frees the person to reach out for a more equal relationship. This bonding may be physical. It often involves appropriate holding of the other, or appropriate touch that is not sexual.⁸ Each needs to set clear boundaries or false hopes will be raised that the parental figure cannot sustain without feeling "put upon." Only God can fulfil our need for a more total relationship, and no relationship can be a substitute for one's own parents.⁹

3. Marriage and friendships:

Discernment becomes most concrete in actual relationships. Why are we attracted to this particular person? Are we looking for our parents? Or for God? Or for ourselves? Or for a partner to create with? How can we tell what vocation we are called to, what friendship to cultivate? How can we discern within a particular state of life, when we come to a new depth of experience, whether our initial call was God-given and permanent or simply a step toward clearer discernment of God's call. For the Christian, both marriage and celibacy are God-given vocations.¹⁰ Celibacy is a New Testament vocation for "only those to whom it is given." (Mt 19:11 par, see 1 Cor 7:1-9). It is freely chosen "for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven." But marriage is also seen in a new way in the NT. Jesus grounded his forbidding of divorce in God's call: "What God has joined, let no human separate." Both marriage and celibacy are meant to be God's call, but are they in fact? The possibility in the Catholic Church of having marriages "annulled" is grounded in the view that these marriages never were "sacramental," and so do not fall under Christ's proscription. Reasons for such a decision may range from lack of emotional maturity (not being aware of one's true center), lack of spiritual growth and peace in the marriage (no confirmation of its gracious character in the working out of the marriage) or no real faith in God in one or both of the partners. One need think only of Paul's permission to separate if the unbeliever so chooses: "For God calls us to peace" (1 Cor 7:15). Those with vows of celibacy have been dispensed by the church for similar reasons. How is one to discern what is "of God" and what "human" in these vocations?

One woman had been struggling for years to come to terms with sexual abuse by her father and the many subsequent abusive relationships she seemed to choose. As she experienced God's healing more deeply, she realized ever more clearly that she had married someone just like her father, and that she really was not called to marry him in the first place. They had never had children and she and her husband seemed stuck in periodic angry explosions which never changed anything. She experienced what seemed a clear call from God to separate and seek an annulment. She has since grown in her ability to accept responsibility in her job and to accept her own womanhood. She moved from being a child to adult responsibility. In her case the marriage was

for security from a feared loneliness. It later became a block to true development. That does not mean she was not "called" to that partner. The relationship may be meant to reenact the past hurt that it may be healed.¹¹ But until that inner rift is healed, one will not be fully free to know one's call or to grow and create a mature relationship. Others may recommit to their marriages after such a discernment process.

It is also not uncommon for a person vowed to celibacy to "fall in love" or for a married person to "fall in love" with one who is not one's spouse? Such relationships can appear "fascinating," promising the love one has not yet experienced. Such people may feel they never were "special" to anyone till now, or they never were so "understood" or never had such "wise" guidance or such "strength" to make decisions. This can happen to a person happily married or (and more usually) to a person unhappily married, or it can happen to a celibate who has been successful or one who has come to a certain dryness in his or her life. It might seem that one is called to "marry" such an important complement to one's well-being and fullness of life. One might even have dreams of sexual union with the person or some other figure. Yet all these signs are not reliable guides for whether one is called by God to marry such a person. There are many types of relationships that begin by "falling in love" -- celibate friendships, projections of father/mother (above) or one's inner feminine or masculine, etc. Only when each finds wholeness and a ground in God can there be clarity in discerning what the real relationship ought to be. Each person can be of great help to the other if they can remain in the relationship while keeping true to their own call in life. Gradually what is really a life-giving friendship can be differentiated from what is one's own "projected" potential that needs to be developed in oneself. Such relationships are to help each person in the process of individuating. When that is understood they are indispensable. We will either work through this often painful process, preferably with the help of an experienced guide, or be doomed to repeat it with someone else, or stagnate and lose creativity by fearfully withdrawing from all such relationships. The Samaritan woman had "five husbands" and the one she had "was not her husband." It seems only contact with the divine in Jesus and his love freed her from her compulsion to repeat unhappy relationships. She found in him what she had been looking for in vain in the other relationships.

A real call to marriage, friendship or celibacy is neither a substitute parent nor a mystical "completion." It is a call to commit oneself either to another person as called by God ("What God has joined let no one separate"), or to choose celibacy "for the sake of the Kingdom." Only discernment in God can clarify which is one's call.

4. Anima/animus: One's call to inner integration of male and female:

What such "fascinations" often involve, which is a further source of confusion and conflict, is a seeing in another our inner feminine/masculine qualities (what Carl Jung called our anima and animus). Such attractions have a compulsive quality about them as well as a sense of "walking on eggshells." One is "fascinated" by the other, thinks of them continually, and has a longing to be always with the person. The fear of the relationship breaking or of never having enough of the person can become obsessive. It feels like death to let go of possessiveness, to give the other space and freedom. This makes sense, for to lose one's inner soul would be a "death", and one's soul *must* be a constant companion in touch with every aspect of one's life. But one isn't aware of the identification of the other with one's own inner self. Actually, what seems to be a promised

paradise is quickly filled with paradox and impossibility. The other can't always be centered in me, and I become *jealous* because of my inner demand for totality. Then being present itself only reminds one of the real absence. Such a marriage can sometimes intensify one's sense of isolation. To keep tantalizing one with the promise of wholeness and then take it away seems like torture. One has lost the freedom to pursue one's wholeness because of being captivated with the other.

John Sanford cites Anthony and Cleopatra as exemplifying some of the negative dynamics of these anima/us relationships.¹² Captivated by Cleopatra, Anthony, the consummate field general, chose to fight Octavian by sea because Cleopatra was proud of her Egyptian fleet. Octavian's fleet, smaller and more maneuverable, had the clear advantage, but even then Anthony could have won had Cleopatra not turned back to Egypt. Anthony abandoned his own fleet to pursue her, and his troops then surrendered to Octavian. Instead of a free and freeing relationship, Anthony was held captive by Cleopatra, an experience that is typical of this sort of relationship. One is not free to become one's true self because half of one's self is given to another. One half times one half is not one, but one quarter! Only two wholes multiplied makes one!

Such attractions do not necessarily indicate a real relationship with another, nor are they to be enacted "literally" through a sexual relationship. That would actually hinder individuation by losing oneself in the other. Rather, they are symbolic, carriers of one's own inner masculine or feminine, and the frequent fantasies or dreams of sexual relations represent an integration of this side with oneself. If a real relationship is involved, that will come clear only as each one finds in oneself what has been "projected" onto the other.

5. Co-ministry of men and women:

In today's church there is increasing awareness that renewal of community necessarily involves the shared gifts of men and women. If God is community and family is the cell of church, then men and women will be called to share in giving God's life. Such ministry occurs between married people and celibates, married and married, and celibates and celibates. The intimate sharing involved may put stress on the marriage or one's religious community unless each is developed to the point of openness to whatever God wills. It may stress each of the participants if the other dimensions of their male/female development are wounded and underdeveloped. As one married woman said to me about her ministry relation to another married man: "I admitted to him (and to myself) that I was attracted to him in all the above dimensions, but I had no intention of overstepping the boundaries of my marriage." In this case the other could also then admit his attraction to this woman, but strengthen his commitment to his marriage.

On the other hand, it may be that the personalities of the two are very different. In one team I know, the woman is very outgoing, verbal and used to housework rather than professional spiritual direction whereas the man is reflective, matter of fact and intellectual. There is a common commitment to whatever Jesus asks, but also a frequent questioning of whether they should be in common ministry at all because of the periodic conflicts and sense of personal "slights" that arise. Such a relationship is not just for union but also for purification and pruning.

Discerning Male-Female Relationships

As we see, all these aspects of male-female relationships touch God. The original sin of Adam and Eve was to look to their own experience rather than to God for guidance, and the result was massive confusion and conflict between each other. Instead of each one deepening the others' relation to God, they substituted for God and became idols -- objects of love and hate at the same time. Only if we reconnect with God can we rightly discern how we are to relate to our God-given partners. Each case is unique. Each person is at a different developmental stage with different needs appropriate to their stage. God works in each life differently. St. Ignatius of Loyola gives two different sets of rules for discernment depending on whether a person is a beginner or is advancing in the spiritual life. God challenges the tepid and strengthens the fearful. The aim is always toward greater conformity to Jesus' way and greater spiritual freedom and service of God in the community of believers. Male-female relationships are an integral part of this transformation, since we are only fully human in God's image as male and female community. I will use my own experience to illustrate how discernment might proceed and how the various aspects of male-female relationships might help clarify the process.

As I reflect on my own experience, I realize how much my issues have centered on male-female relationships. I became aware of a pattern of getting close at first then withdrawing. A first step in getting to the root of that pattern was a re-birthing experience with a woman in a healing session. I experienced a physical bonding that seemed to get behind my concern whether or not I was worthy of it. It was a bonding that put no pressure on me to respond, that just "was." That gave me an inner peace as well as a more feminine view of God. The early parental stage was being healed.

That was a beginning, but I still felt "locked up" despite a growing relationship with a woman friend. Her "mother wound" had reminded me of mine, and perhaps that was the initial attraction. But as the relationship grew, I sometimes felt a drive to "please," and found myself distancing. As I was prayed for in a healing group for my own early womb experience, I got in touch with how I still felt the need to come to the aid of my mother who felt unsupported by my Dad and overburdened by her third pregnancy in three years. Intimacy was connected to that impossible demand to help my mother, and loyalty to my mother prevented my bonding to anyone else. Prayer to free me from responsibility to help her released a new sense of freedom in bonding. My mother herself died rather suddenly a little over a month after this session, perhaps helped by being freed from enmeshment to me. Her death brought me a sense that she was finally freed from her own sense of inadequacy to peace, and it freed me from my disloyalty to her if I opened to bonding with another. The initial mothering had led finally to freeing me with my own mother.

But that itself was only another beginning. My friendship became a kind of barometer of my inner state. In her despair and lack of hope I discovered my own. She had a kind of death wish, as I suspect I also had. Her issues with men not being reliable paralleled my own with women, as well as her lack of bonding with her mother. It was the healing group's support that helped her get past her hopelessness, as it also was for me. It seemed that both our impasses were rooted in ancestry and only when those roots were prayed for would we get healed. The needier she got, the more ambivalence and distance I felt; the more she developed her competence, the freer I felt. Our relationship seemed to illustrate what Harvel Hendricks said: We marry (or are drawn into

relationship with) those who reactivate unhealed aspects of our parental relationships in order to heal them.

I was not only blocked with women because of my ambivalence to the neediness of my mother, I was blocked with men because I had rebelled against my father who had tried to discipline me when I was ten. In another prayer session, we discerned my mother and father carried on a pattern in their histories of not supporting one another going back to an angry ancestor who seemed to be forced to be celibate because of a sexual sin. Religion had been used hypocritically to save face and control. On my father's side, a "Puritan" compartmentalizing and "work ethic" had put down intimacy and bonding. We apologized to my angry ancestor and asked his forgiveness, but full release did not come till we prayed for the antipathy between men and women back to Adam and Eve! Only then did I sense my ancestors' reconciliation. Later, I seemed to experience them now interceding for me and supporting my vocation. I found my issues were not just present, but involved conflicts of past ancestors. Healing involved praying for their reconciliation.

Still, the journey was not over as I soon learned. I had to face not just lack of bonding but also issues of blocked creativity and competence. I had felt increasingly incompetent in my teaching career and uncertain in preparing a course. I asked a friend for prayers and she saw a little boy in a corner not wanting to come out, and Mary went to bring him out and protect him. She also felt the "performance" attitude I was surrounded by had not been good for me. I needed to be the unique person I really was, not what others expected me to be. I needed to learn to *receive* like Mary. Another saw someone had put their hand over my mouth so I could not express what I felt. I was still blocked and fearful in my ability to express my true self. It was the experience of EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) that brought me more clearly to the disconnection I received in the womb. This time it was not another who was mother to me, or a freeing from helping my mother. It was a healing of my actual mother's relation to me and with it a sense of deeper physical union with God. That prayer brought a deep sense of union in the womb. At the same time it also triggered my anger at my father (and men) for not supporting my mother. A kind of "fight" was released, now a fight for life, and the beginning of releasing my initiative. Since then I have felt a deeper desire for co-ministry, for working with women to help others find life. Only as the root was touched in freedom and God could creativity be freed.

The journey goes on, but many pieces are now in place. In being brought "home" to God and the free gift of life in my mother's womb, I could begin to express my truth in relationships. I could express love publicly without shame. What before brought shame could be expressed openly without concern. I have been more able to work out relationships in a way that is life-giving to both of us. As bonding deepens, shame and confusion lessen. They are not fully gone, but I am freer to battle for openness to feeling and life. God's dream is beginning to become a reality through facing the deep pain of abandonment and lack of clear communication that kept me locked up in myself. As he was dying Jesus called out, "My God, my God why have you abandoned me," but that very acknowledgment of his deep pain released a final surrender to God, as he handed over God's Spirit of union to Mary and John as representatives of us all. Through the agony of that spiritual birth, God's dream, that God never abandoned, could again be made real. It is made real in our facing the pain of our wounded bonding and breaking through to God's restoring Spirit in the ground of our being and in our heart to heart relationships.

In the midst of this process, I opened to Ps 139 and felt consoled by God's surrounding knowledge and understanding, and I wrote a poem that I offer in conclusion:

Lord, you have been my companion since I was conceived
You were with me when my mother got hurt and angry with my father
Even now you can comfort me and shield me so I will not get upset.

You know not only me, but my mother and father
You know their stresses, how mother's upset made Dad feel inadequate,
as he felt with his mother
How his withdrawal frightened my mother more.
You surround them too, and help them understand each other.

Lord, you breathe life into us -- life that distinguishes us,
that makes us who we *are* in your sight.
You have a goal for us, and you do not rest until it is accomplished.
As you sent Jesus to *be* what you always intended humans to be,
So you watch over me that I might become what you had in mind in the beginning.

Separate me from my enemies both outside me and within me.
Separate me from my own defenses that have become a prison,
And open me to your love and the love of your people.

Endnotes

¹ See Steven B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1980) who argues this position at length.

² See Ezekiel 36:26f. God had promised to take out their stony hearts and give them hearts of flesh by putting His Spirit within them. Clearly, marriage in God's Spirit was forever.

³ See Hos 2:18-22; Jer 2:2; 3:1; Ez 16:8; Is 50:1; 54-5; 62:5. Also Ps 127:3ff; Prv 5:5ff; 12:4; 18:22; 31:10-31 presuppose a monogamous background.

⁴ I have developed these five stages of spiritual growth in "Healing and Family Spiritual/Emotional Systems," *The Journal of Christian Healing*, vo. 5, no. 1, 1983, pp. 10-23. I point out there that they are cumulative and each builds on and brings to greater fulfillment the preceding stages. They cannot be bypassed.

⁵ I have developed these aspects of God's love in "Trinitarian Love as Ground of the Church," *Theological Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4 (Dec. 1976), pp. 652-679. That article also gives the theological underpinnings of my analysis of spiritual stages of development.

⁶ The exceptions to this general taboo concern ritual acts for divine procreation is conceived as a kind of incest. It may well be that incest itself is a disguised form of identity with the divine coming from a sense of possessing one's children. In any case, this very exception proves how unhealthy such relationships are.

⁷ This dynamic explains why it is so devastating for therapists to have sexual relationships with their clients. The therapeutic relationship is parental in nature, an unconditional love that aims to free the other. Any sexual acting out would equivalently be incest.

⁸ See Walter Leschler and Jaqueline Lair, *I Exist, I Need, I'm Entitled* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), for a therapy based on this need for bonding, and Donald M. Joy, *Bonding: Relationships in the Image of God* (Waco, TX: Word Bks, 1985) for an analysis of the bonding relationship. Leschler's therapy included such holding in order to heal the early deprivation.

⁹ See Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and G. M. Spark, *Invisible Loyalties* (N.Y.: Bruner/Mazel, 1981) for an analysis of this dynamic. The loyalty is ontological and to one's own parents. To reconnect, we do need to forgive our parents and develop an appropriate connection with them without allowing continuing abuse. Theologically, our parents have been chosen for us by God, and only by choosing them in God will we be aligned with our true source. "Honor your father and mother" is the one commandment connected to attaining the blessing of the Promised Land (Ex 20:12). In some cases the wounded person may actually be substituting the relation to the opposite sex for a deeper, more frightening need for bonding with the parent of the same sex. I have seen this especially with women who are alienated from their mothers and caught in a kind of "maternal" relation to a man or men. Two foundational relationships can help in this case, male and female, if the two can work together as a unit. The one can ease the fear of bonding to the other and what ultimately needs healing is the alienation between one's parents and an integration of the masculine and feminine aspects of oneself.

¹⁰ See the little book by Max Thurian, a brother at Taize, *Marriage and Celibacy* (London: SCM Press, 1959). Thurian argues that Christian marriage needs the Christian option of celibacy to rise above a merely "natural" state, a sort of human necessity that is tolerated by God. If celibacy is a possible call, then marriage also requires discernment of God's call, not just a yielding to human needs.

¹¹ This is the reason for most marriages according to Harvel Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want* (N.Y.: Harper Perennial, 1988).

¹² See his, *The Invisible Partners* (N.Y.: Paulist, 1980), pp. 22-24.