

ASIAN
HORIZONS

Vol. 11, No. 1, March 2017

Pages: 29-41

**'I will make him a helper fit for him...'
THE CONCEPT AND ORIGIN OF
MARRIAGE IN GEN 2:4-25 IN LIGHT OF
AMORIS LAETITIA**

Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili[♦]

University of Regensburg

Abstract

Genesis 2:4-25 (the so-called 'Second Account of Creation') is well known for its deep and elaborate teaching on marriage. This explains the obvious allusion to it not only by the authors of the books of Tobit (Tob 8:5-6) and Sirach (Sir 25:24-26), but also by several New Testament authors (Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25; Lk 20:35). In its idea of marriage, Gen 2:4-25 depicts the creation of the first woman as geared, among others, towards resolving the 'loneliness' of Adam and his need for 'suitable helper.' YHWH, by taking something from Adam's side to create the first woman, initiates a bond between them that is deeper and stronger than filial bond – they became 'one flesh.' But how exactly does Gen 2:4-25 understand marriage and its origin? What implications can one deduce from it for fostering the Christian understanding of marriage? This article, motivated by Pope Francis' clarion call in his 'Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*' for promoting marital and filial love in the family, will explore the understanding of marriage in Gen 2:4-25 and its implications for Christian concept of marriage.

[♦]**Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili** (PhD, Catholic University of Leuven) is a specialist in Old Testament biblical exegesis. His research interests include the meaning, understanding and role of human sexuality in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the book of Samuel, and Contextual biblical Exegesis. Some of his research findings are published, among others, in international journals, *Vetus Testamentum* (VT), *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* (SJOT), and *Old Testament Essays [New Series]* (OTE). He is the author of the Book, *The Understanding of Adultery in the Hebrew Bible*. He is a Catholic priest and a member of the religious order Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy. Currently, he is a part-time postdoctoral researcher at the university of Regensburg while carrying-out his pastoral assignments in Regensburg, Germany. Email: alexabasili@yahoo.com

Keywords: *Amoris Laetitia*, Family, Genesis 2:4-25, Male and Female, Marriage, Second Account of Creation

Introduction

The Bible is full of families, births, love stories and family crises. This is true from its very first page, with the appearance of Adam and Eve's family with all its burden of violence but also its enduring strength [cf. Gen 4] to its very last page, where we behold the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb [Rev 21:2, 9] (AL, 8).¹

With this emphasis on the vital role of the Bible in Christian understanding of the family and marriage, Pope Francis begins the first chapter of his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation 'on love in the family' – *Amoris Laetitia*. Although 'family,' in almost all societies, serves as a fundamental and important social institution around which other societal structures are built, it assumes even a greater role in the OT where it functions as the nucleus for linking and bonding the entire people of Israel among themselves and with God. Thus, for the ancient Israelites, 'family' has grave implications for the inter-human relationship (horizontal), and for the human-divine relationship (vertical). The horizontal implication of the family – 'Israel as the family of YHWH' – was consolidated and sealed with YHWH's Covenant at Sinai where he promised to be their God and that they will be his special possession. The condition, however, was that they hearken to his voice, keep his covenant and reject all other gods (Ex 19:5; Deut 18:13-19). On the inter-personal level (horizontal), Ancient biblical Israel understood itself as a family – Sons/children of Israel – genealogically traceable to Adam and Eve, the biblical patriarch and matriarch of human race.

Marriage, in the OT, is perceived as the starting point of a family. The understanding of marriage in the OT, without negating the contemporary view, underlines procreation as an essential purpose of marriage (Gen 1:28 & Gen 38). As B.S Jackson observes, "marriage, in this context, is not only the opportunity for procreation, but also a guarantee of its legitimacy."² There is, in this sense, no separation in the OT between marriage and beginning of a family which is always open to the begetting of children. Hence, marriage becomes not only

¹Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html (accessed 15.01.2017). Hereafter AL.

²Bernard S. Jackson, "The 'Institutions' of Marriage and Divorce in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 56, 2 (2011) 221–251, 227.

the context for the fulfilment of the so-called ‘first divine order to the first man and woman’ “to increase and multiply” (Gen 1:28), and a way of attaining YHWH’s promise to Abraham of becoming the father of a great nation (Gen 12:2), but also a means of cementing the love between the man and woman.

Obviously, marriage plays a pivotal role in beginning a family in OT. But how does the Second Account of Creation (Gen 2:4-25) understand marriage? Whose idea is the beginning of marriage? What implication has Gen 2:18-24 for the Christian understanding of marriage? This article motivated by Pope Francis’ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on love in the family (*Amoris Laetitia*), will re-examine the concept of marriage in the Second Account of Creation (Gen 2:4-25) and the implications thereof for the Christian understanding of marriage. This work is divided into five subsections logically connected to each other. [1] God’s creation of humans as ‘male and female’ (Gen 1-3). [2] Marriage as God’s idea in Gen 2:4-24. [3] The Creation of Eve and the consequences for marital bond. [4] Monogamy as normative paradigm for marriage in the OT. [5] Conclusion: the concept of marriage in Gen 2:4-25 vis-à-vis the Christian understanding of marriage.

I will now turn to the first subsection of this article: the creation of the first humans as ‘male and female.’

1. God’s Creation of Humans as ‘Male and Female’ (Gen 1:27)

In the OT, the first designation of human beings as ‘male’ and ‘female’ is attested in Gen 1:27 (in the so-called ‘First Account of Creation’ [of the P source]): “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; *male* and *female* he created them” (Gen 1:27). The mentioning of the two human genders (male and female) here prepares the way for humanity’s fulfilling of the divine order in Gen 1:28: “to increase and to multiply;” a command that also implies human being’s capacity for sexual intercourse and reproduction. But the ability for sexual intercourse leading to reproduction is not unique to humans. In fact, animals and other living things were first granted this capability for reproduction in Gen 1:22: “God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth’” (Gen 1:22). Why then does the author highlight gender in human being? The author’s explicit mentioning of *male* and *female* in the creation of human being (Gen 1:27), which is the only instance of gender differentiation in the Creation Account, suggests that human

sexuality has a deeper and higher meaning than that of animals. This may be the reason why the author ignored genders in the non-humans. In other words, the author "has not considered gender to be an important feature to stress in his account of the creation of the other forms of life, but for humankind it is of some importance."³ It could be said that God by making them 'male and female' hints at companionship as essential part of their existence. As some authors suggest, companionship between male and female may indeed be part of the implication of their creation in the 'image and likeness' of God. Pushing this connection further, John Sailhamer observes that, "the 'likeness' which the man and the woman share with God in the first chapter of Genesis finds an analogy in the 'likeness' between the man and his wife in chapter two. Here also, as in the first chapter, the human likeness to God is shown against the background of their distinction from the other creatures."⁴ Thus, the fulfilment of the divine order to humans to 'increase and multiply,' should take place within a marital bond characterized by real companionship rooted in love. Marriage, in this sense, should be open to fecundity. In other words, humanity, unlike other non-human beings, is created in the 'image and likeness' of God (Gen 1:27), and is expected to use his sexuality responsibly in marriage for fulfilling God's ordinance of procreation. This idea of human responsibility in marriage, as we shall see, is further underlined in the Second Account of Creation (Gen 2:4-25), where YHWH is presented as the initiator of marriage.

2. Marriage as God's Idea in Gen 2:4-24

In Gen 2:4-25 (the so-called 'Second Creation Account'/the Yahwist account), marriage is presented as initiated by God for the good of the first man and woman, and their descendants. Some scholars have associated the origin of this 'Second Account of Creation' with an ancient Mesopotamian myth – the *Gilgamesh Epic*.⁵ But the truth is that, whether the Second Creation Account is understood literally, metaphorically, mythically or symbolically, its value as accurate depiction of the biblical Israel's religious

³Sailhamer H. John, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992, 95.

⁴John, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 102.

⁵Ellens shares this view. According to him, it was a Mesopotamian story rooted in *Gilgamesh Epic* and the tale of *Adapa* but rewritten in the Bible "to make it a story about YHWH, the God of the Bible." Harold J. Ellens, *Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration*, Westport: Praeger Publisher, 2006, 55.

worldview about the origin of human being, marriage and pain in the world remain undisputed.

According to the ‘Second Account of Creation,’ God formed man from the earth and placed him in beautiful and luxurious Garden of Eden supplied with enviable living environment (Gen 2:8). The presence of the ‘tree of life’ in the garden suggests the possibility of ‘eternal life’ for the first man in this generously equipped environment. All Adam, the first man, has to do is to ‘till and keep’ the land and enjoy his unparalleled beautiful environment. The only one exception is the ‘tree of knowledge of good and evil’ which Adam is ordered not to eat otherwise he will die (Gen 2:17). With the ‘tree of knowledge of good and evil,’ God places before Adam the choice between life and death. He is free to choose one but must bear the eternal concomitant consequences of his choice.

Adam, for the meantime, has in Eden apparently more than he could dream of in life – he enjoys “abundant provision, meaningful responsibility, personal care from God and splendid promise for the future.”⁶ Humanly speaking, the Garden of Eden is marvellous and excellent. But for God, it contains a big lack. In Gen 2.18, God said, “it is *not good* that man should be alone.” In this way, “God puts his finger on the flaw in this otherwise ideal environment.”⁷ But before now, Adam was not alone. Apart from the trees, he had the company of “every animal of the field and every bird of the air” (2:19). In obedience to God, Adam carefully named them, choosing for each creature a name that is appropriate to its nature.⁸ However, “in the course of his naming of the animals the man came to realize that there was no other creature in the garden which fully shared his own nature.”⁹ Adam, therefore, in the midst of many company, was ironically *lonely*. He was yearning for something he could not explain or ask for. But God knows his inner longing and decides to resolve it: “I will make him a *helper* (רֵעֵן) fit for him.” For this reason, marriage can truly be viewed as God’s idea and initiative.¹⁰ In a sense, the creation of the woman is geared towards eradication of Adam’s

⁶Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr, *God’s Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*, in *New Studies in Biblical Theology Series*, Series ed. Carson D.A. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-varsity Press, 1996, 17.

⁷Ortlund, *God’s Unfaithful Wife*, 17.

⁸Ortlund, *God’s Unfaithful Wife*, 18.

⁹Ortlund, *God’s Unfaithful Wife*, 18.

¹⁰Andreas J. Kösternberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004, 35.

loneliness through genuine companionship rooted in love. Thus, marriage is initiated by God for the creation of true male-female human enduring companionship.¹¹

I must underline that, although the deep yearning for a *helper* (עֹזֶר) may be in Adam, he never made this request explicit. Thus, it was God's initiative to create the woman "as a 'suitable helper' for the man (Gen 2:18, 20)."¹² The noun עֹזֶר (*helper or succor*) used here for designating the woman (who Adam later named 'Eve' [Gen 3:20]) is in no way meant to denigrate or belittle the promised *helper* (woman) vis-à-vis man/Adam. Indeed, the same term (עֹזֶר) is used for designating God in some instances in the Hebrew Bible (Ex 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29; 1 Sam 7:12; Ps 20:2, 33:20, 46:1, 70:5, 115:9, 115:10, 115:11, 124:8, 146:5).¹³ As Arnold Fruchtenbaum rightly notes, the 'suitable partner' promised Adam is not merely his subordinate but: "one who can perfectly complete him because without her he is incomplete. She is one who provides what is lacking in man and helps man to do what he cannot do alone. So man was created in such a way that he needs the help of a partner... She corresponds physically, socially, and spiritually."¹⁴ Certainly, Adam and his helper are meant to complete and complement each other, and none is created merely for the exploitation of the other.

But how did God fulfil his promise of providing Adam with a helper? What is the implication of the creation of the woman for the understanding of marital bond?

3. The Creation of Eve and the Consequences for Marital Bond

In fulfilment of his promise to Adam for a *helper*, God created a woman using Adam's צַלְעָה (Gen 2:19-22). Although some biblical translations and Lexica render צַלְעָה in Gen 2:9 as rib – *Adam's rib* – the Hebrew root צַלְעָה has rich semantic field which includes 'side (of something [2 Sm 16:13]),' 'wing (of building [Ez 41:5]),' 'side-rooms, story (= floor [I Kg 6:5]).'¹⁵ Therefore, צַלְעָה may refer to *Adam's side*. According to Fruchtenbaum, "the Hebrew word does not really mean

¹¹See also Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*, Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, 66.

¹²Kösternberger, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 35.

¹³Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2008, 83.

¹⁴Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 83.

¹⁵William L. Holladay, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Leiden: Brill, 1971, 307.

'rib.' But refers to Adam's 'side.' God took out of his side..."¹⁶ The implication is that "the woman was created from an undesignated part of Adam's body."¹⁷ Other instances where צלעַ is used of the 'side of something' include Ex 25:12, 14; 37:3, 5, Ex 26:20; 36:25; Ezek 41:5-8.¹⁸ Indeed, צלעַ whether translated as rib or side underlines the creation of Eve with *something taken* from Adam. They are naturally bound together. This divine action emphasizes the *bond* and *close affinity* between Adam and Eve and not the subjugation and subordination of woman to man. This is well highlighted in Adam's exclamation after the creation of woman in v. 23-24: "Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.' Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:23-24).

Adam's joyful exclamation "*this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...*" are his very first words, and are indeed the very first words of any human being for that matter in the Bible. The exclamation "she is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," in the first place, highlights Adam's acknowledgement of his deep resemblance and connection to the woman which animals lack.¹⁹ A fact that points back to the creation of Eve from Adam's *side* which creates a natural bond between them. In this sense, the expression "she is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is used in a *literal sense*. It is peculiarly used here by Adam in a personal and intimate sense — he sees in the woman a fitting companion and partner; a fact reflected in the name chosen for her by Adam -נשָׁא (woman) — a name comparative to שָׁא (man).²⁰

In verse 24, as a logical conclusion to Adam's exclamation of joy in v. 23, the narrator adds a vital parenthetical note: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (v. 24). This statement has powerful implications for the understanding of the union of man and woman. The first observation is that the author, "thrusts into the midst of a pre-fall

¹⁶Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 86.

¹⁷Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 86.

¹⁸ See Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 86.

¹⁹Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 86.

²⁰As Ortlund notes, the name נשָׁא (woman) in relation to שָׁא (man) is not intended as a proper etymology "but merely a euphonic similarity. The purpose is not technical but practical, which the feminine suffix adequately serves." See Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 19.

human scene a word directly addressing post-fall people. After all, Adam did not have a father and a mother to leave."²¹ Clearly, this statement looks beyond the first man and woman, who by virtue of being alone are destined for each other. Instead, it is future oriented and meant for the coming generations.

This statement has two clear suggestions about Hebrew biblical concept of marriage. First, it makes marriage the strongest human union under God. If a man should leave his biological mother and father for his wife, then marital bond stands out among other human relationships including parent-child relationship. "In Genesis," observes P. Hugenberger, "not only is the wife called 'a helper, suitable for him,' but also the highest natural loyalty owed by a man to his parents is now to be superseded by an even higher loyalty to his wife — as a husband, he 'leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife.'"²² This is "an astounding declaration in a world (ancient Near East) where filial duty was the most sacred obligation next to loyalty to God."²³

I immediately add that the 'leaving of father and mother' here does not imply the *abandoning* of one's parents. Marriage is not tantamount to the rejection of one's beloved parents. It is not a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. What is meant is that the relationship with one's parents, though still important, takes a second place while the relationship between a wife and his husband becomes the primary relationship.²⁴ Although the Hebrew word נזע (used in describing a man's forsaking of his parents) is attested in several texts (Jer 1:16; 2:13, 17, 19; 5:7; 16:11; 17:13; 19:4; 22:9) where it is negatively used to depict Israel's abandonment of her covenantal bond with YHWH,²⁵ there are indications, however, that its use in Gen 2:24 is positive. It only implies that the man transfers his 'primary familial loyalty' from his parents to his wife.²⁶ But he must not forsake the love, care and honour he owes his parents.²⁷ Putting it strongly, Ortlund argues that

²¹Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 21.

²²Paul G. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi*, Leiden: Brill, 1994, 149.

²³Wenham J. Gordon, *Genesis 1-15: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1998, 88. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary*, 88.

²⁴Geoffrey David Miller, *Marriage in the Book of Tobit*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011, 135.

²⁵Miller, *Marriage in the Book of Tobit*, 135.

²⁶Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 159-160.

²⁷Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 159-160.

"marriage is so profound a union that not only may one put one's wife ahead of all others, one must do so."²⁸

The second implication of Gen 2:24 is contained in the 'positive order' of *clinging* to one's wife. According to v. 24, when a married man 'leaves' his parents, he is expected to 'cling' (קָבַד) to his wife. So the 'negative order' of *leaving one's parents* is completed by the 'positive command' to cling to one's wife. Elsewhere, the *qal* verb קָבַד refers to 'the bone cleaving to skin' (Job 19:20) or a 'weary hand clinging unconsciously to the sword' (2 Sam 23:10).²⁹ The Hebrew word for 'cleaving' literally means "to stick like glue."³⁰ In Gen 2:24, it is used metaphorically for underscoring the expected strong bond between a man and his wife initiated by marriage.

It is in connection with the idea of 'cleaving' that the expression, the "two becoming one flesh," should be understood. Here the intimacy between a man and a woman is akin to the two becoming 'one flesh.' Whereas 'flesh' (בשר) is used in literal sense in Gen 2:23 (*she is... the flesh of my flesh*), its usage in v. 24 (... and they become one flesh) is symbolic and metaphorical. The latter suggests that the new bond "created by a marriage fuses a man and wife together into one, fully shared human experience:"³¹ making them *become one*.

Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 13, highlights the spiritual value and deep rooted love implied in the idea of a man 'cleaving' to his wife:

The very word 'to be joined' or 'to cleave', in the original Hebrew, bespeaks a profound harmony, a closeness both physical and interior, to such an extent that the word is used to describe our union with God: 'My soul clings to you' (Ps 63:8). The marital union is thus evoked not only in its sexual and corporal dimension, but also in its voluntary self-giving in love. The result of this union is that the two 'become one flesh,' both physically and in the union of their hearts and lives, and, eventually, in a child, who will share not only genetically but also spiritually in the 'flesh' of both parents.

Marriage, as depicted here, makes a couple soul-mates whose union remain open to fecundity in accordance with God's command to increase and multiply. It is a bond that should reflect God's selfless love for humanity. In addition, the reference to 'flesh' here in

²⁸Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 21.

²⁹Francis Brown, Charles A. Briggs, and S.R. Driver, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1952, 179.

³⁰Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 88.

³¹Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 22.

describing marital bond highlights the ephemeral and finite nature of the marriage. It is a deep and permanent personal relationship but limited to the earthly life. It lasts only till death and not beyond it. What are the implications of the ‘Second Account of Creation’ for monogamy?

4. Monogamy as Normative Paradigm for Marriage in the Old Testament

There are indications that the presentation of marriage in the Second Account of Creation (Gen 2:4-25) strongly suggests monogamy as an ideal form of Hebrew biblical marriage (and, in a sense, marriage in general). Indeed many scholars support this view.³² For instance, according to Kösternberger, the fact that God made only one *female* helper for Adam means that “subsequent marriages, involves a *monogamous heterosexual* relationship.”³³ Hugenberger holds the opinion that “the explicit introductory ‘*therefore* (*על-כן*)’, highlights the intentional generalization implicit in Gen 2:24: “*Therefore* a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (v. 24). Another indication of this intentional generalization is seen in the author’s shift from ‘*Adam*’ (hitherto used until now) to ‘*man*’ (a more generic term) for referring to the ‘first man’ in Gen 2:24. Similarly, wife/woman was used for Eve in Gen 2:24. This, at least in part, suggests that Gen 2:24 offers “a normative paradigm for marriage.”³⁴ Implied also, in the use of ‘wife/woman,’ is the universal nature of the divine punishment contained in Gen 3:14-19, particularly v. 16.³⁵ As N.M. Sarna explains, there is an obvious connection between the divine blessing in Gen 1:28 – to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth – and the divine curse in Gen 3:15-16.³⁶ Both the divine blessing and the divine curse presuppose each other and have implicit universal implication.³⁷ Put simply, “just as the divine blessing was not restricted to or exhausted by the original pair (cf. Gen 9:1), the correlative curse

³²Andreas J. Kösternberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004, 32.

³³Kösternberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 35.

³⁴Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 153.

³⁵Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 153.

³⁶N.M. Sarna cited in Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 153-154.

³⁷N.M. Sarna cited in Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 153-154.

appears similarly to go beyond Adam and Eve to encompass every one of their descendants in its baleful grip.”³⁸ The pivotal role of the Genesis creation account as normative paradigm for marriage in the OT is further highlighted by the obvious allusions to it by the authors of the books of Tobit (Tob 8:5-6) and Sirach (Sir 25:24-26); two books dating from 2 BCE.³⁹

While it is true that most of these scholarly arguments are very plausible, and that Adam’s ‘marriage’ to Eve is monogamous, the numerous instances of polygamous marriage in the Hebrew Bible makes it obvious that polygamy, more or less, existed side by side with monogamy in Ancient Israel. Nonetheless, monogamy takes precedence and was practiced by the majority in the ancient Israel.

5. Conclusion: The Concept of Marriage in Gen 2:4-25 *vis-à-vis* Christian Understanding of Marriage

Our critical analysis of the concept of marriage in Gen 2:4-25, motivated by Pope Francis’ *Amoris Laetitia*, has revealed some positive implications for the Christian understanding of marriage. Four of these implications will be elucidated here:

Marriage is geared towards procreation and real companionship: After the divine decision to make humans in his own image and likeness, he created them ‘male and female’ and ordered them to ‘increase and multiply’ (Gen 1:26-28). Thus, God by making them ‘male and female’ not only prepared them for procreation, but also makes true companionship and bond of love as essential part of their life. Thus, begetting children is a crucial part of marital bond. “Seen this way,” says Pope Francis, “the couple’s fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection” (AL, 11).

Thus, unlike animals, procreation in human beings should at best always take place within marriage, and marital union should normally be open to fecundity. This conclusion reinforces and resonates with Christian (Catholic) “twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without

³⁸N.M. Sarna cited in Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 153-154.

³⁹N.M. Sarna cited in Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 150.

altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family.”⁴⁰

Marriage as monogamous: In the Second Account of Creation (Gen 2:4-25), the Yahwist in discussing marriage upholds in strong terms the ideal of monogamy.⁴¹ This is, for instance, seen in the author's parenthetical note: “Therefore a man *leaves* his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh (Gen 2:24).” Moreover, the two first humans by virtue of being alone are destined for each other. The statement is, therefore, future oriented. It is an assertion that projects monogamy as the main form of marriage in the OT. This idea is supported by the idea of metaphorical marriage between YHWH and Israel, a marriage that survives only by remaining monogamous. It is in this connection that YHWH forbids the Israelites from worshipping any other God. The corollary of this marriage is seen in the Christian idea of monogamous marriage between Christ and his Church. Thus, monogamous Christian marriage is mirrored in the “‘mystery’ of the union of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:21-33)” (AL, 11). This reading puts the Church's insistence on monogamy into perspective.

The enduring but ephemeral nature of marriage: Idea of a man leaving his parents in order to ‘cling/cleave’ to his wife” is weighty (Gen 2:24). Since the Hebrew word for ‘cleaving’ literally means “to stick like glue,”⁴² the implication is that the bond that arises between a husband and wife is the strongest human bond. It is even stronger than the allegiance owed to parents by their children. The picture is that of an enduring and long lasting relation that carries the couple through life and ultimately ends in death. That death brings marriage to an end is depicted through the idea of ‘flesh’. The husband and wife becoming of *one flesh* should ultimately ends at death. Therefore, marriage though meant as an enduring union does not last forever. This interpretation recalls Jesus' teaching to the Sadducees in Mt 22:30 that there is no marriage and giving in marriage in the resurrection because all will be like the angels (see also Mk 12:25; Lk 20:35). This makes the Church's teaching of indissolubility of consummated marriage understandable.

⁴⁰The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2363. See also *Gaudium et spes* 49. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed 23.01.2017)

⁴¹Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, London: Burn & Oath, 1988, 334-337, 335.

⁴²Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 88.

Marriage as God's Idea: Adam's loneliness in spite of the many animals and trees in the beautiful Garden of Eden reveals his inner craving for a companion; an inner craving he could not explicitly utter. Probably, he does not even know exactly what he was lacking. It was God, who out of his love for Adam and his desire for his happiness, decided to give him a real companion: "it is *not good* that man should be alone ... I will make him a *helper* fit for him" (Gen 2:18). God in fulfilment of his promise created Eve from the side of Adam. For this reason, marriage can truly be regarded as God's idea and initiative. Thus, marriage is initiated by God for the creation of true male-female enduring human companionship rooted in love.⁴³

The Church's insistence on the divine origin of Christian marriage has its roots in Gen 2. Thus, according to the author of Matthew's gospel, Jesus cites Gen 2:24 in Mt 19:4-5: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them 'male and female'?... this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?" Acknowledging the weighty nature of Gen 2 to the Christian understanding of marriage, Pope Francis says: "the majestic early chapters of Genesis present the human couple in its deepest reality" (AL, 10).

In conclusion, our reading of Gen 2:4-25 not only highlights the richness of marital union and its divine origin, but also the importance of the 'Second Account of Creation' to the Christian understanding and practice of marriage. Marriage, in Gen 2:4-25, is a permanent union between husband and wife rooted in love and commitment, and with openness to fecundity. Indeed, the 'becoming of one flesh' of the couple is fundamental to the perceptions of marriage in Gen 2.

⁴³See also Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men*, 66.