

“To be One Heart and Soul in God”. Augustine on Peace within the Family

“Un solo corazón y una sola alma en Dios”.
Sobre la paz en la familia en Agustín

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Abstract

This essay describes how Augustine conceives of peace within the marriage of man and woman. According to Augustine, true peace is found where humans love the same goods in the right way. How does that work in marriage? First, the essay depicts the decline of the traditional understanding of marriage in Western societies. Subsequently, it treats Augustine's view of "marital peace" in three stages: before the fall, its corruption after the fall, and its redemption by divine grace. A final section answers the question: What present-day Christians can relearn from Augustine with regard to a peaceful relationship between husband and wife?

Keywords: Augustine, headship, husband and wife, marriage, peace, sexual revolution, submission.



Resumen

Este ensayo describe cómo san Agustín concibe la paz dentro del matrimonio del hombre y la mujer. Según Agustín, la verdadera paz se encuentra donde los seres humanos aman los mismos bienes de la manera correcta. ¿Cómo funciona eso en el matrimonio? Primero, el ensayo describe el declive de la comprensión tradicional del matrimonio en las sociedades occidentales. Posteriormente, se trata la visión de san Agustín de la “paz conyugal” en tres etapas: antes de la caída, su corrupción después de la caída, y su redención por la gracia divina. Una sección final responde a la pregunta: ¿qué pueden aprender los cristianos actuales de san Agustín con respecto a una relación pacífica entre marido y mujer?

Palabras clave: San Agustín, revolución sexual, matrimonio, paz, esposo y esposa, jefatura, sumisión.



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Introduction

Since the 1960s the traditional Christian understanding of marriage is on the decline. One of the reasons for this development probably is the emphasis in Western culture on the freedom of the individual and the satisfaction of personal desire. Traditional marriage required a lifelong bond of fidelity between one man and one woman, the raising of children, and contained particular roles of husband and wife. Personal freedom was found within these bonds of marriage. This traditional understanding of marriage became increasingly criticized as a patriarchal institution that suppressed human individuality, especially of women, and denied them the possibility of personal growth.

Today, the heritage of the sixties is palpable in our societies. There is a widespread fear of losing one's own freedom by binding oneself to another. This is why divorce rates are so high, and why many young people prefer a form of cohabitation before they marry, if they marry at all. Sociological research has demonstrated, however, that the ethic of self-actualization has many negative effects on personal well-being and on the well-being of society at large. It has not led to more happiness, but rather to more personal and societal problems (Eberstadt 21-25).

At the same time, the longing for enduring relationships remains. As Augustine already noted, people prove to be made for a life in communion, and the union between a man and a woman is the first natural form of this communal life (*bono coniug.* 1, 1). It is not surprising then, that in our culture scepticism about marriage coexists with a high veneration of romantic love. Philosopher Ernest Becker has even argued that the ideal of romantic love has replaced the afterlife in Western society. He has coined this "apocalyptic romanticism." The enduring love and ultimate happiness that people used to seek from God, they now seek in the relationship with their love partner (167-168). The relationship becomes an idol. We expect it to give us what only God can give. These high expectations of love relationships leads to disappointment between love partners, and subsequent break-ups or divorces.

Men and women in our societies long for true communion, but its individualism and "apocalyptic romanticism" stand in the way of finding it. This paradox illustrates what Augustine remarked in the *City of God*: "There is nothing so social by nature, so unsocial by its corruption, as [the human] race" (*civ.*, 12, 28) (CCL 48; 384).¹ Men and women long for true companionship, but sin keeps

¹ "Nihil enim est quam hoc genus tam discordiosum vitio, tam sociale natura" (NPNF 1/2; 243). Text editions were taken from *Corpus Augustianum Gissense*. Translations are my own, or were taken from the *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* series (NPNF).

them from finding it. This essay explores Augustine's thought on what makes a well-ordered marriage, in which husband and wife find happiness and peace. The essay consists of three main parts. First, I will treat marriage before the fall, then I will treat the fall and its effects on the marital relationship, and finally, I address the restoration of marriage through grace. Last, I ask the question: What we can learn from Augustine?

Marriage Before the Fall

In Augustine's view, marriage is from the beginning a temporal institution.² God joined man and woman in order to mirror the unity of God and his people (*civ.*, 14, 23). This is the *sacrament* of marriage. Man and woman had to bring forth this people of God in time. When all the predestined were born and persevered in obedience until the end, they would be transferred into the state of immortality. At that moment, the sacrament of marriage would have reached its fulfilment in the eternal and unbreakable communion of God with his bride. Just like God created humans to keep themselves alive with food and drink, he created them to marry and procreate, but he did so in order to bring them into the eschatological condition in which food, drink and marriage will no longer exist (1 Cor. 6: 13; Mt. 22: 30).³

Union of Man and Woman

Augustine regards the union of man and woman as the first natural form of human friendship and communion (*bono coniug.* 1, 1). God created Adam and his wife to form an intimate, enduring and unbreakable companionship. God created the woman *from* the man (Gn. 2: 21) in order to indicate how dear this union should be to them (*civ.*, 12, 27; 14, 22; *Gen. litt.*, 3, 21, 34; *bono coniug.* 1, 1).⁴ They are not aliens to each other, but are each other's flesh and blood. Although the relationship between husband and wife is hierarchically ordered, this does not contradict the companionate character of their union. Augustine explicitly says that the woman was created from the side of the man in order to indicate that they are companions who walk side by side on the same path, pursuing the same goal. Augustine writes at the beginning of *De bono coniugali* (1,1):

² The literature on Augustine's view of marriage is extensive. The relationship between man and woman is treated in Børresen; an overview of the development of Augustine doctrine of marriage (with special attention to contextual influences) is given by Clark 139-162. See also Schmitt; Pereira; and van Bavel "Augustinus. Van liefde" 54-66.

³ See *Gn. litt.*, 9, 3, 7.

⁴ See also van Geest 187.

[God] did not create these each by himself, and join them together as alien by birth: but He created the one out of the other, setting a sign also of the power of union in the side, whence she was drawn. For they are joined to another side by side, who walk together, and look together whither they walk.

In order to form this companionship the man and the woman were both created in the image of God. Augustine emphasizes this at several places. The difference between man and woman only extends to the body, not to the soul. “In this grace”, that is the grace of the image of God, “there is no male and female” (*Gn. litt.*, 11, 42, 58). Both man and woman were created to know God with their minds and to subject their bodies to their mind in the service of God. Some have suggested that Augustine denies that the woman was created in the image of God, but this would contradict the entire idea of marriage as common service to God.⁵ Only if the man and the woman are both created in the image of God, they can obey Him together and serve each other in obedience to Him.

To be one heart and one soul in God (Act. 4: 32) is the one great goal of marriage. Augustine sees marriage as an institution, given by God and regulated by God, in which husband and wife serve God together through their distinct callings. In doing so they form one heart and one soul in Him. They are not primarily made for each other, but rather given to each other to love and serve God together. This is what makes them happy, and what makes them flourish as husband and wife. It is important to understand this, in order to value Augustine’s view of the roles of husband and wife, and the importance of procreation, which are so central in his view of marriage, but so different from the view that has come to prevail in the West. In the Western view happiness is sought in the partner, whereas the happiness of marriage that Augustine has in mind consists of enjoying God together, and the spouse in God.

Difference between Man and Woman

Having discussed the union between husband and wife and the purpose for which they were united, we now turn to the different roles that God gives man and woman in marriage. Augustine regards the husband as the head of the marriage bond. This idea of male headship is inherent to the sacramental meaning of marriage. From the beginning, the union between Adam and Eve signified the bond between God and the united souls of his people (*Gn. litt.*,

⁵ See for this feminist criticism, for example Ruether “The Liberation;” “Augustine, Sexuality.” For more nuanced accounts of Augustine’s view of the woman as image of God, see van Bavel “Augustine’s View on Women;” and Stark “Augustine on Women” 216-41.

11, 37, 50).⁶ This is a hierarchical relationship, in which God rules his people and gives them life, whereas his people subject themselves to God in trust and obedience (*bono coniug.*, 20; *nupt. et conc.*, 1, 9).⁷ The husband's relation to his wife and family should mirror the way in which God relates to his people. The husband is the primary agent in the process of procreation (although not without the woman), and he is called to care for his family and to rule them with benevolent authority, just as God rules his people.

Augustine (*Gn. litt.*, 11, 37, 50) describes this way of exercising authority with the apostle Paul as “service in love” (*Gal. 5: 12*). The husband has the responsibility to lead his wife and family in the worship of God, and defend them against the intrusion of sin. Augustine argues that several details in *Genesis 2* and *3* suggest this responsibility. God gave the commandment not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil specifically to Adam (*Gn. 2: 16-17*), probably in order to transmit it to his wife, who still had to be created. If she was already created, it is even more striking that God only addressed Adam when he gave the command. This even more underlines his primary responsibility as family-head to lead his wife in obeying this commandment.⁸ It seems also for this reason that God called Adam first to account after the fall. Although Eve had sinned first, Adam as the head of his wife had the primary responsibility to keep her away from sinning. Therefore, the order of justice (*ordo iustitiae*) required that Adam was called to account first, although he had sinned only after his wife had done so (*Gn. litt.*, 11, 34, 45).

⁶ In this passage, Augustine says that the rule of the man over his wife, and her service to him existed before the fall. They served each other through love, the husband ruling, the woman obeying. Only after the fall the servitude of the woman became a penal condition. But see Bennett 69, who argues that the hierarchical nature of marriage as such is a consequence of the fall.

⁷ Augustine stretches the comparison of God's relation to his creatures to the man's relation to his wife quite far. First of all, the man seems to represent the singularity of God over against the plurality of his creatures. Therefore, in the Old Testament, one husband could have many wives, without violating the nature of marriage. The man represents God, and the many women represent the many human souls that are bound together by God. Augustine also makes a connection between God's creative power, and the 'life-giving' power of the male seed. Many women can conceive of one man, but one woman cannot conceive of many husbands. This illustrates the power of the higher nature (*vis principiorum*) over inferior natures. The husband represents the one true God, who can make many souls fruitful. Elsewhere, Augustine argues that the law of nature requires that the higher reason rules over the lower reason. This means that man in general rules over the beasts, that parents rule their children, and that husbands rule their wives (*civ.*, 19, 15).

⁸ Augustine argues that this method of teaching (*disciplina*) is maintained by the apostle in the Church, when he says: “If they (women) want to learn something, let them ask their husbands at home” (*1 Cor. 14: 35*).

Having discussed the position of Adam, we now turn to Eve. Why was she created as distinct from the man and given to him as his helper? In order to understand Augustine's answer to this question, we need to understand a bit more about the position of human beings in creation. Augustine argues from *Genesis* 1 that God made man his co-worker. God rules his creation by natural and voluntary providence (Markus 88-92). By natural providence he himself gives life to all the creatures that he has made, but in his voluntary providence he uses the wills and actions of humans and angels to fulfill his purposes for creation (*Gn. litt.*, 8, 9, 17). These rational creatures are co-workers under God.⁹ Augustine argues that God used Adam and Eve in his providence, by giving them the task to increase and multiply and to rule and subject the Earth (*Gn.* 1: 27-28). The latter part of this commandment could be obeyed by Adam alone. According to *Genesis* 2: 9, God gives Adam the task to till the garden and thus discover the richness of creation (*Gen. litt.*, 8, 8, 15, 16). The first part of God's command, however, namely to increase and to multiply, could not be fulfilled by Adam alone. God created Eve for this specific purpose.

Genesis 2 states that God made a helper like Adam (*adiutorium similis ei*), but it does not say for what purpose Adam needed this helper. Searching for an answer to this question, Augustine denies that Adam needed her help to till the ground, as before the fall Adam did not yet experience any difficulty in his work. Moreover, if he needed help, a man would have been more suitable to him, because men are physically stronger than women. Neither did God make the woman to keep Adam company, Augustine argues. If that were the reason for the creation of the woman, it would have been more logical that Adam received the company of another man, "for how much more pleasantly (*congruentius*) would two friends live together, than a man and a woman, to associate and talk with each other" (*Gen. litt.*, 9, 5, 9) (CSEL 28, 1; 273).¹⁰ To modern ears this might sound harsh, but what Augustine is doing here, is to seek the specific reason why God made a *woman* for Adam. He does not deny that Eve helped Adam tilling the earth and that he found solace in her friendship, but this does not explain why God created another human being that only differed from the man with regard to the body. Augustine finds the most probable reason (*nihil*

⁹ In *Gen. litt.* 8, 8,15-16, Augustine refers to 1 Cor. 3: 6-9, for the concurrence of divine providence and human cooperation: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow... We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

¹⁰ "Quanto enim congruentius ad convivendum et conloquendum duo amici pariter quam vir et mulier habitarent?" Augustine's remark still raises the question, of course, why a man, before the fall, would converse more pleasantly with another man than with a woman.

aliud probabiliter occurit) for the creation of the woman qua woman in the begetting of children.

The Cooperation of Man and Woman in Marriage

God created Adam and Eve and gave them different roles to fulfill the divine purpose of marriage. The man is called to rule his wife and his family with benevolent authority, the woman was given to obey him with love, thus mirroring the unity of God and his people. At the same time she was given to him as an indispensable helper for the begetting and raising of children for the city of God.

With regard to the role of the woman as mother, feminists interpreters of Augustine have said that Augustine reduces the woman to a breeding-animal. This explanation of the creation of the woman seems so at odds with his view of the spouses as companions, expressed in *de bono coniugali* (Clark, 161). I think, however, that in Augustine's view companionship and procreation belong intimately together (Bennet 63-65). Man was created to love God and to fulfill his commandment. Part of this commandment was to fill the Earth with a human family. For this purpose, God made the woman from the side of the man, in order to make procreation possible. In other words, by creating the woman God made clear that his commandment could only be fulfilled through the companionship of man and woman, which they "exercise" in the act of procreation and the subsequent education and raising of children for Him (*Gen. litt.*, 8, 21, 33). Many modern readers have accused Augustine of a negative view of sexuality. His view of sexuality before the fall (free of what we would call "sexual arousal", and ruled by the rational will of man and woman) seems a rather technical act in which bodily or psychological pleasure is not allowed to play any role (Ranke-Heinemann qtd. in Lamberigts 175). This evaluation of Augustine's view of sex, however, is to be explained from a different evaluation of the *telos* of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. Under the influence of the sexual revolution, sexuality has become emancipated from God and from nature.¹¹ It has become an act of mutual bodily and psychological satisfaction, disconnected from the purpose for which sexual intercourse was designed by God, namely to beget children for his kingdom.¹²

¹¹ See Kuby 179-180.

¹² To the extent that people connect sexuality to spirituality, they seek a kind of sublime experience in sexuality itself. The experience of the divine is sought in the sexual act itself. Augustine would deem this idolatry, the exchange of the creator and his creation. A popular

In Augustine's view, this experience of sexual intercourse misses the right end, if it is not ordered by the divine law. It reverses the order of creation, which commands that lower goods always serve higher goods (*bono coniug.*, 9, 9). In other words, the mind should serve God and the body should serve the mind that loves God. This means that husband and wife should have sexual intercourse in order to fulfill the divine purpose of this act, and use their bodies for that purpose. Augustine does not deny that even in paradise Adam and Eve had *concupiscentia carnis*, a bodily desire for sexual intercourse (*Ep.* 6*, 4-6),¹³ but this desire was subject to the law of the mind. It did not have a dynamic of its own, which battled against the law of the mind. Sex in paradise was well-ordered. Sexual intercourse was an expression of one will to serve God with the intention to beget children for Him, and to raise them for Him. Husband and wife offered their bodies to God for that purpose. What the spouses loved in each others was not their bodies *per se* (or any other external properties), but rather their mutual will to obey God both with their mind and their bodies (*nupt. et conc.*, 1, 15).¹⁴

The Fall and its Consequences

The distortion of the peace of the marriage bond did not start with Adam and Eve, but with the devil. The devil refused to accept his place in the divine order, and subsequently tried to persuade man to join him in his rebellion against God's order.

In the order of justice, God came to the man, with his commandment, so that the man would teach this commandment to his wife. The devil turns this order upside down. He comes first to the woman to tempt her to transgress the divine commandment, and then she tries to make her husband a companion in her disobedience. This must have been Satan's design. He knew that the woman had the heart of her husband. The bond of love with his wife, made him vulnerable to follow her in her sin. This is exactly what happens. Her husband, rather than persevering in obedience to God, and ruling his wife by guarding her against Satan and sin, listens to his wife, and becomes disobedient to God together with her.¹⁵ Adam knew that he disobeyed God in doing so,

book in which this spirituality is promoted (over against traditional Christianity), is Brown *The Davinci Code*.

¹³ See Lamberigts 184.

¹⁴ See van Bavel "Augustinus. Van liefde" 61.

¹⁵ See *Gn. litt.* 11, 42, 58 on the reason why the devil seduced Eve and not Adam. See also 1 Tim. 2, 13 ("Adam was not deceived, but the woman").

but he preferred the bond of peace with his wife to that with God. Augustine compares this behaviour with that of Salomon who was endowed with wisdom, which preserved him from the sin of idolatry. Nonetheless, Salomon followed his wives in their idolatry, because he did not want to disappoint them. He committed what he knew should not be done, in order not to grieve his “deadly sweethearts” (*mortiferas delicias*) (*Gen. litt.*, 11, 42, 59; *civ.* 14, 11). Both Adam and Salomon sinned from a “certain friendly benevolence, by which it happened that God was offended in order to avoid that a human being from being a friend became an enemy” (*Gen. litt.*, 11, 42, 59) (CSEL 28,1; 378).¹⁶ In doing so, Adam preserved peace with his wife, but it was an unjust peace. The instability of this peace, becomes apparent when God calls Adam to account for his disobedience. He transfers his guilt to his wife, and is unwilling to take responsibility for his own failure in exercising his headship over her (*civ.*, 14,14).

Through the first sin, peace with God was distorted, and as a punishment for that sin the man and the woman experience *concupiscentia carnis* in themselves. This is much more than misdirected sexual desire (Lamberigts 179). It is sinful desire as such that rebels against the law that God has ordained for the flourishing of human relationships. The next section discusses how this carnal concupiscence distorts the peace of marriage after the fall. Marriage remains a good, but the sinners who engage in marriage distort this good through their sin.

The Distortion of the Peace of Marriage

Augustine emphasizes that the institution of marriage remains a good after the fall, even if it is the marriage of unbelievers. God uses marriage in his providence to produce new life and to restrain man’s sinful nature. Augustine argues, for example, that the begetting of children stimulates the parents to take responsibility and work together (*bono coniugi.*, 3). Also the fidelity of husband and wife, albeit for the wrong reasons, has a certain civil goodness that contributes to the stability of society.¹⁷ Augustine also regards the patriarchal

¹⁶ “...amicali quadam benevolentia, qua plerumque fit ut offendatur Deus, ne homo ex amico fiat inimicus...”. See *civ.* 14, 13.

¹⁷ This does not mean that chastity in unbelievers is a genuine virtue, for “what comes not from faith is sin” (Rm. 14: 23). The chastity of unbelievers is sinful, because it is not motivated by the love of God, but rather by a desire for the praise of men, to avoid trouble, or to serve demons. Nonetheless, Augustine argues, one sin can suppress another sin (*nupt. et conc.*, 1, 4). Therefore, the chastity of unbelievers can contribute to the temporal peace of the earthly city.

structure of the family a providential means by which God preserves order in the world. He does not in the least justify the despotic rule of husbands and fathers in their households (*civ.*, 19, 14). Nonetheless, after the fall, the society of sinful men needs coercive power to preserve a certain degree of order. This also applies to the family. God uses the coercive power of the *pater familias* to preserve a kind of order that contributes to the stability of the earthly city. Thus, marriage after the fall is a means to contribute to the temporal peace of this fallen world.

At the same time, Augustine observes how sin distorts the peace of marriage and family. When something else than obedience to God's will becomes the object of human desire, this must necessarily lead to a distortion of God's order for marriage. First of all, this becomes apparent in the violation of fidelity. Whereas God intended the spouses to be faithful to each other in order to mirror the covenant between God and his people, sin sacrifices fidelity to something that it values more than obedience to God. This is the case, for example, in the gratification of sexual lust. If this becomes the highest object of desire, it might eventually lead to fornication. Augustine also points to another instance in which fidelity is sacrificed to another earthly good, namely procreation. When a man discovers that his wife is barren, he takes another wife to beget children, in order to realize his ideals, such as the preservation of his family-estate or the endurance of his family-name (*bono coniug*, 17).¹⁸ Thus misdirected human desire breaks the sacramental unity between husband and wife.

Augustine also observes how the harmonious cooperation of man and woman in the begetting of children becomes distorted by sin. As we have seen, God united husband and wife to sacrifice their bodies as living sacrifices to Him in the act of intercourse. In doing so, they would work together in the service of God, to beget children for Him. But after the fall, carnal concupiscence distorts the sexual act. It is no longer undertaken in order to obey God together, but to seek a certain earthly good for its own sake, for example, the gratification of bodily lust. Husband and wife use each other's bodies to find satisfaction for their carnal desires (*nupt. et conc.*, 1, 5). In this way, their companionship is seriously distorted. They no longer work together in the service of God, but use each other's bodies to serve their own desires. Augustine especially warns men not to possess their "vessel in desire as the heathens do" (I Tess. 4, 5). If they do so, they do not treat her as their wife (future mother),

¹⁸ Augustine justifies this behaviour with regard to the patriarchs in the Old Testament (for example Abraham and Hagar), because of the requirements of this dispensations within the divine economy. See further below.

but they abuse her as a prostitute. This way of using one's wife is the seedbed of infidelity and fornication, because the man seeks his own interests using his wife, rather than respecting her as his God-given helper in the service of God. In short, sin isolates sexual intercourse from the religious friendship and cooperation of husband and wife in the service of God, and makes it into an act in which individuals use each other for their own private interests. This is why Augustine says in the *Confessions* that he distorted the true bond of friendship through carnal lust (*conf.*, 2, 1, 3, 1).

Augustine sees the effects of the misdirected will in the way people treat the children that are conceived from sinful sexual intercourse. The distorted will that engaged in sexual intercourse, solely for the reason of bodily satisfaction, shows itself in the unwillingness to care for the children that are born from this sexual union. Spouses commit abortion or treat their children in an uncaring way once they are born (*nupt. et conc.*, 1, 17, 15). However, this does not mean that sexual intercourse that is engaged in for the sake of begetting children is good in and of itself, because the ultimate purpose for which people want to have children can be wrong. People get children in order to further their family-estate, or to serve the glory of the earthly city by offering their children to its service.¹⁹ Their care and sacrifices for their children can still be driven by carnal concupiscence. Augustine illustrates this in the *Confessions* where he describes how his parents, especially his father, saved a lot of money to enable Augustine to pursue a worldly career (*conf.*, 2, 5). For that purpose his parents even held him back from marriage, which could have restrained his sexual desires (*conf.*, 2, 8).

Although Augustine argues that God makes a right use of the sinful *pater familias* to preserve order in society, he simultaneously points out how fathers and husbands can use their authority in a sinful way and oppose the bond of peace that should tie husband and wife and father and children together. If they no longer regard themselves as vice-regent of God or Christ (the head of the man—1 Cor. 11: 3), tyranny and infidelity become normal for the behaviour of husbands and fathers. Rather than showing their wives the example of fidelity (being the head that should lead the body), they think their male position entitles them to be unfaithful to their wives (s. 9; 153, 3-7). And rather than using their paternal authority to educate and correct their children and slaves

¹⁹ On sons as means to preserve the economic interests of their father after the latter's death, see Shaw 20. Augustine refers to this in s. 21, 8 (to save for one's son as an excuse not to give your money to the poor); see also *civ.* 19, 1 (the pagan virtue of begetting sons for the sake of the city or the country).

in the service of God, they use it to make them obey their own sinful will (*civ.*, 19, 12).

Return of Peace Within Marriage

The grace of faith restores the bond of peace in marriage (*nupt. et conc.*, 1, 5),²⁰ because it makes the spouses willing again to obey the divine order of marriage, and to help each other obey this order. After the fall, however, the will has to cope with the reality of *concupiscentia carnis*. This makes Christian spouses co-operators in the battle of the Spirit against the flesh, for the sake of realising a unity of heart and soul in God.

A Christian marriage is meant to be a sacrament of the relationship between Christ and his people. What does it mean to preserve this unity and to embody it? For Christian spouses this means that they try to be faithful to each other. Augustine emphasizes that the husband, as the head of the marriage bond and the representative of Christ, has the primary obligation to be faithful to his wife. Rather than considering himself entitled to play around, he should love her as his own body (Ef. 5: 28), and exemplify in his behaviour what faithfulness means (*adult. coniug.*, 8, 9; s., 332, 4, 9). Furthermore, the spouses help each other to be faithful by conceding to sexual intercourse out of lust. Although Augustine emphasizes that Christian spouses should only have sexual intercourse in order to beget children, he knows the weakness of the flesh, and states that the spouses should not deny their bodies to each other, in order to help each other to be faithful and protect him or her from the temptation of adultery. In doing so, the spouses “bear each other’s burdens” as Paul commands Christians in Gal 6: 2. Augustine also argues that the spouses should never require celibacy of the other spouse if he or she is not yet ready for it. This might lead the other spouse into fornication, because he or she cannot sufficiently cope with the ardour of lust that is still present in the member of the body (*ep.*, 262, 1-2; *bono coniug.*, 3). For Augustine, the representation of the relationship between Christ and the Church is so important, that everything else is subservient to this primary goal of marriage.

With regard to sexual intercourse, Christian marriage differs from marriage before the fall. Before the fall, the union between husband and wife was intended to produce children for the city of God. Man ought to fill the Earth with God’s children, and thus cooperate with God for the coming of his

²⁰ Augustine quotes Rm. 14: 23 (“whatsoever is not of faith is sin”) in combination with Hbr. 6: 6 (“without faith it is impossible to please God”).

kingdom. In the Old Testament, the begetting of children was still of salvation-historical importance, in order to produce the people of God from which the Messiah was to be born (*bono coniug.*, 9, 18). This is also why polygamy was justified in the Old Testament. The patriarchs took more than one wife, not for the sake of lust, but rather for the sake of the begetting of children for the Church. This kind of marriage also had a sacramental meaning: the many wives under one husband prefigured the many Churches of the New Testament under one God. In the New Testament polygamy is no longer allowed, because of the eschatological state of the Church. One man and one wife mirror the eschatological relationship between God and his people, who are one soul and one heart in Him (*bono coniug.*, 20, 21). Moreover, the begetting of many children is no longer necessary, because God's children are now gathered from the nations. This is also why Augustine regards chastity as a higher good than marriage in the time of the New Testament, and celibate cohabitation of the spouses as a higher form of marriage, because it is closer to the eschatological state of the Church: a community of brothers and sisters in Christ who are one soul and one heart in God.

The begetting of children, however, still has an important function within Christian marriage. It remains the natural good of marriage, and this natural good is sanctified by the graced will of the spouses, who engage in it with the desire to have children that will not only be born, but also be reborn by the water of baptism and the work of the holy Spirit (*nupt. et conc.*, 1, 5). In this way, the misdirected carnal desire (*concupiscentia carnis*) of the spouses is again directed at the purpose for which it was created. The peace of the mind with God is "embodied" in the sexual act aimed at the begetting of children for God and his Church. When Christian spouses become fathers and mothers, they put their physical parenthood in the service of their spiritual parenthood of their children. They intend to serve God and Christ in the way they treat their children.

This has important consequences for the way in which Christian fathers exercise their authority towards their children. They acknowledge Christ as their head and serve him. They do so by showing "paternal love" (*paternum affectum*) to their children, by teaching them the name and doctrine of Christ, and showing by their example what obedience to Christ means. This is why Augustine also calls fathers *bishops* in their own houses (*Io. ev. tr.*, 51, 13).

As bishops in their own houses, Christian husbands and fathers also administer discipline to their wives, children and slaves with merciful severity. In this context, Augustine applies the metaphor of head and body to the relationship of the *pater familias* to his household. To take care of his body (Ef.

5: 29), also means that the father fights against “the flesh” in those who are entrusted to his care. Just as an individual person should subject the flesh to the spirit (Gal. 5: 17), the father has the responsibility to make his body obey him. But this obedience to the father is not a goal in itself. The father himself is a servant of Christ. He is a steward of Christ in his family, and should lead them to obedience to Christ (s., 349, 2). Therefore, Augustine reminds his readers: “If you want your body to serve you, you are reminded of how fitting it is for you to serve your God” (*util. ieiunii*, 4) (CCL 46; 235).²¹ If the father experiences resistance to his authority from his family, he should not just react with the affirmation of power, but also seek wisdom and grace from God to react in a loving, Christ-serving way.²²

What about the role of the Christian woman in marriage? By God’s providence, the woman has become subject to her husband. She is not allowed to do anything without his consent and should obey his command. This belongs to the punishment of Gn. 3: 16, in order to restrain the rebellious nature of the woman. Augustine argues that a Christian woman will not rebel against this order, even if her husband is a pagan and treats her ill. Augustine takes his mother as an example. She tried to win her husband for Christ, not by words, but by the loving and patient manner in which she treated her husband (1 Ptr. 3: 1). She bore with his unfaithfulness, and did not go against him when he came home with an aggressive mood, but waited patiently for the moment he had become reasonable again, and then talked to him. In doing so, she served the Lord, and eventually won her husband for Christ.

From a modern perspective, which emphasizes individual rights and the empowerment of women, this behaviour might seem sub-assertive. The woman should fight for her own rights, we would say. Augustine, however, sees the societal position of the woman as a somehow ruled by divine providence, in some way similar to slavery. It is not directly commanded by God, but the factual situation is used by him to restrain the sinful nature of the woman and to exercise her in virtue (*Quaest. Gen.*, 153). Rebellion against this condition would be a proud protest against God, which would show that the woman is not aware of the rebellious nature, that she inherited from Eve. Given the societal position of the woman, she serves the Lord, by accepting her position, and living faithfully in that position, in order to win her husband for her through

²¹ See *util. ieiunii* 4 (CCL 46; 235): “Cum vis ut serviat tibi caro tua admoneris quomodo te oporteat servire Deo tuo.” See *cont.* 9, 22-24.

²² In *util. ieiunii* 4 Augustine points to the fact that God “tries” the head through the resistance of the body. This is true in the individual, but also in the household.

her way of live. In the case of Monnica, God blessed her love by the conversion of her husband, and the love and respect that accompanied it (*conf.*, 9, 17, 22). This does not mean that the Christian woman cannot appeal to her rights. In a Christian marriage, the husband and the wife are subject to the law of the Church, which is different from the laws of the world (s. 9,4; La Bonnardière 41). Whereas the laws of the world allow a man to have sex outside of marriage (Shaw 29), and to divorce and marry someone else, the laws of heaven forbid this, and to these laws a Christian marriage is bound. Therefore, a Christian woman has the right and even the duty to report the crime of her husband to the bishop, so that he can exercise ecclesiastical discipline. On the one hand, she claims her rights in doing so,²³ but at the same time she cares for the soul of her husband (s. 392), and strives to re-establish marital peace.

In the stewardship over the family, the wife is the partner of her Christian husband. They work together, although the woman is not the equal of the husband. Augustine emphasizes this in his letter to Ecdicia, who had acted independently from her husband in several ways. She had vowed celibacy without his consent (which is needed from both partners according to I Cor. 7: 4-5), she had sold a large part of the family property to wandering monks without the consent of her husband, and she had changed her clothes into those of a widow without asking his permission. This made him so angry, that it became the occasion for him to commit adultery, whereas he had first vowed celibacy, following his wife. It goes without saying that Augustine rejects the behaviour of her husband, but Ecdicia also receives a severe chastisement from him. She was not allowed to act independently from her husband, whom she should obey as her lord (1 Ptr. 3: 6). With regard to the selling of property, Augustine argues that this is in itself a good deed, but the fact that she had done this without the consent of her husband made it wrong. For the husband is the head of the family, and should take final decisions. This does not mean that she only had to listen and obey. Augustine views the woman indeed as a co-steward of the household. It would have been good if Ecdicia had made suggestions to her husband, in order to make a plan together about what to do with their property. As they did not yet know the future calling of their son, they neither knew how much property they had to save for his future. Therefore, they should have made a plan in order to combine the practice of mercy and the care for their son. She could come up with plans and suggestions, but her husband remained the one who took the final decisions. This is not because the husband is “the boss”, but because God gave him the final responsibility for their son. Augustine empha-

²³ See I Cor. 7: 4.

sizes that their reunion is of great importance, not only for their souls wellbeing, but also for the Christian education of their son (*Ep.*, 262, 11).

Finally, Augustine argues that the Christian family serves the peace of society. In a sermon, held after the lynching of a government official, who had maltreated the people, he warns his congregation not to take vengeance. If they feel maltreated they should go to the government, but not take the law into their own hands. This is what fathers should teach their children. In this way, Christian families can contribute to a more peaceful society. If children learn how to behave at home, this will influence society at large, because most people have become Christians. Thus, Augustine says, those who learn virtue at home, because they belong to the city of God, will contribute to the peace of the earthly city by their way of life (*s.*, 302,19).

Conclusion

How does Augustine help us to diagnose the crisis of peaceful relationships between men and women in our society? I draw a few conclusions.

Augustine regards marriage as a bond between a man and a woman that is designed by God. He joins man and woman, and defines the purpose of this union, which they, in their turn, have to serve. Marriage implies the sacrifice of autonomy, both from the man and from the woman, in order to serve God by submitting their wills to Him. This theocentric perspective is indispensable for a righteous peace within marriage.

Augustine relativizes the romantic concept of marriage in our societies, in which the experience of attraction and sexual satisfaction is regarded as the highest goal of the relationship. Men and wife were given to each other to serve God, and to help each other serve God. Obedience to his will is the *sum-mum bonum* under which lesser goods should be ordered, such as friendship and sexual desire. They are not denied or suppressed, but receive their proper place in the order of love, according to which God is loved in and of himself, whereas other things are loved because of Him. If something else is cherished by the spouses for its own sake (such as begetting children, or not begetting children, sexual satisfaction, etc.) this endangers the fidelity of the spouses to each other.

In Augustine's view, God gives the man and the woman a specific position in the marriage relationship. Feminist interpreters of Augustine have criticized him as a representative of a patriarchal culture. Augustine emphasizes, however,

that the headship of the man over the woman should reflect the headship of Christ over his Church. Male headship is not a justification of abuse or adulterous behaviour (as it was in the Roman culture in which Augustine lived), but rather a call to rule one's wife and family in the name of Christ with loving and sacrificial authority. The fact that male headship in our culture is treated with disdain, might explain why many men don't know how they should relate to women in a responsible way (cf. #MeToo).²⁴

When it comes to the position of the woman, Augustine emphasizes that she is the man's companion and helper. At the same time, the man has received the final authority in the household. When the man abuses his position, as Augustine knew from his own boyhood experience, a Christian woman will seek peace, not so much by rebelling against her subordinate position, but by patiently bearing with it, and by keeping her conscience clean, in order to amend her husband by her good works.

This does not mean that Augustine justifies the *status quo* of sinful male behaviour in marriage. He rather takes seriously that male dominance over the woman is a consequence of the fall, which cannot be solved by simply improving the rights and assertiveness of women. For Augustine, only the regeneration of a man's heart can solve this problem. At the same time, God makes a good use of the sin of the husband. He uses it in his providence to control the rebellious nature of the woman, and to exercise her in virtue.

From Augustine's concept we can learn that peace between the man and the woman is not reached by the negotiation about individual rights (which is driven by self-love), but by regeneration of the heart, which enables them to accept the position that God has given each of them, and to bear with each other's sins and weaknesses, for God's sake.

Augustine also points to the fact that a Christian household, in which parents educate their children in the fear of God, contributes to the peace of the earthly City, because the children learn to treat their neighbors well, and respect the temporal authorities that God has given.

²⁴ This is not to say that the Christian notion of male headship cannot be abused by men for malevolent purposes. For the connection between sexual harassment of women, and the egalitarian ideology that dominates our culture, see the talk by John Piper "Sex Abuse Allegations and the Egalitarian Myth". This talk is based on Piper article "Do Men owe Women a Special Kind of Care?".



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