

*In the World but not of It: A Critique of  
American Evangelical Views of God and  
the Material*

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By  
Rebecca Lynne Hudson

Stirling, United Kingdom  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis concentrates on normative Christian male conceptions of God and the physical realm embodied by women and sexuality especially as they relate to attitudes toward women and sexuality in contemporary American Evangelical Christianity. As a result of the work of feminist and body theologians, it can be seen that the normative framework surrounding God is one of complete disembodied hypermasculinity and the result is one of systematic exclusion of embodied humanity – specifically women and sexuality. In this thesis, I will be exploring how this duality has been negatively reinforced and perpetuated through significant historical theologians from Saint Augustine to the influential twenty-first century American Evangelical writer, theologian, and pastor, Joshua Harris.

In this process, we will see that the situation of woman is perilous, as described by feminist philosopher, Simone deBeauvoir in *The Second Sex*. I propose that this situation is reinforced by the image of God – as a hypermasculine ideal – which is prevalent in normative Christian thinking. This idealised image is produced when the male theologian projects his discomfort with his own masculinity in terms of its unresolved relationship with both body and divine disembodied spirit onto God while simultaneously idealising woman so that he can see reflected in her subordination to him, his own subordination to the hypermasculine God.

Through this thesis, we will look at how this began to occur with Augustine and his conceptions of the physical realm as clearly distinguished from the disembodied God. From there, we will see how this dualistic ideal has been carried through to present times – although uncritically examined – by American Evangelicals. Finally, drawing

on the work of Karen Lebacqz, I will propose an alternative to this normative understanding of God and woman. In this alternative feminist and body oriented theology, there is an assumption of a kind of mutuality in the divine/human relationship where the characteristic inviolability of the hypermasculine God is inconsequential. The approach provided by Lebacqz's appropriate vulnerability, which I will expand and enrich, improves on the normative construction of divine human relationships so characteristic of contemporary American Evangelical Christianity by demanding self-reflection from both men and women in a way that allows God of the hook of hypermasculinity and gives women a voice in theology-making and relationships.

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## Introduction

As a result of the significant work done by Simone de Beauvoir and later feminist and body theologians, it can be seen that the normative framing of God as disembodied hypermasculinity, is defined by the systematic exclusion (or othering) of embodied human sexuality. This exclusion is identified with the female in American Evangelical theology. The result is negative attitudes toward the body, and rigid policing of male and female sexuality, as well as an inflexible control of women as a group. I propose that this gendered model of the relationship between a disembodied masculine God and embodied feminine humankind is not the fault of any specific man or male theologian, however enthusiastically they seem to adopt it. In respect of this enthusiasm – seen within Western Christian theology from Augustine to present day American Evangelical theologians such as Joshua Harris – I suggest that it is generated as much by the desire of the theologians in question to place themselves in a position of absolute subordination to God as by simple misogyny. However, of course, this model of subordination is deeply flawed by its normative male perspective. I propose that one possible alternative approach to an understanding of the divine/human and human/human relationships would be that which has been suggested by Karen Lebacqz in its assumption of the mutuality and consensuality of the divine/human relationship. It provides a more inclusive substitute – appropriate vulnerability – to the characteristic inviolability of the hypermasculine God. The approach provided by appropriate vulnerability is a vast improvement upon the normative (male) Christian relationship between God and women because it takes on a degree of self-reflection that is important because it represents a considered approach to God and relationship with the other sex where humans are on equal terms and God is not wholly disembodied and a perfect image of hypermasculinity.

Therefore the aim of this thesis is to analyse patriarchal Christianity in order to prepare for a new way of understanding the relationship between God and the material – specifically the body, women, and sex – in Western Christianity. In *The Second Sex*,<sup>1</sup> Simone deBeauvoir famously shows different ways in which man makes woman Other in relation to his subjectivity because of her association with body, mortality, and the physical world.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, following the work of Björn Krondorfer,<sup>3</sup> I aim to show that man projects his concept of masculinity onto God by idealising God as transcendent and all-powerful, and as all that man is not. This model can be shown to reflect the reality of divine/human relationships within the gendered framework of normative Christianity. It indicates that while it is true that men who adhere to patriarchal structures see women and all that is bodily as Other, these men also place themselves into a category of Otherness by projecting their hypermasculine ideals onto God.

The idea of a two-way projection onto both God and woman is important and needs to be explained a little further. When a man who is under the influence of a traditional Western Christian culture and belief system registers a sense of spiritual or emotional discomfort, instead of attempting to understand this discomfort and resolve it himself, he places (or projects) this discomfort onto either God or woman and sometimes both. In other words, if a man feels that he is inadequate in his relationship with God or is not spiritually ‘good enough,’ he projects this judgement onto God and feels himself wanting in relation to God’s ‘hypermasculinity’ or

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<sup>1</sup> Simone deBeauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans., ed. H. M. Parshley (Haemondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>3</sup> Björn Krondorfer, *Male Confessions: Intimate Revelations and the Religious Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 135.



idealised masculinity. For example, if a man feels that he is spiritually weak because he has an erection, instead of attempting to appreciate this as a positive aspect of God-given embodiment, he sees it as a negative attribute of his body which must be subordinated and denied. At the same time his negative judgement about his own body is also projected onto woman and he judges her as wanting and perhaps even guilty of producing the erection he felt unable to control.

While woman is associated purely with that which is bodily, God then is one of complete hypermasculinity who is continually and eternally hard (or phallic) and is able to control, or dominate, because of this hardness. Projected onto God, this is an ultimate good. Man, on the other hand, is not ultimately good and therefore these attributes of hardness cause man shame. This projection also affects women because when man denies his masculinity by projecting it onto God, he is emasculating himself which puts him into a position of female subordination. This process has two effects on women. First, women are completely removed from a relationship with God because only the effeminate male can relate to this hypermasculine God. Secondly, in male/female relationships, women are expected to live up to an ideal, which has been imagined by the male when he ponders his subordinate (feminine) relationship with God; that is, man expects his woman to act as he would in relation to God. This way, the man is able to partake in his understanding of the hypermasculinity of God. However, the woman is forced to take on an idealised subordinate position to the male so that the man is able to be 'god' on earth.

Following Tina Beattie, I would say then, that this hypermasculine conception of God leaves women out of the equation completely because men usurp her place.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, by taking this place in a spiritual hierarchy, men are not acknowledging female embodiment. Instead, they are laying claim to an idealised female subordination – the signatory trace of embodiment is completely wiped out. The feminine is idealised by males because of the male determination to be female in relation to a hypermasculine God, and yet women are still viewed negatively because of their association with the troubling dimension of embodiment, that constantly reminds men that they are not completely spirit(ual). Or, as Karen Armstrong notes, ‘the wish for wings is often not sufficiently imaginative and so is doomed to frustration and disillusion.’<sup>5</sup> This wish for wings is a spiritual quest, but when the spiritual ideal is not sufficiently maintained, the frustration is projected onto women and embodiment as Other.

Precedence for this connection between male dissatisfaction with his own body and projection onto women as termed by Other also comes from Mieke Bal:

Man, dissatisfied with himself, frightened of his drives and disgusted by his demanding body, found a way out by assuming that this body was very different from himself. But he knew very well that this would not work. The power of the body just would not make sense in such a structure. Therefore the perception, external and hence monolithic, of woman who in her otherness could seem more whole, posed a problem of envy. Envyng her apparent wholeness, blaming her otherness, he decided she was entirely corrupt.<sup>6</sup>

Looking at, and attempting to understand these projections, or idealised mirror images is important because, as Björn Krondorfer notes:

Mirror images can reveal something about oneself, and they might motivate a person’s introspective quest. Ultimately, though, they are insufficient, for they do not constitute a

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<sup>4</sup> Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 118.

<sup>5</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Gospel According to Women: Christianity’s Creation of the Sex War in the West* (London, Elm Tree, 1986), 147.

<sup>6</sup> Mieke Bal, ‘Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character,’ in *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*, ed. E. A. Castelli and R. C. Rodman (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 156.

strong enough Other that would make it possible to transcend one's ontological confinement while searching for a self that has not yet come to the fore. To be radically transformed, the self needs an Other more powerful than any mirror image can provide. Why? Because mirrors attract the narcissistic gaze....in which the self is not so much revealed as it is restated in the flatness of its surface....[which] does not seek depth, does not seek to be shaken in its existential grounding, but wishes to confirm itself in the present in the hope of defying aging and dying....The enigma is man, not the mirror.<sup>7</sup>

By looking at how, and under what circumstances, a number of specific Western Christian male theologians follow the process of projection already described, we will be able to observe something about these men and their own introspective quest.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that the projection, classification, or oppression, placed onto both God and women is a passive consequence of men's spiritual struggles which are fought within and against their own bodies.<sup>9</sup> In looking at this, we will not only be able to observe the mindset of these theologians. We will also be able to see how theology has and has not changed throughout Western Christian history up until the present day. By understanding this process of projection it may be possible, ultimately, to suggest a way of moving forward to a point where men are not continually narcissistically gazing at themselves via women and God, but instead are looking at themselves and the male dominated theology they have inherited in a new way that has the potential to become inclusive and honest for all.

When man projects his spiritual discomfort on God, the attributes of this hypermasculine spirit-being change depending on what the male Christian theologian does or does not wish to see

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<sup>7</sup> Krondorfer, *Male Confessions*, 31-2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Björn Krondorfer, 'Introduction,' in *Men's Bodies Men's Gods: Male Identities in a (Post-)Christian Culture*, ed. B. Krondorfer (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 7.

within himself. Specifically, we will witness how the attributes of God are built upon previous theologians' idealisations but also how the idealisations of hypermasculinity become decidedly more intense with the passage of time. For example, whereas Augustine might have seen God's foremost attribute as one of love,<sup>10</sup> by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in American Evangelical Christian belief, this God has become hypermasculine – the idealisation of a pure and disembodied masculinity. We will trace the development of this thought and discover how, with each additional emphasis on these hypermasculine characteristics of God, the value of the human (and women in particular) has become less significant and less good.

It is my claim that while Western Christianity projects upon both God and woman those things which men are unable or unwilling to embody, it is through these actions of making God and woman Other that the man is, effectively, making *himself* Other. Patriarchal duality makes it impossible for him to accept a positive male embodied state with spirituality as a natural part of being. Or, in Krondorfer's terms, it is man who is the true Other because he projects his feelings of otherness (lack of perfect spirituality and embodiment) onto God and women through mirror images. When man gazes narcissistically into the mirror of God or woman, it is his own otherness he sees. The problem is, of course, that men are able, at the same time, to perpetuate the normative view in which they are identified with God as subject who sees, and woman becomes the object (or Other).

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church Vol. III St Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, trans. A. W. Haddan, revised and annotated by W.G.T. Shedd (Grand Rapids MI: WM B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), IV. 5.7 p. 100.

To illustrate how this model works, I will be tracking normative Western Christian views of God and sex from Augustine to present day American Evangelicalism. I am specifically choosing to look at attitudes towards sex and marriage because these attitudes are indicative of how traditional Western Christian male theologians have understood their connection with body and women. In doing this, I show an association between normative male patriarchal views of God and how they relate to normative male patriarchal views of sex (and by extension, woman and body). Because it would be impossible to cover the entire 2000 year corpus of Christian thought on this subject, I will be looking at the work of specific theologians in a broadly historical perspective. The intention is to show that while Western Christian thought about God and sex have changed in some minor ways; it has largely remained stagnant throughout Western Church history and that, in particular, it continues to negatively influence American Evangelical thinking and theology.

I will begin with Augustine, the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century Christian theologian, who had much to say about sex and God and his thoughts and dualistic normative ideas are reflected in all of the subsequent theologians' discussions. From Augustine, we will move on to another highly influential figure in the history of Western theology – Martin Luther. We will move directly from Augustine to Luther, in spite of the historical distance between them, because he represents the first major shift in theology regarding marriage. Luther is also crucial to this study because of his concept of *Sola Scriptura* – the notion that the bible is the most important tool to discern the will of God, a concept which is still referred to in American Evangelical Christian thought to support ideas about sex and God. From there, we will move on to John Wesley. In Wesley's time, I argue that God's hypermasculinity becomes even more pronounced and the value, or goodness, of

humanity becomes less. The next theologian is Jonathan Edwards – possibly the most famous American theologian during the Great Awakening. Edwards is best known for his sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* and, like Wesley, his work is useful because it reflects on the God/human relationship. His work is important for this thesis in so far as it develops an influential understanding of God as wrathful rather than merciful – a critical shift in thought which continues to influence American Evangelical theology today. Although, arguably, male theologians have always been concerned about their inability to live up to their spiritual ideals, the progression through these key figures indicates an increasingly hypermasculine figure of God. Furthermore, the devaluing of the essence of humanity is fundamental because it gives evidence for the idea that God and woman as Other are projections of the patriarchal male who is, in reality, the Other – or object in relation to God, the idealised subject.

From Edwards, we will move to more contemporary theologians and, specifically, theologians who speak authoritatively in the realm of American Evangelical Christianity. First there is the missionary and preacher, Jim Elliot and his wife, Elisabeth. We will be examining them particularly because they produced writings that clearly illustrate the powerful influence of past theologians. In this way, their extremely popular books and journals give evidence for my view that a contemporary American Evangelical Christian view of sex and marriage is derived from a historical tradition of male normative ideas about God. Furthermore, looking at the work and continuing influence of the Elliots, as in many ways typical of Evangelical thought, indicates one important source of a contemporary male normativity at work in American Evangelical Christianity, making women and God Other due to discomfort with (specifically male) embodiment and spirituality. We will conclude this exploration of American Evangelical

Christians with an analysis of contemporary pastor, theologian, and author – Joshua Harris.

Harris began his road to American Evangelical Christian fame in his youth when he wrote a book about premarital sex and connected what he considered proper, in relation to sex, to the character of God. Subsequently, Harris has begun to read, study, and write Evangelical theology in a more conventional context. This provides more formal evidence of his immersion in the theology of American Evangelical Christian thought into which he comes in contact through his theological training. In particular, I am interested in the way he mirrors male normative American Evangelical Christian views about sex and marriage that relate much more to conceptions about God and how man perceives himself in relationship with this God than they actually relate to the physical act of sex.

In other words, overall, I intend to show how normative American Evangelical views of sex and marriage are related to their understanding of God and how, in this process, the projections of a culture that is normatively male force women and the body into a place of Otherness. However, before doing this, I must explain who I am talking about (American Evangelical Christians) and some of the beliefs which pertain to this study. Then I will discuss the analyses I am using to critique these views of sex and God – namely through the work of Simone deBeauvoir, Christian feminist theory, and body theology.

### **American Evangelical Christians**

While I will primarily discuss American Evangelical Christian belief in chapter 3, it is important to give a brief and preliminary description of whom I am speaking about when using the term

‘American Evangelical Christian.’<sup>11</sup> Evangelical Feminist, Pamela D.H. Cochran has defined Evangelicalism thusly:

‘*Evangelicalism*’ refers to a nondenominational coalition of conservative Christians known for its strict, or ‘literal’ interpretation of the Bible. *Evangelical* also conjures up images of right-winged politics and social conservatism, including support for ‘traditional’ gender roles.<sup>12</sup>

When Cochran describes Evangelicalism as ‘a nondenominational coalition of conservative Christians,’ she is saying that no individual fits exactly into the generic description of Evangelical. For every 100 Evangelicals who are social conservatives, there will be at least one who is a social liberal. Furthermore, while most believe in ‘traditional’ gender roles, there will be those who have been forced to accept a single parent reality. However, this is not to say that ‘traditional values’ are not the normative beliefs for the vast majority of Evangelicals or that there is not a cultural guilt imposed upon those who behave differently than the norm.

Coming from outside an Evangelical worldview, Lisa Isherwood offers another definition:

[American Evangelical Christians] amass property and wealth which they understand theologically as part of God’s plan for the faithful. They offer their congregations entertainment, security and safety and a space in which the hard questions will be suspended. Their tithing system is not only financial but also symbolic; you exchange money and an unquestioning loyalty to a white male God for stability and security.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious part of the definition of the group of people to whom I am referring is ‘American.’ In this thesis, I am specifically looking at those Evangelicals who are from, or whose beliefs were formed in the United States of America. This is a recognition that Evangelicals in other countries of the world may well be different than those in (and from) the

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<sup>11</sup> Hereafter also referred to as ‘Evangelical’ and ‘Evangelicals.’

<sup>12</sup> Pamela Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips, eds., *Post-Christian Feminism: A Critical Approach* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 3-4.



United States if for no other reason than there is a particular capitalist culture within America that influences American Evangelical Christians.

This capitalistic culture is significant because those who interpret the bible for American Evangelicals are powerfully influenced by this economic system. The capitalistic outlook can be seen in many ways. One example from a socioeconomic point of view would be that if one does not attempt to climb the socioeconomic ladder by having many bank accounts with money in them, then one will be punished economically by being unable to obtain a credit card for emergency use. A mindset rife with capitalistic style approval and punishment can be seen in much of American Evangelical interpretation of the bible. Evangelicals are to act the way they do because the bible says so and because if they do not, God will punish them. The bible says that God is a male, and perfect in anger and wrath,<sup>14</sup> and if the faithful want stability and security, they must obey – just as one obeys in a capitalistic society for the reward of stability and security.

The desire for stability and security is clearly reflected in attitudes toward the Evangelical churches – i.e. the church is there to serve me and if I do not feel safe and secure in it, I will leave and take my monetary donations with me. Equally the idea of the wrath of God, given powerful impetus by Jonathan Edwards in the mid 1700's, demands obedience as the price of spiritual security; an obedience invariably connected to the policing of the sexual. This combination of capitalistic culture underpinned by sexual policing and the idea of the

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<sup>14</sup> Joshua Harris, *Dug Down Deep: Unearthing what I believe and Why it Matters* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2010), 117.

hypermasculine God creates an understanding of marriage and sexuality that I would argue is uniquely American.

Associated with the capitalistic aspect of God and Christianity, for American Evangelicals, is a strong political element. Specifically, most American Evangelicals are attached to the right wing political issues of being against homosexual marriage and abortion, as well as advocating the death penalty because, as Isherwood notes, this bounded understanding of the world makes Evangelicals feel safe and secure. It has been my experience that many American Evangelical Christians will vote according to their patriarchal/hetero/male normative belief system which includes a belief that homosexual marriage and abortion are always wrong, and the death penalty is right.<sup>15</sup> This belief is strong for American Evangelical Christians because their chosen authorities and their interpretation of the bible dictate how they vote and this black and white understanding of the world brings safety and security to them.

Unfortunately, Evangelicals have a tendency to adhere uncritically to their chosen authorities who interpret the bible and lay down appropriate beliefs for the individual. While Evangelical authorities claim to derive that authority from the bible, which has been literally and correctly understood, this is typically absorbed without criticism of the cultural norm of hetero/patriarchal normativity or of any underpinning theology. This is the price for the safety and security of American Evangelical belief. It should also be noted that this literal interpretation of the bible

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<sup>15</sup> The best example of this that I can think of is my parents and all of their friends, acquaintances, and co-workers who are American Evangelicals. A specific example of this is the 2004 presidential election where those in this group might have had reservations about the legality, expense, and deaths resulting from the Iraq war but proceeded to vote for George W. Bush a second time because he was anti-abortion, pro-death penalty, and against homosexual marriage. This is a direct result of their American Evangelical Christian belief system, and the Christian authorities to whom they listened connected these three issues to biblical correctness, and subsequently, these three issues were more important than political leaders lying and being involved in murder.

may change depending on the person in authority (pastor, theologian, or author) who is doing the interpreting.

In this thesis, I will be using Joshua Harris as an example of Evangelical beliefs about marriage, sex, and its interpretation from ‘biblical’ and patriarchal sources. The reasons I chose Harris are twofold. First, I chose him because he has much to say about ‘proper’ sex for single people. Secondly, I chose him because he has published his theology, and in published form, he connects sexuality with adherence to the clearly hypermasculine character and will of God in a patriarchal and Evangelical fashion. Typically, his ideas on sexuality are expressed in biblical terms and Cochran clarifies why it is ‘biblical’ rather than theological when she discusses authority within the Evangelical tradition by noting that the authority is the Bible itself:

It is the Bible, unmediated through the institutional church or authoritative leaders, that direct the beliefs and actions of the believer. At the heart of the issue of scriptural authority is the trustworthiness of the source. Does the biblical text reliably reveal divine will? Is it historically accurate? Even if one finds it reliable and accurate, how does one apply it to one’s own life in contemporary America, given that it was written in very different social and historical contexts?<sup>16</sup>

Cochran goes on to note that American Evangelicals have remained exclusive in faith claims and instead of becoming inclusive and tolerant due to increasing social liberalization, or liberal biblical scholarly influence in American Evangelical society, they have closed ranks and in her view stuck their heads in the sand with a declaration that their interpretation of the bible is right and anyone who does not believe exactly as they do are wrong.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

It is this unbending belief that their interpretation of the bible is true or, as Cochran would say is trustworthy of being God's divine will, that seems to explain Isherwood's description of the Evangelical give and take for 'safety and security.' That is, if one is looking for safety and security, adhering to culturally and theologically normative values is a good way to feel safe and secure. Thus, to combine the two explanations of American Evangelical Christians by Cochran and Isherwood, I believe that a worthy description of those of whom I am speaking would be thus: at the core of an Evangelical belief system is a conviction that the Bible is a trustworthy source of understanding God's divine will, that is viewed as normatively patriarchal and hypermasculine. The Evangelical laity tends to trust both their chosen authority – the Bible and its authorised interpreter – wholeheartedly and uncritically. However, of course, with the exception of Evangelical Catholics, there is no one legitimate interpreter. Individual charismatic pastors, authors, and occasionally theologians, are variously considered authoritative and the criteria for determining this is not the amount of education, biblical, or theological training a person has had (depending on the person or denomination in question, this could actually be counted as counter indicative). Rather, a person is given authority if what they say conforms to the layperson's uncritical worldview, and if, as Isherwood would say, this makes them feel safe.

It is then not very surprising that Evangelical Christian Feminists tend similarly to be theologically and culturally uncritical. Much of their work appears to involve reinterpreting scripture to make it more female friendly. This seems problematic, because instead of attempting to tear down the walls of the patriarchal structure within Evangelical Christianity, they seem to be only interested in giving women a bit more breathing room by interpreting the bible in such a way where a woman might feel less guilt for her actions (e.g. working outside the

home) which are ultimately decided by males while keeping the suffocating structures. They seem unwilling, or unable, to work against the more immediate issue of patriarchal attitudes within the church which makes the reinterpretation of scripture pointless. Thus, it is easy to understand why the scholar Susanne Scholz notes that Evangelical Feminism is not popular in Evangelicalism and that it is little more than an attempt to heal a broken arm with a plaster.<sup>18</sup> In order to find a firmer basis on which to argue my case therefore, I will return to the analyses provided by Simone deBeauvoir, some other more robust Christian feminists, and body theology.

## **Tools of Critique**

The issue of sex and marriage in American Evangelical Christianity is diverse and challenging to understand. Therefore, no solutions to this problem can be simply black and white. It is not enough for those who would criticise the American Evangelical Christian understanding of the relationship of God to the material world of both sex and capitalist consumerism, to say that it simply reflects the static inheritance of patriarchal Christianity and therefore should be done away with. While it is possible that this understanding of God *is* to some degree a problematic consequence of patriarchal Christianity, to essentialise it in such a way helps nobody in the attempt to move beyond its negative influences. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to give due attention to the critiques of Western Christianity on which I base the subsequent chapters of this thesis in order to indicate the sense in which, without denying the seriousness of the charges against it, they help us address the kind of subtle complexities inherent within the context of contemporary American Evangelical Christianity.

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<sup>18</sup> Susanne Scholz, 'The Christian Right's Discourse on Gender and the Bible,' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 21 (Spring 2005): 83.

***Simone deBeauvoir***

One of the most important figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century feminism is Simone deBeauvoir. Beauvoir has powerfully influenced feminist thinking since 1949 and her book, *The Second Sex*,<sup>19</sup> has been very important for the feminists I am using and my thesis. Her analysis of woman as Other is an essential part of my criticism and problematisation of American Evangelical views on sex and marriage, which is why I am beginning this discussion of methodology here. It is Beauvoir's work that has helped people realise the implications of patriarchy and asks people, specifically women, to take themselves out of the marginalised spaces of patriarchal society. In this book, Beauvoir tackles the subject of femininity and discusses the pressures placed on women by men to be women.<sup>20</sup> She begins by discussing the conundrum that women are told to be feminine but they are not told what that is; rather, females are ambiguous subjects or Other.<sup>21</sup> Basically Beauvoir asks what it means to be a woman and how this social construction came about.<sup>22</sup> She poses the thesis that men represent the positive and neutral aspects of humanity whereas women represent only the negative part of humanity.<sup>23</sup> Beauvoir also introduces the concept of woman as the Other.<sup>24</sup> The Other is an analysis which maintains that throughout time, woman has become dependent on man for definition and in turn, man has defined woman as something completely other than himself. He is a subject who is capable of self-determination whereas woman is not nothing, but an Other, an object in relation to the male as subject because woman

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<sup>19</sup> Simone deBeauvoir, *The Second Sex*. trans., ed. H. M. Parshley. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

serves only to define man.<sup>25</sup> She posits that because men find women threatening and do not understand them, they are happy to passively place women into this unknowable and dangerous category.<sup>26</sup>

While Beauvoir does not regard the process of men putting woman into an Other category as an active and conscious act, she describes some of the reasons for this unconscious contextualization of women. First she suggests that women are not understood by men.<sup>27</sup> Their biology and physical functions are as foreign to men as are female thought processes and ideas.<sup>28</sup> This unconscious contextualization is reinforced by the fact that women have monthly menstrual cycles and give birth.<sup>29</sup> These states of being are associated with nature which is also characterised as unknowable, conquerable, and Other.<sup>30</sup> These classifications serve to disassociate men from that which is bodily, or 'natural' and by disassociating oneself from the Other, man is simultaneously making himself normative – which is, perhaps, the purpose for this process.

Beauvoir gleans some of her ideas from thinkers such as Aristotle and Augustine as authoritative figures for men.<sup>31</sup> She specifically reinforces the idea that the main downfall for woman is not

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 129.

that she is not male but that, rather, she is a failed male as Beauvoir claims Aristotle would say.<sup>32</sup> Beauvoir then connects this to her analysis that women are Other.<sup>33</sup> Beauvoir continues, as she gives evidence, to display the way in which man thinks women are evil, less rational, and less creative than men.<sup>34</sup> She also claims that in all of the different attributes placed upon women, the end result is that women are forced into stereotypes, marginalised, and obtain ambiguous definitions.<sup>35</sup> This is because, specifically in Christianity, woman is viewed only as a virgin, a chaste and obedient wife, or a whore.<sup>36</sup> As we will see in the next chapters, Beauvoir is not wrong in making this connection between woman as Other and these sexual stereotypes which are sustained in American Evangelical Christianity. While Beauvoir did not specifically discuss views of sex in Evangelical Christianity, these stereotypes of women have specific connotations which result in a categorization of woman as Other as well as Evangelical views of sexuality and the hypermasculinity of God (which could also be seen as a form of reflexive ‘othering’ projected by men onto God).

Beauvoir states that men have always had the power and have no desire to give any of it up to women and this is part of the reason why women are in an Other category.<sup>37</sup> This is because men crave power and therefore they must place women somewhere due to the fact that if men

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 171.



were to equate themselves with women, they would have to share the power.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, men have no desire to be rid of women, although they would not want to be a woman.<sup>39</sup> They just want to keep the power.<sup>40</sup> Paradoxically, by placing women in this Other category, women serve as a constant reminder that man is finite, but because she is Other, she also allows him to exceed his own limits.<sup>41</sup> This, of course, places women in a precarious position where she is always ambiguous and dependent on males to define her by exclusion. Woman is not simply woman. Part of her definition becomes wife and mother, or virgin, or whore.<sup>42</sup> However, even these classifications need males because titles such as mother require a male presence<sup>43</sup> since without semen or a male partner, a woman could not become a mother. This encourages further disassociation from woman on the part of the male for the reason that even in these definitions; a male must be present and the head of woman.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, this sexual relationship gives males license to conquer and possess women in sex so that they may remain powerful.<sup>45</sup>

At this point in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir associates the idea of woman with nature.<sup>46</sup> Not only does Beauvoir make reference to the idea of woman being like a field, but she also links virginity to that in nature which men want to conquer be it sea, a mountain, or any other 'virgin

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 229.

territory.<sup>47</sup> The embodied female is not a subject, rather she is a thing.<sup>48</sup> As a thing, the female can be conquered but different titles and boundaries are more easily placed upon the woman because she is an object.<sup>49</sup> That is, in a sense, because woman is no different than an unconquered land, there is no difference between a female virgin and virgin territory – the purpose of both things are to charm men.

Beauvoir also writes about the Other in relation to literature and Western society,<sup>50</sup> analysing the idealisations that frame the lives of women as they grow and mature.<sup>51</sup> She scrutinises the uncertain place of women in society as men are those who go out and earn money but they are also in charge of the house which does not allow a space for women to be or to improve herself as she deems proper.<sup>52</sup> Beauvoir concludes her work by stating what should be and how women should be able to find love and acceptance of her self as a whole person. Nevertheless, she suggests that this is not possible in the current social climate.<sup>53</sup> This is significant in the context of this thesis because while there are many American Evangelical women who work to help sustain the family, the attitude toward women has not changed in a positive sense – that is, she is still connected to unhelpful sexual stereotypes.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 513.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 665.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 612.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 707.

Beauvoir's work is important to this thesis because she allows me to establish a connection between a patriarchal view of sexuality and American Evangelical views of sex and marriage. In other words, she problematises the issue of sex because it is not simply about sex. Instead, it is about the Otherness of woman and her place (or lack thereof) in American Evangelical culture. In the next chapters, I will show how the sexual stereotypes of women have been detrimental to Christian women of the past as well as American Evangelical women of the present. Beauvoir's analysis of woman as Other is also helpful to this thesis because she allows us to connect man's understanding of God to a different but connected form of Otherness. Paradoxically, man desires, and succeeds in becoming, Other in relation to an all-powerful and hypermasculine God which is, in reality, nothing more than an all-powerful and hypermasculine image of himself. This is where the problematisation of American Evangelical views of sex begins – with an attempt to understand how the men within this sect comprehend God. Using Beauvoir's analysis is important because without this template of woman as Other, it would be very difficult to begin to understand the paradoxical American Evangelical male view of God. Furthermore, Beauvoir's analysis helps explain why patriarchy has influenced Western Christianity as it has. It will be particularly useful as I explore the reasons why sex practices that do not conform to normative patriarchal expectations are demonised in American Evangelical Christianity.

### ***Second Wave Feminism***

We will now look at how Christian feminists of the second wave analyse the burden placed on women by Western Christianity and also at what they continue to value within the tradition. This will help give us a sense of why the issues surrounding sex are important for American Evangelical Christians as well as why they should be re-examined.

Many feminists would grow to love, critique, or otherwise build upon Beauvoir's analysis. Luce Irigaray is one example, drawing on Beauvoir's ideas while also updating her thinking.<sup>54</sup> One primary thought in Irigaray's writing is '...not what Simone de Beauvoir said: one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (through culture), but rather: I am born a woman, but I must still become this woman that I am by nature.'<sup>55</sup> This understanding of women which I develop in my thesis is important because I also want to say that women are different from men but, while being a female is a biological state of being, becoming a woman is something that is developed culturally. Due to the combination of biological and cultural development of what it means to be a woman, this thesis becomes important because, while it primarily focuses on how men relate to God and to women, these normative male relationships dictate how Christian women interpret culturally (i.e. American Evangelical Christian culture) appropriate ways of understanding themselves and God. This work must be done by looking at normative Christian male concepts of women and God because historically, it has been males who have written down that which has been (and become) theologically significant. Thus, while women might have begun to have a theological voice in the recent past, as we will see even in the work of Karen Lebacqz, this voice has been strongly influenced by normative Christian male ideals of what it means to be a woman, who God is, and how one is to interact with God and the opposite sex.

The fact that woman's cultural identity has been framed by normative male ideals not only makes it difficult for women to expand their understanding of themselves, but it is also based in an idealised image of what a man thinks a woman should be. This predicament has been

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<sup>54</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

examined extensively since the second wave feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Tina Beattie. Not only does Irigaray show how the definition of woman is both biologically and culturally determined, but upon examination of this cultural influence, Irigaray shows the reason for this confusion, or lack of understanding between genders, when she notes:

Thus man and woman, woman and man are always meeting as though for the first time because they cannot be substituted one for the other. I will never be in a man's place, never will a man be in mine. Whatever identifications are possible, one will never exactly occupy the place of the other they are irreducible one to the other.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, even if the creators of normative male concepts of woman did desire to understand how a woman understands herself, this would be impossible because a man can never be in a woman's place – and will never be able to fully understand the reality of a woman. Therefore, whether purposefully or not, the woman is always an Other to man's subjectivity – be it evident through cultural demands placed upon woman, sexual restrictions, or normative male ideals of what it is that a woman should be. Regardless of how the Other is perceived, Irigaray claims that this differentiation always begins in the arena of sexuality.

Who or what the other is, I never know. But the other who is forever unknowable is the one who differs from me sexually. This feeling of surprise, astonishment, and wonder in the face of the unknowable ought to be returned to its locus: that of sexual difference. The passions have either been repressed, stifled, or reduced, or reserved for God. But it is never found to reside in this locus: between man and woman. Into this place come attraction, greed, possession, consummation, disgust, and so on. But not that wonder which beholds what it sees always as if for the first time, never taking hold of the other as its object. It does not try to seize, possess, or reduce this object, but leaves it subjective, still free.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, as Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverly Clack note: 'once the masculine has been raised to the universal human, beyond gender, the feminine alone must bear the burden of sexual

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<sup>56</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans., C. Burk and G. C. Gill (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 13.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

difference.<sup>58</sup> This is the reason why this thesis is looking at Christian normative ideas of woman *and* sex – because as long as the male is normative, it will be impossible to disassociate woman from sexuality. It will thus follow that when looking at issues surrounding sex, the findings will similarly apply to the concept of woman – and vice versa.

When women did begin to gain a voice in the American Evangelical Church, there was much discovered about what it means to be woman, how a woman might define herself beyond Other, and how the normative male concept of woman relates to his understanding of God. For example, Irigaray notes that:

one sex is not entirely consumable by the other. There is always a remainder. Up until now this remainder has been entrusted to or reserved for God. Sometimes a portion was incarnated in the child, or was thought of as being neuter.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, although traditionally, the entirety of female definition has been dependent on the normative male, woman has still been present if in no other form than as something for man to focus his idealisations of what it means to be feminine and then copy in relationship with a hypermasculine God. This has detrimental effects upon woman because ‘God is being used by men to oppress women and that, therefore, God must be questioned and not simply neutered in the current pseudoliberal way.’<sup>60</sup> So, when women in second wave feminism began to examine the relationship between normative male understandings of God and women, these feminists found that instead of disappearing into the Other, woman was either neutered or her attributes were, paradoxically, given to a hypermasculine God. One example of this transference of attributes is God’s care and concern for His children in

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<sup>58</sup> Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverly Clack, eds., *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings* (London: Routledge, 2004), 6.

<sup>59</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 14.

<sup>60</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans., Gillian C. Gill (New York: NYU Press, 1993), v.

Isaiah 49:15 ‘Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may not forget. Yet I will not forget you.’<sup>61</sup> This neutering attribute, traditionally associated with mothers, is transferred to God after His wrath is appeased – a traditionally male attribute.<sup>62</sup>

Not only were women, paradoxically, neutered when their positive attributes were placed upon God, but for women, these positive attributes were then replaced with ‘evil’ and absolute characteristics such as one of pure sensuality. When this occurred, according to Karen Armstrong,

The devil gradually emerges as God’s shadow, the evil that we know exists but for which God refuses responsibility. This means that we cannot accept the evil in ourselves....The Christian creation of the Devil in fact makes Evil absolute. Sexuality was one of the ‘evils’ that Christian men could not accept and so they repressed it and projected it on women, who became unnaturally sexual in the Christian imagination.<sup>63</sup>

This is how many normative Christian males understand women – as an embodiment of all that is dangerous. However, in her work on Hans von Balthasar, Tina Beattie shows that while normative male ideals do tend to either neuter or reattribute characteristics of women, in normative male Christian theology, the woman is also absolutely necessary even if those who hold these normative views do not realise this to be the case:

For Balthasar and the new Catholic Feminists do not eliminate women from creation: they eliminate man, and that is where the real issue lies. Balthasar’s woman is ‘by nature, a being that exists for/by another’, who ‘may just as well not be as be’, because while ‘woman’ has a role to play in this drama, her body is quite redundant to the performance, which is really ‘his’. Thus we must turn this argument on its head, in order to see that Balthasar’s theology does indeed posit a thoroughly sexed creation: a feminine creation,

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<sup>61</sup> New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), 713.; Julia Kristeva and Arthur Goldhammer, ‘The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic’ in *Poetics Today* 6 (1985), 135.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Armstrong, *The Gospel According to Woman*, 93.

with the only masculine presence being the priest who represents the divinity of Christ, and therefore of God the Father as the (masculine) origin and source of life. Except that Balthasar forgets himself, and scripts the male subject into his theology at every turn.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, following Beattie if, by turning woman into an Other, man is eliminating his masculinity from his relationship with God, the question becomes why does he do this – even if it is unknowing. We have already discovered that woman's identity is framed by biology and a normative male culture where the definition of what it means to be a woman is expressed solely by the normative male. We have discovered that in doing this, males have often neutered women, given God the attributes taken away from women, and then demonised women as entirely sexual (or embodied). However, if, as Beattie claims, it is not woman who is neutered and eliminated but the man's distinctive masculinity – and subsequently this elimination is mirrored onto woman, the question must become why this occurs. The majority of this thesis will be looking at this question, but Beattie definitely aids an answer because it is through an idealised image of woman that man is able to relate to God.

Only with Eve can he [Adam] become who he is not – woman, bride, feminine other to the masculine God. Thus the male cannot have a priority in creation, for there are no men in the incarnation – a flickering presence, almost effaced in the 'quasi-feminine' Jesus and entirely poured out on the cross when, once again, the woman appears as 'his' fullness, 'his' body....She is his [man's] fulfilment and completion because only she allows him to know who he is in relation to God, i.e. he is not-God, and because she is not-man, and God is masculine, he must become 'she' in order to remind himself that he is not-God.<sup>65</sup>

In expressing this conundrum Beattie is getting to the heart of the problem. Man must have woman because she is able to show man how to be the feminine aspect in relation to a male God. However, returning to Irigaray, we know that this description of femininity is not created by women. Rather, it is ascribed to women by a normative male culture. In short, man views

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<sup>64</sup> Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 114.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115.



women in conformity with his own desire to act as the idealised feminine in relation to a hypermasculine God. This has profound implications for women, men and the normative male idea of God. All of these concepts of Otherness, male and female become fluid ideals which can be readily taken from one character and given to another. For example, the traditional characteristic of a hypermasculine God can be mirrored by a man when he is relating to a woman. Similarly, a hyper submissive so-called feminine characteristic can be mirrored when he is relating to the hypermasculine God. And finally, when that normative male is feeling in need of love and support, the traditionally feminine characteristic of tenderness and love can be transferred onto God who will then feel that for the man.

While this may be confusing to the outsider, it is also dangerous for those within the normative belief system. This is because if the ideals of man, woman, and God are fluid and to a degree interchangeable, then it is *only* the individual normative male who is really able to understand who they are at any given time or in any given context. Furthermore, in creating an idealisation of woman so that the male can feel good in relation to a hypermasculine God, not only is woman an ideal conjured from the mind (and whims) of a man, but it would then follow that so is God. With this in mind, we will now turn our attention to the somewhat controversial post-Christian feminist – Mary Daly and her understanding of the God/female in relation to the normative male.

### ***Mary Daly***

In 1968, Mary Daly wrote *The Church and the Second Sex*.<sup>66</sup> In this work, Daly's focus makes explicit connections between Beauvoir's work, *The Second Sex*, and the Church. While Daly

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<sup>66</sup> Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1985 [1968].

uses the Catholic Church as her example,<sup>67</sup> much of it is still relevant as a base line for our study of American Evangelicals and sexuality because Daly points out different problems of patriarchy within Christianity which are relevant for both Evangelicals and Catholics.

The first helpful point that Daly makes is a correlation between the stereotypes of virgin, chaste wife and mother, and/or whore which Christian women are forced into.<sup>68</sup>

So effectively has the conservative pressure and propaganda been, that this idealizing ideology is accepted and perpetuated not only by countless members of the clergy, but indeed by many women. Fascinated by an exalted symbol of 'Woman', they are not disposed to understand the distress imposed upon countless real, existing women.<sup>69</sup>

Here, Daly is specifically referencing Catholic canon law where only men are allowed to be clergy and is also discussing the veneration of Mary.<sup>70</sup> However, as we will see throughout the progression of Evangelical dogma, the effect is the same even if Mary is not specifically venerated and women are 'allowed' to speak with authority in some Evangelical Churches. This is because; as Daly points out and we noted above in looking at Beauvoir, there are still very specific roles for women that are perpetuated by the American Evangelical Church and many women who are not 'disposed' to challenge them. Arguably, this is because within American Evangelical Christianity, women have a feeling of safety and security within these roles, and therefore these women do not challenge the roles even though they may become unmanageable and inappropriate. The main difference between Daly's critique of Catholicism and Evangelicals is that veneration in the Catholic Church is reserved for Mary whereas American Evangelical

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

women are, perhaps, put into an even more precarious position than their Catholic sisters because American Evangelical women do not even have the ambivalent model of the venerated woman (Mary) to follow. Thus, an Evangelical female role perhaps lends to feelings of the safety and security which we discussed with Isherwood above because while the role might be uncomfortable, the woman can feel safe and secure in the uncritical knowledge that if she remains a virgin until marriage and then becomes a ‘good’ wife and mother, she is fulfilling her duty to God and her husband. However, these are also idealised roles because it is impossible to be a perfect virgin, wife, or mother. We will be discussing this in much more detail when we look at a present-day popular pastor and theologian, Joshua Harris.<sup>71</sup>

The second substantial connection that Daly makes between Beauvoir’s work and Western Christianity is the relationship between women, transcendence, and immanence.<sup>72</sup> In doing this, Daly reminds the reader of Beauvoir’s claim that patriarchal Christianity has diverted ‘...woman’s attention to bright rewards in a future life, Christianity creates the delusion of equality already attained.’<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, by focusing on the afterlife, Christianity has duped woman into believing that she is ‘no longer denied transcendence, since she is to consecrate her immanence to God...’<sup>74</sup> Thus, by encouraging a focus on the afterlife instead of the present, Evangelical Christianity has told women that they will attain equality with men in the future afterlife and therefore, they should not even look at why this is not attainable in the present because she will be transcendent, and thus Godlike, in the future. However, this ‘equality’ is, in

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<sup>71</sup> C.f. pp. 118 ff.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

reality, unequal because woman is not accepted in and of herself as a man is – and Evangelical women have been tricked into believing that this does not matter on earth because equality will become a reality in heaven.<sup>75</sup> From this arise many questions about sexuality because by attaching one's worth to soul-saving and the afterlife, one is simultaneously denying the present, the earthly, and the bodily. As will be pointed out, this duality can be seen from Augustine in 5<sup>th</sup> century Africa to 21<sup>st</sup> century America and everywhere in-between. While the effects of this duality will change through time, the focus away from body and sexuality and toward the afterlife has many implications upon both women and sexuality.

Daly – with reference to Beauvoir – hammers home the same point. Drawing on Gertrude von le Fort's work<sup>76</sup> on the Eternal Woman more fully to illustrate the idea of woman as Other within Western Christianity, Daly describes le Fort as being opposed to any idea of a '...developing, authentic person, who will be unique, self-critical, self-creating, active and searching.' The Eternal Woman:

...is said to have a vocation to surrender and hiddenness; hence the symbol of the veil. Self-less, she achieves not individual realization but merely generic fulfilment in motherhood, physical or spiritual (the wife is always a 'mother to her husband' as well as to her children). She is said to be timeless and conservative by nature. She is shrouded in 'mystery', because she is not recognized as a genuine human person.<sup>77</sup>

Here, Daly not only points to the disastrous effect of identifying women with motherhood, but she also shows that when Christians do this, they are ascribing very specific earthly, or material, characteristics to motherhood that correlate with the idea that women should be focused on equality in heaven rather than in the here and now, in two very tangible ways. First, whenever a

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Gertrud von le Fort, *The Eternal Woman*, trans. Placid Jordan (Milwaukee: Bruce), 1962.

<sup>77</sup> Daly, *Church and the Second Sex*, 149.

traditional theologian assumes that women can only be seen as a type of virgin, wife, mother, or whore, he (sic.) is reinforcing the values of his patriarchal inheritance according to which, women are to be valued as less than man, Other, apart from himself, and a mystery – which, of course, is why equality on earth is not possible. Secondly, by analysing these characteristics in terms of the idea of woman as Other in the Church, we can see clearly why negative views of sex are rife within the Churches – both Evangelical and Catholic. The characteristics of le Fort’s ‘Eternal Woman,’ or woman as Other, in Christianity are echoed strongly throughout my own research into American Evangelicals and by discussing the situation of male normativity and how this limits women, I hope to focus attention on the absolute consequences of patriarchal views on sexuality and the physical. Specifically, when one views sex in a negative way, or from the viewpoint of patriarchy, it is women who suffer. They suffer because of their identification with sex; and because they are classified only by whether or not they have had sex, or how much sex they have had.

However, I am unable to agree with Daly on much more, because, in my view, she takes the symbol of ‘God as great patriarch’<sup>78</sup> in an unhelpful direction. Daly notes that:

The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fulfilling...the images and values of a given society have been projected into the realm of dogmas and ‘Articles of Faith,’ and these in turn justify the social structures which have given rise to them and which sustain their plausibility.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (London: The Women’s Press Ltd., 1973 [1986]), 13.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

My issue with Daly here is not that she is wrong. Indeed, it may be true that the patriarchal image of God is unhelpful to women – and in the next chapters, I will show how specific patriarchal beliefs in God influence societal beliefs about the proper role of women and vice versa. However, in my own view, in laying all the blame on a male patriarchal view of God, Daly is being far too simplistic.

As I have begun to explain in this introduction, I maintain that the Evangelical view of God is more complex than Daly indicates. Instead of simply blaming men for their view of God and stating that a hetero-normative culture has determined both man's view of God and his view of man's place in culture, I would expand Beauvoir's analysis of Other in relation to male subjectivity to problematise American Evangelical views of God, men, and women. I maintain that man's view of God is not simply one of an almighty patriarchal father figure. Instead, I argue that while patriarchy has influenced the male view of God; it is also significantly influenced by the individual male's view of himself. That is, instead of relying on theological tradition or the Church for an understanding of God, each individual American Evangelical male passively looks inward, toward himself, and projects his spiritual wants and desires onto God.<sup>80</sup> Regardless of American Evangelical claims about the special revelation of God through the Bible, this understanding of God (or interpretation of the Bible) is, in fact, nothing more than a kind of idealised image of the individual male. Thus, if the individual male in question believes that he, the man, should be a great lover to his wife, a strict authoritarian figure to his children, and an all-knowing mentor to his friends; then this is reflected in his understanding of God – and the more he fails in his attempt to live this ideal, the more these attributes are mirrored, idealised,

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<sup>80</sup> Harris, *Dug Down Deep*, 175.

and identified with God. As we will see in this thesis, each theologian examined has specific concerns regarding themselves, and these concerns are mirrored in their understanding of God. What connects all these different perspectives, however, is a similar understanding of the hypermasculinity of God – which is ultimately nothing more than a projection onto God of the values they wish to see in themselves, but are unable to live up to. In sum, God appears to be nothing more than a male idealisation with hypermasculine male attributes.

In this thesis we are unwilling to simply blame Christian males for adhering to archaic patriarchal values that are, arguably, contained within Christianity (which seems to be the view of Daly). Instead, we will take the view that American Evangelical males reflect aspects of Beauvoir's analysis that they do not fully understand because the archaic patriarchal values dictate that it is only women who belong to the category of Other. If we are capable of problematising the way that Evangelical Christian men view themselves in this fashion, we will be able to understand that the problem is not just with Christianity. Instead, the difficulty is that many men in the American Evangelical Church – or perhaps in Christian Churches more generally – lack a sufficiently self-conscious understanding of themselves; a lack of understanding that has consequences for women. If, as I will argue, one accepts this premise, then the question becomes: how do American Evangelical Christians begin to understand themselves – be they women or men – and how can this positively influence Evangelical Christian views of God and the self? And, of course, how would this impact on American Evangelical Christian views of marriage and sex? In my view, alongside the application of a critical feminist analysis such as Beauvoir initiated, body theology can also provide useful tools to aid us in answering these questions.

## ***Body Theology***

Lisa Isherwood and Elisabeth Stuart note that most secular, and many Christian, feminists believe that the body is the site of patriarchal oppression;<sup>81</sup> and therefore human embodiment and the material conditions of human existence, closely associated with women and the female, are viewed negatively. However, the body does not have to be understood solely in this way.

Isherwood and Stuart define body theology to show a positive connection with Christian feminism:

...as Christian feminist liberation theologians we agree upon and have at the heart of our theology: 1. Incarnation, by which we mean that which we call divine, is redeeming present in and between people and nature. This incarnational nature of reality is revealed most fully in the person of Jesus. 2. Sin and redemption are not just metaphysical realities but lived in the here and now in the real lives of people. 3. Women's experience is not only important but central to the creation of theology. This experience is sited in the body which includes the mind.<sup>82</sup>

For the purposes of this study, the first portion of the above quotation is the most important.

Central to a positive theology of the body, is a belief that God is continually incarnated in humanity. It is through the body that humans are able to recognise and be in relationship with God, and while God has been revealed most fully in Jesus, every human partakes in the incarnation. This understanding of the incarnation necessitates a belief that the body is good in both essence and reality. Furthermore, as James Nelson notes, a theology of sexuality is important because it is strongly implicated in any belief in the incarnation.<sup>83</sup> As we will discover in chapter 4, a proper understanding of the sexualized body is essential to a balanced understanding of God. It is from the foundation of a positive body theology where I will be

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<sup>81</sup> Lisa Isherwood and Elisabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>83</sup> James Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 236.



critiquing Evangelical concepts surrounding sex and how it is influenced by the way in which one understands God.

Within my work, I have found American Evangelicals to be deeply ambivalent about women and the body. While the Feminist analyses discussed above will aid an understanding of how this ambivalence has affected women in Western Christian culture for the past 2000 years, body theology will help us as we investigate how this ambivalence has affected attitudes and larger issues surrounding the body and all that is material. I would argue that problems relating to sex, including the role of women, as well as views of God which are problematic within Evangelical Christianity stem from this ambivalence about the body – particularly the male body. As we will see, Augustine provides one key illustration of this. While he claims that women and the body are good because God created both; he also comes from a misogynistic and patriarchal society that reinforces the belief that the body and women are of less value than the spirit and men. Sometimes these influences imply that women are actually evil because of their association with the body.<sup>84</sup> I see Augustine, and arguably the majority of Western Christianity after him, trying to deal with these two disparate ideas that do not make them misogynistic, but definitely suggests ambivalence about women and the body. Therefore, I am using body theology to help determine what it is that Western Christianity is ambivalent about. However, body theology also offers an analysis and the good news that a Christian theology can embrace the body and bodily incarnation as good. I will also argue that Augustine and many of those who follow him are unable to accept the goodness of the body in a wholehearted manner. This contrast is important in my work because, while it is different from more traditional Christian theology due to the fact

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<sup>84</sup> C.f. 2 Chapter (pp. 73ff) for more detail.

that it is blatantly positive about the body, it does give an explanation of, and offers a possible solution to, this ambivalence.

Isherwood and Stuart give insight into the basic tenants of body theology and succeed in explaining how Western Christianity has devalued the body in its theology.<sup>85</sup> Isherwood and Stuart claim that the body is the key site of experience of God and that this should be encouraged rather than rejected by Christianity.

The body is far more expansive and inclusive. By focusing on experience the body becomes the site of personal redemption and redemptive interdependence. A reality that is not in any way new or against the teaching of Jesus but rather revives a process that has been crushed under the weight of patriarchal power.<sup>86</sup>

This work has confirmed my view that traditional Western Christian theologians are ambivalent about women and their status in relation to God; an ambivalence that relates to the whole body and in many cases, is placed upon women because they are perceived as being more closely associated with their bodies than men. For example, in her book, *The Fat Jesus*, Isherwood gives valuable insight into body theology as she draws on Mary Douglas's concept of taboo and the margins to show how women continue to be associated with body taboos in Evangelical Christianity.<sup>87</sup> Referring to issues regarding the body that are prevalent in Evangelical Christianity, her work has allowed me to develop thoughts relating to the ways in which Christianity encourages hatred of the body. By using Douglas's idea that marginal spaces are weak spots in the power system, Isherwood claims that normative males, who have negative attitudes toward the body, place women in these marginal spaces.

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<sup>85</sup> Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology*, 15.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>87</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002).

For example, such men may tell women that there is something wrong with them because they are not physically as strong as a man.<sup>88</sup> If the body is thus marginalised within traditional Christianity, it becomes an avenue of hating the self, and specifically so for women who are so closely associated with it. In other words, women are forced to associate the guilt Western Christianity helps to generate with their bodies, and in this way to reinforce the female form as bad and sinful. Body theological analysis also aids our query into sex and marriage, because if the body is hateful, or if someone feels disassociated from it, then they will also be suspicious of the pleasures that come from the body – such as sex – and want to police them in some way. Furthermore, the body theological idea that women are taught to distrust their own bodies, helps us to explain why women are so often defined in terms of the specifically sexual categories that Beauvoir and Daly so clearly noted: virgin, chaste wife and mother, or whore.

If Isherwood and Stuart are important body theologians because they offer a female perspective on the body, James Nelson is similarly useful because he is able to expand their feminist analysis by taking a male perspective on the body into account. His theology is important because it is written to encourage men to review or revisit their own embodiment and be willing to experience God through the body.<sup>89</sup> Nelson also analyses the notion of gender and its connection to God – specifically the phallic and flaccid conceptions of God.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>89</sup> James Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/JohnKnox Press, 1992), 196; and *Sexuality & the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection* (Louisville: Westminster/JohnKnox Press, 1992), 19.

<sup>90</sup> Nelson, *Body Theology*, 196.

For example, Nelson recognises the apprehension surrounding male sexuality when he states: ‘The body, especially in its sexual dimension, often evokes anxieties about mortality, loss of control, contamination, uncleanliness, personal inadequacy, and a host of other fears. Thus we sorely need body theologies that will illuminate [male] experience.’<sup>91</sup> But Nelson does more than express male anxiety around the subject of sexuality. He also shows how this anxiety can be resolved and positively used when considering a relationship with God.

Incarnation proclaims that the most basic and decisive experience of God comes not in abstract doctrine or mystical otherworldly experience, but in flesh...Then the fleshy experience of each of us becomes vitally important to our experience of God. Then the fully physical, sweating, lubricating, menstruating, ejaculating, urinating, defecating bodies that we are – in sickness and in health – are the central vehicles of God’s embodiment in our experience.<sup>92</sup>

Thus Nelson does not finish his analysis of the male/God relationship with male anxiety regarding sexuality – which feeds into a normative male Christian understanding of the male/female and male/God hierarchies. Instead of continuing to normalise this belief, he shows how, when a male understands and accepts the fact of embodiment, he is then able to renew his understanding of who God is and how he can be in relationship with that God – by encouraging his own embodiment rather than fighting against it. By normalising embodiment and boldly stating that all experience is bodily and all that is bodily is sexual, Nelson forces the reader to re-examine their own relationship with body and with God. This is profoundly significant for this thesis as we combine it with another approach to the problems of normative male experience relating to God and women; appropriate vulnerability. To this we will now turn.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 31.

## Appropriate Vulnerability

Before moving on to the actual work of this thesis, it is important to note – at least in its broad outline - the theological alternative I will propose to the normative patriarchal, body and woman hating, theology of sexuality. It is important to introduce here because it should be kept in mind, throughout, that there is an alternative to the patriarchal Christian views presented here. This more positive model for exchange regarding the patriarchal model of how males relate to God and women, then, can be drawn out of the work of Karen Lebacqz – an American feminist bio-ethicist. Her work on ‘Appropriate Vulnerability’<sup>93</sup> provides an alternative to the kind of teaching on sexuality and marriage that is prevalent throughout Evangelical circles. In her work, Lebacqz notes that neither the conventional teaching in Evangelical Christianity of celibacy until marriage or the ‘free love’ of the 60’s era, have been particularly helpful.<sup>94</sup> The aim of her work is to ‘construct a positive Christian sexual ethic for single people.’<sup>95</sup> Lebacqz accepts that in Christianity, the body should be seen as positive, and that, within a Christian context, sexuality has often been understood as ‘good’ so far as it has been used for procreation and union.<sup>96</sup> However, she also notes that sexuality is also concerned with vulnerability<sup>97</sup>

Lebacqz goes on to indicate that appropriate vulnerability need not be confined to marriage, rather, she creates a ‘principle of proportionality’ for all people – married or not.<sup>98</sup> In this, she notes that the marriage boundary does not necessarily create a fence where one will not be

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<sup>93</sup> Karen Lebacqz, ‘Appropriate Vulnerability,’ in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, J. B. Nelson and S. P. Longfellow, eds., (London: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 256-261.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 256-7.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

abused for their trust, and therefore, everybody should give away their vulnerability in proportion to its appropriateness.<sup>99</sup> In doing this, Lebacqz creates a space to move beyond a patriarchal and traditional Christian definition of the boundaries of sex and by extension the body and a normative male definition of woman. This requires the individual to think for themselves and move from rigid boundaries of right and wrong toward a more responsible view of sexuality, body, and woman.

This is where I would like to end my thesis – moving beyond a patriarchal definition of appropriate sexuality, body and woman because by doing this, I will be showing how males can accept an embodied state free from some of the painful ambivalence that leads to masculinist and patriarchal definitions of ‘God’ and ‘woman’ that are based upon the need for exclusively defined categories of identity. Augustine *et al* and their views on sexuality provide examples of the rigidity of such black and white views. The fact that, while Augustine thinks celibacy is best, he continues to have nocturnal emissions, exemplifies how uncritical such a disembodied view of sexuality can be.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, while the status of marriage has been revised from the time of Augustine, ideas about sex, body and woman, have not advanced noticeably in all contexts. In the framework identified within this thesis then, appropriate vulnerability has something important to offer since, when women and men seek to go beyond traditional Christianity’s definitions of prescribed roles, they will also be able to be truly vulnerable because they will be looking to see who they are for themselves beyond the stereotypes. In the context identified

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 260-1.

<sup>100</sup> Beverly Clack, ‘Beyond Reason: Toward a Post-Christian Philosophy of Religion,’ in *Post-Christian Feminism*, eds. L. Isherwood and P. McPhillips (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 19.

within this thesis then, appropriate vulnerability has something important to offer. It suggests a new way of addressing the evident anxiety that traditional theologians face with the ambiguity of their masculinity.

Appropriate vulnerability allows for a re-evaluation of one's definition of oneself and one's relationship with God and others because being appropriately vulnerable has as much to do with one's relationship with God as it does with other people. Therefore, if one moves beyond a hypermasculine view of God, then one will be able to see that the importance of the marriage ritual, or the supposed failings of unsanctioned sex, is not when the sex takes place; rather, it is the appropriateness of the vulnerability being given at a specific time. As Beverly Clack has noted,<sup>101</sup> for Augustine, the danger of erection (and sexuality) is that it threatens the image of God within him. What he can not see is that an appropriate vulnerability – in the sense defined by Lebacqz and expanded upon in chapter 4 of this thesis – can inform an understanding of the self in relation to God.

I will argue then, that for Evangelicals truly to understand themselves and God, they need this more appropriate understanding of sexuality (and theology). In doing so, they may come to realise that the black and white boundaries surrounding a patriarchal view of sexuality are less than helpful. This is because while these clear boundaries may make one feel safe and secure in their understanding of right and wrong, it is dangerous for those Christians who are trying to live in the world with the complex realities of relationships between the spiritual and the physical (including a relationship with God and other people), but not of it. This is because a simplistic,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

patriarchal binary – body/spirit or material/spiritual – does not address the complexities of life when including women and the feminine due to the fact that Evangelical Christians are attempting to transcend the world that they live in. This is a precarious position because these simplistic and dualistic beliefs with which they associate themselves are uncritically examined and impossible for both men and women to contribute to fully.

## **Conclusion**

Although I am critiquing Evangelical views of sex and its relation to God as normatively male, I aim to show how this model is unhelpful for both men and women. Evangelical perspectives on the role of women, but also on sexual ethics and the significance of the body more broadly are determined by a particular Evangelical theology which is formed by this hetero-normative model. As will be seen through the work of our chosen theologians, this theology advocates a hierarchal view of a hypermasculine and wrathful God; and it will be argued that the various theologies produced are not about God so much as they are about the individual male theologian who devised it. This theology is flawed. It was flawed when Augustine argued that celibacy was better than marriage, and it has not been aided with the passing of time.

If the model which has been in place takes into account only a patriarchal normative view of God, woman, body, and sex, the question then becomes whether or not there is a viable alternative which will positively affect understandings of the attributes of God and the material. That is, is it possible to have a similar approach to a relationship with God as one has with other people? Once I have shown that the church has been sceptical of sex and the whole of the material realm from Augustine through to American Evangelicals of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and have revealed why male centred attitudes of God are dangerous for attitudes toward sexuality and the



body, I intend to ask what happens when Christians reject patriarchy. What does the material look like and what does a relationship with God look like in this new context?

By problematising understandings of God, body, and woman in such a way, I intend to show that these theologians have unconsciously projected negatively onto both God and woman, but the problem is not God or woman. The problem is that these theologians, and particularly present day American Evangelical Christian theologians, are unable to combat the patriarchal duality which they have inherited and therefore they are not comfortable being both spiritual and fleshy. The result is untenable restrictions on women, the body, sexuality, and God.

## Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to trace the pathway of the hypermasculine God of Western Christianity and relate it to the negative views of sex and the body that are found in the works of Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. I have chosen these theological figures because they have all so evidently contributed to the normatively male theological views observable in American Evangelical theology today. For example, Augustine's views of God and the relationship that is appropriate to have with God; Luther's promotion of marriage; Wesley's emphasis on personal salvation; and Edwards's damnation of the flesh can all be traced through Western Christianity and can be shown to have significantly impacted on American Evangelical beliefs about God, women, and the body. Through this work, we will see how patriarchal views of God, sex, woman, and the body influence Augustine and how these negative patriarchal attitudes have been maintained throughout Western Christianity down to the present, via Lutheran and Wesleyan theology as well as in the theology of the Great Awakening in America. By putting these normative views into historical and theological context, we can begin to understand why these arguably flawed views have continued to exert such a strong influence over Evangelical theology.

Looking at the 4th-5th century theologian, Augustine and his views of God, salvation, and the will is an important first step because, as we will see, the patriarchy of the classical world that influences his writing has and, partly through that work, continues to be very influential. From there, we will move on to the powerful impact of 16th century German Reformer, Martin Luther who arguably promotes marriage but does little to promote or valorise sex and the body beyond reproduction. I will show how Augustine's legitimisation of certain patriarchal threads continues

with Luther and is consistent with his work. I am choosing to move straight from Augustine to Luther because while Augustine believes that celibacy is best for everyone, Luther creates a major change in Western Christianity, arguing marriage is best for everyone and celibacy is not good. This shift had considerable ramifications for women and gender roles for those who participate in the Reformation – although there are few positive implications for sex or the body. Furthermore, through Luther's work, one can see significant modification of belief regarding God, salvation, the will, and the body. While I could spend an entire thesis looking at differences between the Reformers, I am choosing to skip all but Luther because he pioneers some important theological changes that are consonant with the ways in which American Evangelicals now understand salvation and marriage.

From Luther I will move to the important 18th century English theologian, John Wesley who, like Luther, believes in Justification through Faith alone. Unlike Luther, Wesley does not concentrate on specific sins (such as illicit sex). Instead, Wesley draws attention to the issue of personal holiness where we can continue to discern a patriarchal focus on the hypermasculinity of God, and a lack of concern for the body. Wesley is interested in the mercy of God, but in highlighting this aspect of God, he also diminishes the goodness of embodied humanity.

After looking at Wesley, we will move to Wesley's American contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, who, during the Great Awakening in the United States downgrades the goodness of humanity still further by focusing on the wrath of God. In other words, we will see how the move across the Atlantic is accompanied by a change in theology about God whereby God becomes more

angry and wrathful and in consequence of this focus on one specific attribute of God; encourages an even less positive view of the body and human nature.

## Augustine

Augustine was born November 13, 354 CE and died August 13, 430 CE.<sup>102</sup> Although he was born in Thagaste,<sup>103</sup> he was a Roman citizen. Through a pagan education, Augustine gains an appreciation for neo-Platonism. This is where he acquires much of his admiration for Greek and Roman culture and ideals which influence his theological writings; for example, Augustine credits Plotinus with ‘edifying words on God and the nature of soul from which he had benefited.’<sup>104</sup>

Neo-Platonic thought is extremely dualistic and hierarchical in nature;<sup>105</sup> God is the clear head and man is the servant.<sup>106</sup> God is the supreme good and everything that is corruptible and mutable – the whole material world, for example – is lower in the hierarchy.<sup>107</sup> However, because God is believed to be the supreme good, everything God creates is also inherently good.<sup>108</sup> This causes Augustine problems as he attempts to define evil. His solution is to say that evil is not a substance because if it was a substance, God would have created it and evil

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<sup>102</sup> Serge Lancel, *St. Augustine*, trans. A. Nevell (London: SCM Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>103</sup> Thagaste is modern day Souk Ahras is on the Algero-Tunesian border in Africa; *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 82. Augustine, ‘The De beata vita of St Augustine,’ in *Patristic Studies* Vol. 72, ed., trans. R.A. Brown. (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America), I.4.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*; Augustine, *On the Trinity*, IV.3.

would then necessarily be good.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, for Augustine, evil is simply the deprivation of good.<sup>110</sup> However, as we will see below with Wesley and Edwards this nuanced view of evil is increasingly essentialised. This is an important point because, while the substantive nature of evil changes, its connection with the physical realm (embodied by women) does not change. Therefore, as we will see below, when evil becomes substance, this substance tends to be even more closely associated with woman and the body.

The supreme goodness of God also becomes problematic when Augustine reflects on women because of this troublesome connection to the body and physical realm. His culture tells him that women and the body are bad, dangerous, and not even fully human; yet Genesis 1:28-31 affirms the goodness of creation – including the body and woman. Yet I would argue that Augustine does see the body as essentially good.<sup>111</sup> Of course, Augustine argues that via original sin, the body has been irreparably tainted, and has to bear the burden of the soul's sin,<sup>112</sup> but because of Augustine's high, or transcendent view of God,<sup>113</sup> he maintains that in some sense, the body remains good, if only in relation to its Divine creation and commissioning.<sup>114</sup> However, Augustine does not focus on the goodness of the body because he sees that fallen humankind is in such desperate need of restoration, salvation, and repair, which only Christ can give.

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<sup>109</sup> Lancel, *St. Augustine*, 87.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. M. Dods (New York: Random House, 1950), XIV.3; XI.

<sup>112</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, IV.3.5.

<sup>113</sup> The 'high view of God' refers to two Augustinian concepts of God. First, this view of God is one of complete transcendence – one attribute of a hypermasculine God. Secondly, God is highest in the hierarchy and thus humanity is dependent on God for everything.

<sup>114</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, IV.3.

For Augustine, this restoration – just like the sin that creates a need for it – affects equally, the body, the soul, and the will. After all, for Augustine, sin begins with an inability of the will to control the body.<sup>115</sup> This rebellion by the body has a compound effect as the person continues to sin. The soul becomes involved as the person has less and less desire for God. This state in turn, aids the continuation of sin. Similarly, restoration occurs when one moves toward God and does the will of God. One is enabled to control the will, and grace is given by God so one can desire to control the will. Controlling the will leads to physical restoration because the human will be doing the will of God, and the person will be able to control their desire.

To come to a better understanding of why Augustine confirms that the body is good and yet seems to despise it, we will begin with a discussion of Augustine's theology of God. This is important because arguably, Luther, Wesley, Edwards and American Evangelicals have all perpetuated Augustine's hypermasculine, or idealised masculine image of God within their theologies, contributing to the negative view of sex and the body throughout the whole Western Christian era. This is also our beginning point for seeing how the normative male, in this case exemplified by Augustine, projects his idealised image of masculinity onto God with the result that man becomes the discounted feminine Other. This view of God reflects Augustine's own discomfort with the degree of control he has over himself and his body; he projects the control onto God and a corresponding lack of control onto the body. Doing this puts both him and his body in an Other category which is rigorously controlled by an hypermasculine God.

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<sup>115</sup> This paragraph is a result of my reading of Augustine's treatise, *On the Trinity* II.17 and *The City of God* XIV.3.

### ***Augustine's view of God***

Carol Harrison writes extensively about Augustine's high, or in my terms, his hypermasculine, view of God and the circumstances surrounding this. She relates Augustine's high view of God to the hierarchical views of the Neo-Platonists. The Neo-Platonist of Augustine's age said that '...the bodily realm was the lowest emanation of the One, the soul or animating principle above the body, the mind or *nous* above the soul, and the One at the apex of reality, beyond Being and definition.'<sup>116</sup> While Augustine agrees with this view of God, he also holds a belief that God created the world *ex nihilo* while the Neo-Platonists do not. Therefore, Augustine critiques the Neo-Platonic view of God by making Him even higher and more powerful than the Neo-Platonists do. For Augustine, the ability to create *ex nihilo* is an important attribute of God because it exemplifies God's power *par excellence*. That is, believing God created the world out of nothing reinforces the belief that God is the most powerful being in the cosmic hierarchy.<sup>117</sup> Further, God is not only the height of creation, but to turn away from God is literally turning from life to nothingness.<sup>118</sup>

Although Augustine eventually comes to believe in a Christian concept of God, he carries into it the powerful hierarchical worldview from his Roman background and thus it is natural for him to envision a male/Divine relationship similar to the way he understands a male/female relationship of that time. In other words, if God is the most powerful being, then God, of course, takes a male role in the God/human relationship and the lesser human takes a female role in the

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<sup>116</sup> Carol Harrison, 'Taking Creation for the Creator: Use and Enjoyment in Augustine's Theological Aesthetics,' in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 180.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

relationship. This may or may not be a problem for women, but it is evidently problematic for males. They are forced to become in some way like women and thus, in the terms of Beauvoir's analysis, non-extant and marginalised. It is therefore not surprising – though also curious – that according to *On the Trinity*, Augustine seems to desire this 'female' role,<sup>119</sup> placing himself directly into a role about which he is otherwise extremely ambivalent. Specifically, Augustine speaks of his desire to be submissive to God.<sup>120</sup> He also writes of what he believes to be the natural hierarchy, which, is God at the head and man below and this is mirrored on earth as man as the head of woman.<sup>121</sup> That is, Augustine believes that the perfect male/God relationship is one where, according to my interpretation, the male is the female in relation to a hypermasculine God and Augustine is thus passive, subordinate, and humble.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, Augustine wants to be 'entered by' and to receive God.<sup>123</sup>

Augustine has specific ideas of what it means to be male and female derived from his patriarchal culture. He states, for example, that women are not in the *imago dei* without a male present.<sup>124</sup> This is why it is odd, given the language Augustine uses, specifically in *On the Trinity*, that he sees the best relationship between a human and God to be one where the man takes on feminine character traits. The man vanishes in relation to God, or as Tina Beattie puts it in her work

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<sup>119</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XIII.1.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, I.10-11

<sup>121</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 28-30.

<sup>122</sup> Felecia McDuffie 'Augustine's Rhetoric of the Feminine in the Confessions: Woman as Mother, Woman as Other,' in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. J.C. Stark (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 115.

<sup>123</sup> Julie B. Miller 'To Remember Self, To Remember God: Augustine on Sexuality, Relationality, and The Trinity,' in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. J.C. Stark (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 261.

<sup>124</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, VII.9 p.159.



relating to Catholic theologian, von Balthasar, who had much the same perspective as Augustine<sup>125</sup> ‘...as much as man isn’t God, neither is he masculine and becomes feminine even his masculine aspects.’<sup>126</sup> From this evidence, it seems that there are two unsatisfactory explanations for Augustine’s position. Either, Augustine has such a patriarchal view of the world in which God is the leader and man is subordinate, that the only way Augustine can describe the male/God relationship is via the male/female relationship. The alternative is that Augustine understands these character traits in women as both feminine and good and therefore concludes that it is admirable that all humans have these traits in them. However, of course, we have to remember that Augustine believes that women are not created in the *imago dei* specifically because they are female and in this case, surely, any such admirable feminine traits would be a part of the overall disqualifying femaleness.

We will discuss the relationship between God/man/women, and Beauvoir’s analysis of Other as it relates to later theologians later in this chapter, but I would now like to turn briefly to Tina Beattie and to her reflections on God/man/woman relationships. Beattie reflects upon a difficulty within the work of von Balthasar.<sup>127</sup> This dilemma is relevant to the issue raised by Augustine’s desire to be feminine and less powerful in relation to a more powerful God.

Beattie writes about one of the problematic consequences of an overly hierarchal view of the world; if men are supposed to take on the feminine role in a Divine/human relationship, then this

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<sup>125</sup> Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 118.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar lived from 12 August 1905 until 26 June 1988. He was a Swiss theologian and Catholic Priest. He is considered one of the most important Catholic theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. E.T. Oakes, SJ and D. Moss, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 269.

requirement essentially makes all men female, rendering men or their masculinity invisible in relation to God's hypermasculinity:

Only with Eve can he (Adam) become who he is not – woman, bride, feminine other to the masculine God. Thus the male cannot have a priority in creation, for there are no men in the incarnation – a flickering presence, almost effaced in the 'quasi-feminine' Jesus, and entirely poured out on the cross when, once again, the woman appears as 'his' fullness, 'his' body...She is his (man's) fulfilment and completion because only she allows him to know who he is in relation to God, i.e. he is not-God, and because she is not-man, and God is masculine, he must become 'she' in order to remind himself that he is not-God.<sup>128</sup>

Thus, having an unbending hierarchal view of the world, von Balthasar, and Augustine, create a problem for men. They want desperately to have an intimate relationship with an unknowable God; they want to be the bride or the feminine in relation to God's hypermasculinity.

Unfortunately, they are unable to do this because they are – culturally speaking – men.

Therefore, they still need radically subordinated women to exemplify their understanding of this relationship between men and God. Of course, by definition, God is unknowable and ineffable, so their understanding is inevitably metaphorical; really they are creating God as they imagine God to be. Of course Augustine would not say this, but there is little alternative to creating or believing in characteristics that one thinks God should have. Arguably, in Augustine's case, his understanding of who God is reflects an idealisation of utter hypermasculinity and cannot represent the fullness of who God is. And yet Augustine desires to have an intimate relationship with this unknowable God and chooses to use a metaphor that is closer to hand. However, in using the male/female metaphor, he appears to completely take males out of the model.

In sum, this particular characterisation of God as hypermasculine has significant ramifications for Augustine and the influential theology he creates. Having such a view of God places God so

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<sup>128</sup> Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 114-115.

far away from humans that understanding the nature of the Divine is hard for humans to do intellectually. Thus, while Augustine states in *On the Trinity* VI.5 that God is unity and that unity is love,<sup>129</sup> this is a difficult view to substantiate because God is unknowable outside of the grace of divine revelation. Augustine deducts that God is love because of the relationship within the Trinity, but even this represents an understanding of God that is, in an intellectual sense, unknowable. That is, Augustine says that the Trinity is love because the different parts of the Trinity are combined by friendship.<sup>130</sup> However, while Augustine does not admit to this, the friendship that he describes is obviously understood in human terms, not Divine ones,<sup>131</sup> and is exclusively male.<sup>132</sup>

So far, the impression that we have gained of Augustine's concept of God is that God is one of hypermasculinity. God is all-powerful, and proof of this is His ability to create out of nothing.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, theoretically, this all-powerful God is one of love and friendship within the male Trinity. Yet, one cannot completely know this almighty God and therefore one must conjecture the familiarity within God's self because God is three persons of the Trinity. However, even assuming this belief in love and cordiality is true within God's self, this does not necessitate a

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<sup>129</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, VI.5.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> I do not believe that Augustine is speaking of the Trinity as friendship metaphorically here. My evidence for this is in Augustine's *On the Trinity* XII.5, just prior to discussing the friendship aspect of the Trinity, Augustine states that the Trinity should not be understood as a family because the Holy Spirit is not a woman/mother. If the Trinity should not be understood as a family because the Holy Spirit is not physically a woman, then it follows that he is not writing metaphorically here, or in the next section, where he writes about the friendship and love of the Trinity.

<sup>132</sup> C.f. above footnote for an explanation of why I claim that Augustine believed the Trinity to be exclusively male.

<sup>133</sup> I am not saying that God is hypermasculine in such a way whereas men are also all-powerful or able to create.

God who loves creation; God demands submission by all humans because God is more powerful than humanity which is evidenced through creation *ex nihilo*.

Creating an image or unchangeable understanding of God at the top of a hierarchy means that humans cannot consider this God as one would another human being. This God does not really feel, really need, really care in the way humans do because this God is disembodied. In

*Confessions* IX.2.2 Augustine states,

Well then, when I, who make this inquiry love anything, there are three things concerned – myself, and that which I love, and love itself. For I do not love love, except I love a lover; for there is no love where nothing is loved.<sup>134</sup>

This statement indicates that while Augustine realises that one cannot love an ideal (such as love), one must love some thing which is embodied (a lover). However, to love something, such as God is impossible because God is not an embodied being, which is why Augustine feels shame and guilt about his body and his bodily desires. He also feels this way about his body and desires because his Roman culture<sup>135</sup> similarly encourages an understanding of the world where men are associated with all that is disembodied and spiritual, while women are associated with the bodily and physical. Therefore, Augustine feels shame because he is unable to transcend his body which makes him feel like less of a man. Arguably, the inability to be disembodied makes him feel like a woman because embodiment is strongly associated with the feminine and this

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<sup>134</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.2.2.

<sup>135</sup> When using the term ‘Roman culture,’ I am speaking broadly of the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century culture in which Augustine was raised and educated. He uses what he learns though his pagan, or Roman, education when he becomes Christian. His culture influences his understanding of Christianity as well as theology. It is the task of scholars such as Carol Harrison and Peter Brown to discuss whether Augustine’s culture (Neo-Platonism, Stoicism, etc.) influences Christianity, or if Christianity influences the Roman culture. I suspect it is a somewhat circular argument although it seems to me that in the case of the strict hierarchy of which I am speaking, where the man is associated with the disembodied spirit and woman with the earth and body, Roman philosophy influences Augustine heavily. C.f. Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine’s Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

disembodied view of God has continually been promoted throughout the history of Christian theology. The God of Augustine – transcendent, disembodied, and hypermasculine – originates in a Christian patriarchal worldview where men feel an obligation to disassociate the self from the body because this is supposed to bring them closer to God. This disregard for the body, associated with a transcendent and hypermasculine God, is subsequently reflected in the work of Luther, Wesley and Edwards who uphold this view of God – or one very similar – and continue to betray their suspicion of the body through their distinctive disregard for women and sex.

The body theologian, James Nelson claims that the inherited Christian view of God can be described as phallic.<sup>136</sup> This God is powerful, dominant, and metaphorically large. While the concepts of the penis and the phallus have different implications (such as the phallus being hard, strong and able to dominate<sup>137</sup> while the flaccid penis is only able to take these attributes on occasionally<sup>138</sup>), God has been ascribed phallic attributes. This is because in an attempt to understand God and the material world, one place where many men have looked has been toward themselves with a focus on the phallic penis as Nelson notes:

Through the phallus, men sense a resurrection, the capacity of the male member to return to life again and again after depletion. An erection makes a boy feel like a man and makes a man feel alive. It is the assurance and substantiation of masculine strength.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> James B. Nelson ‘Embracing Masculinity,’ in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, eds. J.B. Nelson and S. Longfellow (London: Westminster/JohnKnox Press, 1994), 198.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

Thus, to some extent, this is a good way to understand God, or at least the God of patriarchal Christianity. Augustine's God is much like this. He is strong enough to create the world and powerful enough to govern humanity even with evil in the world.<sup>140</sup> God also helps men gain wisdom so that they may become closer to, and understand, Him. One can certainly claim that Augustine himself is 'resurrected' from his evil ways when he becomes a Christian. After all, in chapter 8 of *Confessions*, Augustine writes about being a slave to lust and God saving him from his old ways:

...my old mistresses, still enthralled me; they shook my fleshly garment, and whispered softly, 'Dost thou part with us? And from that moment shall we no more be with thee forever? And from that moment shall not this or that be lawful for thee for ever?' And what did they suggest to me in the words 'this or that'... What impurities did they suggest! What shame!....an unruly habit saying to me 'Dost thou think thou canst live without them?'<sup>141</sup>

This can be seen as the slow death of an old life with God rescuing Augustine from his flesh. However, a complete resurrection is only possible after Augustine becomes celibate: 'For Thou didst so convert me unto Thyself, that I sought neither a wife, nor any other of this world's hopes...' <sup>142</sup> It is his desire for salvation through this disembodied and hypermasculine God that makes the body and its functions evil; if God is disembodied then it makes sense to assume that God saves us from the body. The fact that God has to 'renew' the body for resurrection shows that the body in and of itself is not good enough for this disembodied God. If this is not the case, then God would be able to simply wipe away the 'stain of sin' that is upon the body rather than having to make the body new.

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<sup>140</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, III.17.

<sup>141</sup> Augustine, 'Confessions,' in *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin*, ed., trans. P. Schaff (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), VIII.XI.26.

<sup>142</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.29.

While this disembodied and hypermasculine view of God is prevalent throughout Western Christian orthodoxy, it can also be seen as very androcentric, or phallicentric, which is disturbing to feminists and body theologians because, while this view of God is intrinsically connected to the body via the phallic penis, it is only connected to the male body and only during specific moments of the male experience. This not only leaves women out of this God/human relationship, but also excludes men from the relationship for the vast majority of the time, as they are unable, of course, to continually remain in an erect (or phallic) state. Nelson states that men would do better to employ an understanding of God via the flaccid penis; not only because this is the way that the penis is most of the time, for most men, but also because for Nelson it is more accessible, less domineering, and more realistic.<sup>143</sup>

Nelson also says that when one views the penis (and God) in phallic terms, there will inevitably be a struggle for control where one has to master the erect penis, and God has to master the human.<sup>144</sup> The problem with this, as Nelson notes, is that slaves do not always do as they are told – as any man knows who has had an erection at an inappropriate time. Further, to master the slave, one has to deprive the slave of life except as a slave.<sup>145</sup>

If my penis seems to have a mind of its own, I must deprive it of that freedom. I will be its master and keep it from running amok. The trouble with servants and slaves, however, is that they seldom know their place. They are treated as machines, whose only purpose is to perform the functions determined by their masters. But either as slave or as machine, that part of me will be dead. I will have deprived it of its right to live *except* as slave or machine. This puts me right back into the dualism of control: the higher over the lower,

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<sup>143</sup> Nelson, 'Embracing Masculinity,' 199.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

master over slave. The spirit or mind with its higher capacities for thought and virtue must control the body, especially the penis, with its physical appetites.<sup>146</sup>

The implication of Nelson's analysis is that a phallic God must master the human like a man attempts to master his penis, wife, and slave. This critique is clearly applicable to Augustine and his legacy. It is also problematic because God is unknowable – due to His disembodiment – to those who are not spirit (e.g. the whole material world, humans, and particularly women). Furthermore, those who are not spirit will necessarily be locked into slave-like stereotypes from which there is no escape. For example, women are stereotyped in sexual terms – specifically as virgins, good wives and mothers, or whores. There is no escape from these stereotypes because they serve to affirm God as hypermasculine and disembodied spirit, as well as helping to support the subsequent patriarchal norm of Western Christianity.

In my view, the best evidence for Augustine's paradoxical understanding of God as both hypermasculine and also as a knowable and loving God comes in *On the Trinity*. In this treatise, Augustine attempts to explain the unity and inner workings of the Trinity and he speaks much of love as already noted above.<sup>147</sup> For Augustine, it is central that the Godhead is unified and that this unity is love.<sup>148</sup> The love<sup>149</sup> of the Trinity is consubstantial.<sup>150</sup> That is, the distinct parts of the Trinity are more than friends; they are love which is equal as the parts of the Trinity are equal.<sup>151</sup> However, Augustine betrays his understanding of God as hypermasculine in Book XII.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> P. 60.

<sup>148</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, V.7.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., VI.5.7.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. Augustine continually uses Philippians 2.6 as a proof that the parts of the Trinity are equal.



In chapters five and six, Augustine explains why the Holy Spirit cannot be female. In his explanation, Augustine notes that only the man (*homo*) was created in the likeness of the Trinity,<sup>152</sup> and woman was in the likeness of man – not God.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, because only man is in God's likeness, the Holy Spirit cannot be female – which means that the Holy Spirit (and the rest of the Trinity) is male.

There is more evidence in chapter 7 when Augustine is explaining how it is that man is the image of God but woman, even a faithful Christian woman, is not. This is particularly evident in the first sentence of XII.7 where he is discussing whether or not Christian women would have lost their bodily sex if they were created in the *imago dei* but answers the question by stating that only man's (*homo*) mind is created in the *imago dei*. Here he also notes that man is in the image of God in his mind, not in his bodily sex:

Pray, have faithful women then lost their bodily sex? But because they are there renewed after the image of God, where there is no sex; man is there made after the image of God, where there is no sex, that is, in the spirit of his mind.<sup>154</sup>

Thus, women would not change in their bodily sex because they would be 'renewed' after men who are created in the *imago dei* in their mind only, not their body. These two indications that God is fully spirit help one understand the earlier claim in chapter three of *On the Trinity* that man is able to contemplate eternal things because he is created in the image of God. That is, there is a portion of the Trinity in the man's (*homo*) mind<sup>155</sup> which makes this possible.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., XII.6. – I used <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/august.html> [accessed online 06 June, 2012], a Latin copy, to aid my translation.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., XII.7.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., XII.4 – I used <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/august.html> [accessed online 06 June, 2012], a Latin copy, to aid my translation.

But this trinity must needs be so discovered in the whole nature of the mind, as that even if action upon temporal things were to be withdrawn, for which work that help is necessary, with a view to which some part of the mind is diverted in order to deal with these inferior things, yet a trinity would still be found in the one mind that is no where parted off; and that when this distribution has been already made, not only a trinity may be found, but also an image of God, in that alone which belongs to the contemplation of eternal things; while in that other which is diverted from it in the dealing with temporal things although there may be a trinity, yet there cannot be found an image of God.<sup>156</sup>

Thus, Augustine is stating that the only part of man (*homo*) which was created in the *imago dei* was the male mind. This is problematic for Augustine; his hypermasculine theology leaves no space for embodied masculinity in the Divine/human relationship as we discussed above in relation to the work of Beattie. It completely marginalises women because women are not male, but paradoxically, according to this view, insists that women aspire toward becoming male – albeit like men who submit themselves in the manner of a woman – to a hypermasculine God.

This hypermasculine view of God which claims immanence through the love of God, and yet is also clearly transcendent, is problematic in many ways as described above. Due to the hypermasculine projection, it affects not only the way in which one views sexuality, but it also interferes with a proportionate view of God as immanent and incarnational; He is completely disembodied. As we will see in the next section, this insistence upon an utterly disembodied God seems to be derived from Augustine's dis-ease with the body – and particularly, his dis-ease with his own body. This is where the projection onto God (and women), derived from the way Augustine understands himself and his own body, is most clearly revealed.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

***The Will and the Body***

Moving on to the will, the body, and how Augustine and his theology influences these themes for later generations, we see in the tradition that Augustine has been understood to unconditionally separate the will from the body in such a way that the will needs to rule the body. The body needs to be ruled because it is subject to sin, but unfortunately, sin affects the will to the extent that the body is not always controllable. A primary example of Augustine speaking about this is in *City of God* when he discusses the function of the penis before and after the Fall.<sup>157</sup> He states that if there was sex before the Fall, then the penis would not have needed male lust to become erect; instead, it would have been directed by the man's will, become erect, and done his bidding in impregnation.<sup>158</sup>

Again, Augustine's discussion of the results of a fallen will illustrates his duality of thought and his ambiguity about the body because if the will had not been fallen, a man would have been able to control his penis. However, while the will should have been able to control the body, it is unable to do so because sin has infected the will. This sin comes via the body and lust. Yet crucially, Augustine claims that the body is good.<sup>159</sup> Thus, a body theologian must ask, if the body is essentially a catalyst for sin and lust, with the will and soul being that which is infected; and yet it is the body that gives evidence of this sin, how separate from the body is the will? They must be interlinked because, to control something, one must be intimately connected with

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<sup>157</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.16.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., XIV.11.

it. As if to confirm that intimate connection, Augustine states that occasionally, for example during intercourse, the body takes control of the will through lust.<sup>160</sup>

Augustine clearly wants there to be a distinction between the will and the body. This is crucial for him as he can then claim that the body is good because it was created by God. This distinction is also convenient because it allows him to blame the will for the sin of the body; a will that can then redeem itself by lusting for God. However, I believe that Augustine's view of the will is theoretical, and when he is confronted with the unruly actions of his body, he becomes much more ambivalent about how it is exactly that the will works. He does not understand, or at least he does not clearly state, how it can be that the body is good and yet so closely tied to sin. If the body is good, then how is it that the will is, or becomes, sinful and how can the essentially good body be corrupted by the will?

Augustine is clearly uncomfortable with blaming the body for sin which is arguably why he is then forced to shift the blame instead onto the will *in its relationship to* the body. Arguably, Augustine does not really believe that the body is good and if he could have reconciled the goodness of God with a creation (the body) that was not good, then he would have done so. Yet, the logic of his hypermasculine view of God forces him to argue that everything is created by God and that everything created by God, is good. Nevertheless, his writings on the body, lust, and the will make it clear that he is, at best, very ambivalent about the body, and that his experience of his own body strongly challenges this logic. This negative attitude will have enormous ramifications for later theologians such as Wesley and Edwards who are extremely

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<sup>160</sup> Elizabeth Clark, ed., *St. Augustine On Marriage and Sexuality* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 36.

unwilling to make a distinction between the body and the will, in favour of the body's connection with a good God. The result is that the body (and thus humans and sex which are both embodied by definition) becomes the site of evil. In other words, because of Augustine's unease with his own body, he creates a careful and deeply considered theological duality which influences all subsequent views of the body in Western Christianity; although as we will see, later theologians are not nearly so careful or considered in their approach to this duality as is Augustine himself. By allowing this duality, Augustine creates a space in which later theologians can demonize the body. In other words, those who follow him make even less effort to maintain a semblance of goodness in the body. And of course, by creating this space, Augustine also encourages a view of sex, in all its forms, as bad; and contributes to its radical devaluation.

### ***Augustine and Sex***

Before moving on to Luther, it is important briefly to return to Augustine's view of God, the will, and sex because it is this established pattern of evaluation that Luther challenges when he alters the value of marriage. In *On Marriage and Concupiscence* chapter 18, Augustine notes that marriage is better than fornication, but continence is better than marriage. This statement says a great deal about Augustine's understanding of God. By enforcing the idea that celibacy is better than marriage, he is combining the opinion that the body and the will cannot be trusted with the notion that sex impedes attainment of the sort of salvation that is provided by the disembodied, hypermasculine God. It is difficult to say whether this view – that celibacy is better than marriage – comes more from Augustine's disembodied view of God, or rather, if it is rooted in his deep suspicion of the body; perhaps it is the result of both ideas. Augustine's suspicion of the body is evident in chapter 7 of *On Marriage and Concupiscence* when he

discusses the evil of lust (and therefore the evil of sex); which is so dangerous because for the male to fulfil his duty of procreation through ejaculation, he must abandon control over the will.<sup>161</sup>

For it certainly was not just that obedience should be rendered by his servant, that I, his body, to him, who has not obeyed his own Lord. Well, then, how significant is the fact that the eyes, and lips, and tongue, and hands, and feet, and the bending of back, and neck, and sides, are all placed within our power – to be applied to such operations as are suitable to them, when we have a body free from impediments and in a sound state of health; but when it must come to man's great function of the procreation of children the members which were expressly created for this purpose will not obey the direction of the will, but lust has to be waited for to set these members in motion, as if it had legal right over them, and sometimes it refuses to act when the mind wills, while often it acts against its will! Must not this bring the blush of shame over the freedom of the human will, that by its contempt of God, its own Commander, it has lost all proper command for itself over its own members?<sup>162</sup>

This statement about lust, the inability to will the penis to do its 'duty,' and the purpose of sex is combined with Augustine's understanding of God in such a way that an inability to control one's bodily functions equates to being shamed before God.

It is because lust is uncontrollable, and because Augustine realises that it is closely tied to the body that he is, at best, ambivalent about the body and, at worst, despises it. Augustine's own words demonstrate his inherent scepticism and fear of a body that is out of control, and endangers the salvation he hopes to gain by a disembodied and hypermasculine God. It is a fear of this God and of his own uncontrollable will which gives Augustine reason to prefer celibacy over marriage. This is his view of the proper place of sexuality both inside and outside marriage. If, for Augustine, God is not disembodied, perhaps he would not view the body with such

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<sup>161</sup> Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, database on-line. Available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/15070.htm> accessed 07 March 2007, 7.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

suspicion. Furthermore, if Augustine's body is not such a cause for discontentment, it is possible that he would not be a proponent of universal celibacy.

As we will now see, Luther inherits the legacy of negative attitudes toward the body from the tradition laid down by the Church Fathers – and Augustine in particular – as well as from the normative patriarchal culture dating from before his time when a man was the head of woman and the spiritual and intellectual was deemed better than the body. While the Protestant Churches do not continue to uphold the value of celibacy, they certainly continue to maintain strict sexual controls over their congregations.

## Martin Luther

Martin Luther was a German priest from an Augustinian order and a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg.<sup>163</sup> He lived from 1483-1546 and is perhaps most famous for his key role in what is generally called the Protestant Reformation. Among other theological disagreements with the Roman Catholic Church, Luther argues that salvation from God's punishment for sin can only be gained through faith in the free gift of God through Jesus' death and resurrection.<sup>164</sup> Luther also believes quite strongly that celibacy is not better than marriage; rather, while celibacy is a gift given by God to a few people, to take an oath of perpetual celibacy is impossible.<sup>165</sup> In this section, we will be looking at how these two ideas have had a strong influence on modern day American Evangelical Christianity.

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<sup>163</sup> John M. Todd, 'Martin Luther' *Catholic Truth Society* no B 581 (1985), 2.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>165</sup> Martin Luther, 'An Answer to Several Questions on Monastic Vows' in *The Christian in Society III*, ed., trans. R.C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 147.

While Luther is not the only Reformer who taught that salvation is a gift from God or that marriage is better than celibacy, his theology arguably forms the strongest connection between Augustine and the characteristic attitude towards sex and marriage in later American Evangelical Christianity. In the following discussion, I intend to show that while Luther engenders some major theological shifts, his work and influence very much reflect the idea of Augustine's hypermasculine and disembodied male God; and his views on women and the body do not significantly change from those of Augustine. Luther, like Augustine, maintains that both God and body/sex/woman are Other and identifies them with the elements that he is uncomfortable with himself. Luther differs from Augustine but arguably this is by being less focused on the goodness of God which allows him to relate woman and the material realm more closely with evil. He also focuses specifically on Justification by Faith which, as we will see below, perpetuates the hypermasculinity of God and a hierarchy in which woman is merely man's property.

### ***Justification by Faith Alone***

While teaching in Wittenberg, Luther continually confronts a theological question which is: how can a person be justified, or saved? This question is not new to theology, but it seems to haunt Luther and at some time between 1513 and 1518,<sup>166</sup> Luther finds his answer:

How can man measure up to God? How could man be justified in God's eyes? Theologically the problem had been posed for centuries: Could man do anything good at all without the assistance of grace? The late medievals often said that man could do something and that he 'must do what he could'. Natural man could do his bit. But Luther found this simply to be untrue for himself. Far from man being able to do anything it was God who did everything. Man was never able to obey God's law fully. The only answer for Luther was to throw oneself into God's hands and believe, put one's entire trust in

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<sup>166</sup> Todd, 'Martin Luther,' 4.



Jesus Christ. Grace alone, according to Luther, enabled man not only to keep the law but live the life of charity to which he was called by the Word of God in the Bible.<sup>167</sup>

It is this question of how one is justified that leads Luther to Romans 1:17 and 6:23 where he reads that the just man lives by faith and salvation results as a free gift from God. In the

*Smalcald Articles* Luther notes:

The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification (Romans 3:24–25). He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Romans 3:23–25). This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law or merit. Therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us ... Nothing of this article can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth and everything else falls (Mark 13:31).<sup>168</sup>

This becomes a foundational principle for Luther, and many of the assumptions that later American Evangelicals have, are derived in part from this contemplation.

‘...the revolution in Justification by Faith Alone lay in the *Alone*. In the complete denial of any independent power for good in fallen man, was contained in germ all Protestantism - the Unfree Will; Predestination; the attack on Hierarchy and Sacramentalism; the Priesthood of All Believers [and the non-existence of any ‘Ministerial Priesthood’]; the Invisible Church.’<sup>169</sup>

While Luther is credited for this ‘theology of the cross,’ or Justification by Faith alone,<sup>170</sup> there are certainly hints that it is influenced by Augustine. It is fair to say that none of the Church Fathers had such a theology.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>168</sup> Martin Luther, ‘The Smalcald Articles,’ in *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, ed., trans F. Bente Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005, 289, Part two, Article 1.

<sup>169</sup> Todd, ‘Martin Luther,’ 11.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 4.

Within this theology what is most significant is the enormity of a God who is judge, jury, and saviour of fallen humanity. If salvation can only be attained through the recognition of God's power and willingness to effect this redemption,<sup>172</sup> and this ability is only possible because of this God, then this God is surely like Augustine's concept of God, phallic, or in my terms hypermasculine. Puny humans cannot even contemplate salvation without Him, and this notion of absolute human inadequacy, conjures images in contrast, of the phallic, hypermasculine God with no feminine weakness. In *The Church and the Second Sex*, Mary Daly, for example, shows why such a phallic understanding of God is dangerous for those living within a Western Christian belief system. Specifically she notes the underlying issue of inconsistency within Western Christian theological circles:

It appears to such persons [intelligent people] that an image of God as 'an old man with a beard' who lives 'up in heaven' is too childish to be taken seriously by any adult. They feel certain their own belief is on a level far above these notions, and that the same is true of every educated adult...However, there are bits of evidence that the absurd idea that God is male lingers on in the minds of theologians, preachers and simple believers, on a level which is not entirely explicit or conscious<sup>173</sup>....Among the misleading and harmful notions about God which the modern theologians have in mind are certain concepts which occur in connection with 'divine omnipotence', 'divine immutability', and 'divine providence'. The classical formulations of the doctrine that God is omnipotent bear with them associations and images which modern man tends to find alienating.<sup>174</sup>

Luther's God is clearly understood in terms of such classical formulations. He is strong enough to be able to save, but more than this, His mercy is also required in order that a person can even know that salvation is necessary. As Daly notes, this divine model is problematic because 'man tends to find [it] alienating' due to its childish nature and this is before we even turn to women, who are so often defined – and excluded – by their physicality. In sum, one can see how

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>173</sup> Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 180

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 182.

problematic it is when Western Christian men project their idealised image of what it means to be masculine onto God; it gets to a point where even men find it difficult to relate to this God. This cannot be a God of love or mercy because this God is unknowable and disembodied. Eventually, the difficulty spreads throughout all of Western Christian theology, as is evident when one looks at the concept of the will and the body in particular. Men project their spiritual dis-ease onto God; and men also project their dis-ease with their body, but men project this Otherness onto women. Or, as Björn Krondorfer notes:

Men are men, but not all men are equal; men become men by articulating their distinctiveness from women, men become 'straight' by distinguishing themselves from 'deviant' male behavior; men become heteronormative by mistaking *sameness* of discrete groups of men as *universal*; men become 'real men' by reiterating the fictions they have helped to construct about the Other.<sup>175</sup>

These fictions are all projections of Otherness, similarly illustrated in another part of Luther's theology of Justification by Faith which pertains to original sin and the will. 'Original sin had totally vitiated man's nature and will, rendering them utterly powerless for good.'<sup>176</sup> Thus, not only can man contribute nothing to his justification, but because of original sin and a tainted will, any attempt for merit is in vain.<sup>177</sup> From Luther's theology of Justification by Faith, we can conclude that Luther inherits Augustine's views of God and the will. Luther is more explicit about justification and salvation than Augustine, but one can observe the heritage of Augustine's theology in Luther, and unfortunately, where Augustine's theology of God and the will is involved, so is a patriarchal worldview and concept of a hypermasculine God. This connection

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<sup>175</sup> Krondorfer, *Male Confessions*, 4.

<sup>176</sup> Todd, 'Martin Luther,' 11.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

can be further seen in Luther's views about marriage and sexuality, to which we will now turn in more detail.

### ***Luther on Marriage and Sexuality***

One of the biggest changes during the Reformation is an elevation of marriage above celibacy which the Catholic Church has always promoted. On the surface, this seems like a positive modification in prevailing attitudes toward sexuality and women, but when one looks deeper into this change, significant questions arise. Not only does Luther's endorsement of marriage eliminate a way for a woman to avoid a life of pregnancy and motherhood by becoming a nun,<sup>178</sup> it also encourages the rule of the father over the daughter,<sup>179</sup> and it continues to normalise a patriarchal view of sex and women by demonizing other forms of sexuality such as premarital sex.<sup>180</sup> In this section, I will briefly outline Luther's position on these subjects which betrays a continuation of Augustinian modes of patriarchy and its tendency to reinforce the Otherness of women and all that is bodily. This will also show that Luther's view of God does not really deviate from Augustine's hypermasculine idealisation of God that I would suggest is due to Luther and Augustine's inability to understand the male self as both fully embodied and spiritual. This inability forces an unacceptable hypermasculinity onto God and places woman/body/sex into categories of Otherness, because for the dualistic mind, the spiritual and embodied realms must remain separate.

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<sup>178</sup> Lyndal Roper, 'Luther: Sex, Marriage and Motherhood,' *History Today* 33 (Dec 1983): 33.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

In 1521, Luther wrote a lengthy book called *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows*.<sup>181</sup> In this book, Luther ‘took the position that the taking of perpetual vows was a denial of salvation through Christ in favour of salvation through works.’<sup>182</sup> While adhering to the view that one cannot work for salvation may be theologically sound, it surely also indicates Luther’s ambivalence about the physical, and his preference for the spiritual, because it betrays an intrinsic distrust of all that can be achieved within the material world of embodiment. In other words this theological teaching too is marked by the patriarchal dualistic thought we see in Augustine.

Subsequent writings reinforce the position that perpetual celibacy is impossible as Luther gives expression to his views on celibacy and the flesh.<sup>183</sup> For example, in *An Answer to Several Questions on Monastic Vows*, Luther states

... an eternal vow is an impossible thing. We do not have the power to be voluntarily poor, obedient, or chaste. God alone can make that possible. Therefore, whoever makes this kind of a vow pledges things that do not belong to him.<sup>184</sup>

In other words, Luther continues to promote his hypermasculine view of God in terms of the way in which humans do not even have control over themselves and depend absolutely on God. The very idea of divine projection is built out of the lowliness of embodiment which always loses out. This is why it is so important to trace the male idealisation, or projection, of hypermasculinity onto God perpetuated by Western theologians such as Luther. Because men like Luther can not be comfortable with the degree of control they have over their bodies, they

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<sup>181</sup> Luther, *An Answer to Several Questions on Monastic Vows*, 141.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 148.

project the power of control onto (a hypermasculine) God and in turn project a complete lack of control onto the (feminine) body. Luther expresses this view when he notes:

We are well aware that voluntary chastity is a precious thing. ...I find ten 'castrated' and chaste people outside the monasteries without being able to find a single one in the monasteries. For the outside is so full of work, trouble, worry, and temptation that one soon loses the itch and is daily compelled to pray. In the monasteries they sit idle and brood day and night over their evil thoughts; and then they think that a woollen cloth or shirt will make them chaste.<sup>185</sup>

In saying this, Luther is reversing one of the assumed roles of the monastery and society beyond the monastic walls, but he is not doing anything to promote a positive attitude toward sex or, by association, the body. Indeed, instead of endorsing a positive view of sex, he is reinforcing the idea that sex is bad, and the body is uncontrollable due to his conviction that people outside of the monastery are too busy to have sex, while those within, linger over their lust. In the same book, Luther even states that one must kill the flesh which can not be accomplished in a monastery:

'Killing the flesh' must first be accomplished through the Spirit in faith. Then a man becomes the enemy of his flesh and its lusts. Then come work, suffering, trouble, worry, and interrupted sleep; but he eats and drinks with confidence. That is the way that married people can do it, who never have any peace from their children or servants...<sup>186</sup>

Thus, while Luther has a clear disdain for monasteries, this is not necessarily because he thinks that sex and the body are good. Rather, he takes this position because he believes that the flesh, body, sex, sexuality, and lust that are not strictly controlled through marriage are wrong. This is a very important point because, while Luther does change the nature of how marriage and celibacy are viewed, like Augustine before him, he is still highly negative about sex and the goodness of the body.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 150.

My claim that Luther is negative about sex and the body is further substantiated when one looks at his views of the proper place of women and prostitutes:

For Luther, marriage was the institution established by God for the expression of human sexuality: no other form of sexual relation was permissible. As the Biblical phrase so often quoted by the reformers put it, adulterers and fornicators shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>187</sup>

In the case of prostitutes, while pre-Reformers are willing to tolerate brothels, Luther has a distinct disdain for them because they encourage promiscuity in men.<sup>188</sup> While this attitude toward brothels might be understandable, it is telling that in condemning them, he also demonizes the women who work in them; as he warns his (male) students against going to brothels by blaming the prostitutes for sexual diseases. Syphilis, for example, is the (female) prostitute's fault, not the (male) patron's.<sup>189</sup> And, of course, in giving this advice, he encourages his students to project their fear of sexual disease onto women as yet another attribute of female Otherness.

Luther thinks that the purpose of marriage is to be a 'hospital' for male sexual lust, an idea which serves to perpetuate the Otherness of women (this time 'good' women), yet again, by making their sole function sexual.<sup>190</sup> In Luther's approach, there is a shift from the Augustinian belief that marriage is secondary and sex is only permissible for the purpose of procreation. Luther

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<sup>187</sup> Roper, 33.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

does not think that sex within marriage is for procreation only;<sup>191</sup> instead, sex within marriage is also to be enjoyed – at least by the man.<sup>192</sup>

Luther's theology of married sexuality may also have served to restrict women's control over their sexual lives. Pre-Reformation theology had held that sex within marriage ought to be primarily for procreation; and some fifteenth-century manuals treated 'too passionate' love of one's spouse as a species of adultery. . . . Luther insisted on the Christian obligation to 'fulfil the marital duty', for the spouse might otherwise fall into sin. . . . Refusal [of sex by the wife] could constitute grounds for divorce.<sup>193</sup>

These views of prostitutes and the wife's duty to have sex with her husband illustrate two important themes in Luther's theology. First, while marriage is better than celibacy, this is purely because he thinks male sexuality needs to be controlled. The demonization of prostitutes and the view of sex as a woman's marital duty or obligation, not only put women in a very strange and vulnerable position where women are not good because they are purely sexual, but it also shows that Luther thinks sex and lust are dangerous and must be contained by marriage. This is not overly different from Augustine's idea that lust must be contained because it leads a person away from God.

Secondly, these views also show that far from liberating women from convents (as Luther claimed);<sup>194</sup> the patriarchy that frames Augustine's thoughts on sex and marriage is still alive and well in Luther's patriarchal culture and in his theology; forcing husbands, sex, and children on women. Luther employs the sexual stereotypes of virgin, good wife and mother, or whore – although none of these stereotypes are seen as positive. And all of this is arguably because of his

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 35, 37.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 33.



conviction that man is unable to control himself and must project this control onto a hypermasculine God defined in relation to woman as the threatening, sexualized Other.

Finally, evidence of Luther's patriarchal influence comes when we look at his work *On Marriage Matters*. This work is about proper and improper engagement between men and women. In this piece, Luther argues against secret engagements because the business of a girl's betrothal should be left to her parents.<sup>195</sup>

It is rather much more against God and his word, namely, against the obedience to one's parents which God has openly commanded, and in this same commandment God is present and forbids such engagements and does not join all together.<sup>196</sup>

Unfortunately, Luther is not even handed in his concern that young people obey their parents. He is troubled that the young man who enters into a secret engagement is a tempter who only desires illicit sex.<sup>197</sup> However, he is much harsher towards the young woman who has entered into a secret engagement.

...one should resist and prevent a secret betrothal from becoming a marriage. If this does happen, and the maid becomes a wife, now that she has become defiled and become worthless to others, you should not give her back, but keep her, and in addition you should make amends.<sup>198</sup>

Moreover, in this passage, one can see that Luther's primary concern is not the young woman herself, but the rights of, and monetary implications for, the parents. He later confirms this as he

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<sup>195</sup> Martin Luther, 'On Marriage Matters,' in *The Christian in Society*, trans. F.C. Ahrens (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 269.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

notes that if a secret engagement has not become a marriage and the girl is ‘completely under her parents’ control and authority’<sup>199</sup> than no real damage has been done by the secret betrothal.<sup>200</sup>

Beauvoir’s reflections on how men seek to maintain the initiative in social relations illuminate Luther’s discussion of secret betrothals and indicate that these attempts to keep control are about more than merely protecting a family reputation, or even monetary interests:

History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchate they have though best to keep woman in a state of dependence, their codes of law have been set up against her, and thus she has been definitely established as the Other. This arrangement suited the economic interests of the males; but it conformed also to their ontological and moral pretensions. Once the subject seeks to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is nonetheless a necessity to him: he attains himself only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself.<sup>201</sup>

One can see that Luther is still highly influenced by his patriarchal inheritance when discussing marriage. Not only does he maintain that woman is either the property of her parents or husband, but even in this he shows disdain for women and reinforces their cultural Otherness: ‘Surely no good child ever becomes a married woman without first becoming a whore.’<sup>202</sup> There are many implications here for future American Evangelicals because, as we will see in the work of Wesley and Edwards, patriarchal influence goes hand in hand with the hypermasculinity of God and a disregard for the body. Karen Armstrong argues, a little differently, that the Reformers do not really change attitudes towards marriage very much because for very many

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 171.

<sup>202</sup> Luther, *On Marriage Matters*, 302.

people there is little time for sex anyway.<sup>203</sup> She argues that the real change in the status of marriage occurs in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the Anglican and Puritan theologies because marriage and the family becomes a holy vocation.<sup>204</sup> We will now turn to Anglican and Puritan theologies of John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards and show how a focus on personal holiness becomes more important than specific sins – to the further detriment of the physical realm.

## John Wesley

John Wesley (1703-1791) was an English cleric and theologian in the Church of England.<sup>205</sup>

Wesley was the 15<sup>th</sup> of 19 children and is most often associated with his brother Charles as they are both credited with founding the Methodist Church.<sup>206</sup> Arguably, their break with the Church of England began in 1738 when John preached his famous ‘Salvation by Faith’ sermon at St. Mary’s in Oxford.<sup>207</sup> Disagreement with the Church of England comes about because Wesley focuses on personal salvation by Jesus Christ through holy living rather than through the church.<sup>208</sup> As well as maintaining Augustine and Luther’s view of a hypermasculine God, Wesley also draws on Luther’s notion of Justification by Faith, reinforcing this by emphasising a need for sanctification, or holy living.<sup>209</sup> Whereas Luther and Augustine focus on specific sins, such as illicit sex, Wesley concentrates on the sanctification of the entire person. As we will see in the next chapter, this idea of personal holiness has major ramifications for American

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<sup>203</sup> Armstrong, *The Gospel According to Woman*, 7.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>205</sup> John Wesley, ‘A Sermon on Salvation by Faith: An Introductory Comment,’ in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, ed. A.C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 109.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

Evangelicals today as they deal with sexuality, because individual sins such as anything relating to sex or the body make personal holiness, and thus salvation, an impossibility. Another reason that Wesley is important to this study is that he thinks that human nature is completely depraved<sup>210</sup> – arguably a consequence of promoting God’s hypermasculinity. As we will see, humanity’s depravation serves to emphasise the scale of God’s salvation of humanity.<sup>211</sup> Therefore, while Wesley does not specifically speak about sex and the body, he does perpetuate Augustine and Luther’s understanding of the hypermasculinity of God and promotes a further devaluing of humanity.

### ***Wesley on God and Humanity***

It is perhaps not a coincidence then that Wesley’s view of God appears most explicitly when he discusses human depravity. In his sermon comparing the ‘Almost Christian’ with the ‘Altogether Christian,’ Wesley describes God thus: ‘the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin.’<sup>212</sup> In this sermon, Wesley describes the ‘Almost Christian’ as one who is an ‘honest heathen,’ believes in God, and may even consider oneself a Christian. However, an ‘Altogether Christian’ differs in three ways. First, the ‘Altogether Christian’ loves his neighbour,<sup>213</sup> second he has a ‘sure trust in Christ,’<sup>214</sup> and third, he is ‘crucified to the desires of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life...but he that

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<sup>210</sup> John Wesley, ‘Original Sin,’ in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 2, ed. A.C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 183.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> John Wesley, ‘The Almost Christian,’ in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, ed. A.C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 141.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him, is less than nothing in his own eyes.’<sup>215</sup> Thus, the main difference between an ‘Altogether Christian’ and an ‘Almost Christian’ is love for God.<sup>216</sup> And because of this love, the ‘Altogether Christian’ fears God<sup>217</sup> and desires to know Christ which is how God heals the ‘Altogether Christian’ from sin.<sup>218</sup>

In noting this, not only is God one of mercy and grace, but the person who is an ‘Altogether Christian’ is focused solely on that which is spiritual so that they can gain this grace and favour. That is, just as we see with Augustine, God is disembodied by virtue of His transcendence and the hierarchy that is derived from it. Therefore, to gain the love of God, the ‘Altogether Christian’ must strive toward holiness, or disembodiment, by being crucified to the flesh. In other words, the only difference between an ‘Almost Christian’ and an ‘Altogether Christian’ is that the ‘Altogether Christian’ has been crucified to the flesh. The implication is that to be a proper Christian, one must hate the body – and therefore, the goal is to be completely disembodied. One must literally kill the flesh in order to be an ‘Altogether Christian’ which only leaves the spirit – separated from its embodiment – alive.

Wesley describes the attributes of this disembodied God in ‘The Unity of the Divine Being’<sup>219</sup> as: everlasting to everlasting,<sup>220</sup> omnipresent,<sup>221</sup> existing through infinite space,<sup>222</sup> all-perfect,<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> John Wesley, ‘The Unity of the Divine Being,’ in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 4, ed. A.C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987).

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 61.

omnipotent,<sup>224</sup> holy,<sup>225</sup> all-wise,<sup>226</sup> ‘unblemished justice and truth: but above all is his mercy.’<sup>227</sup>

Furthermore, Wesley makes a point of noting that ‘God is a spirit; not having such a body, such parts, or passions, as men have...he alone is a pure spirit, totally separate from all matter.’<sup>228</sup>

This description of God has some very specific similarities to Augustine’s view of God. Not only is God love for both Augustine and Wesley, but this God is also all-powerful and in this, hypermasculine. Whereas Augustine shows this power of God through a belief that God created the world *ex nihilo*, Wesley shows this same power of a disembodied God through the salvation of humanity. It would be fair to say that perhaps Wesley ascribes more mercy to this all-powerful God than does Augustine, but in accordance with the precedent set by Augustine, this God is also hypermasculine and pure spirit. Not only does Wesley in one sentence call God ‘he’ and the next describe God as ‘pure spirit’<sup>229</sup> – which in and of itself is a contradiction of which neither Wesley or Augustine seem to be aware – but Wesley also calls upon human creation in the *imago dei* as evidence of this powerful hypermasculine creator just as Augustine does.<sup>230</sup>

All things were created by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. He created man in particular, after his own image, to be a picture of his own eternity. When he had raised man from the dust of the earth, he breathed into him an immortal spirit. Hence he is peculiarly called the Father of our spirits; yea, the Father of the spirits

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 62

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

of all flesh. He made all things, as the wise man observes, for himself; for his glory they were created. Not as if he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.<sup>231</sup>

This is a prime example of hypermasculinity – not only is God creating humanity, but God is the Father of the human spirit. Furthermore, apparently, God creates humanity for God’s glory because humanity needs God for everything, even breath. Later, in ‘The Image of God,’<sup>232</sup> Wesley describes what it is about man that is created in the *imago dei*. In this piece, Wesley notes that man is made in the *imago dei* ‘with regard to his understanding.’<sup>233</sup> That is, it is the part of God that is in man that gives man the ‘power of distinguishing truth from falsehood.’<sup>234</sup> While this ability to distinguish is tainted by sin, originally, he is unable to make a mistake, to be in error, or to doubt.<sup>235</sup> Furthermore, man is created in the *imago dei* in his affections – ‘his affections were rational, even and regular.’<sup>236</sup> This ability to control one’s affections includes love because love is man’s ‘vital heat’ which is the same as God’s love.<sup>237</sup> Finally, man is created in the *imago dei* in terms of ‘the liberty he originally enjoyed; the perfect freedom implanted in his nature...was made with an entire indifference, either to keep or change his first estate...he was the sole lord and sovereign judge of his own actions.’<sup>238</sup> Therefore, not only is

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> John Wesley, ‘The Image of God,’ in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 4, ed. A.C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987).

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 293-4.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 295.

God pure spirit, but He creates humanity in His image – one of unerring disembodied understanding, uncorrupted will, and perfect freedom.<sup>239</sup>

Describing the creation of humankind in this way helps to explain what Wesley thinks is important about the relationship between God and humanity. Not only is God at once a pure spirit and Father, but the attributes Wesley appreciates in humanity are associated with the spirit and mind rather than the body. This disembodied view of God and of the proper goal for humanity can also be seen in his views on post-Fall humanity and human nature.

Previously, I noted that Wesley describes the ‘Altogether Christian’ as one who has been crucified to his flesh. This implies a negative view of the flesh, and as we will see Wesley does not disappoint. While humans are created in the *imago dei* and maintain this in the mind, with the arrival of sin, the body and human nature become evil. This is a significant shift from Augustine’s view because Augustine is unwilling to say that the body is evil; Augustine is only willing to go so far as to say that the flesh is tainted by sin but that the actual flesh is still good because God created it. However, the result for future generations such as Wesley is a shift whereby the flesh is no longer tainted yet essentially good; rather the flesh, in its essence, is evil as is nature. Just as with Augustine, Wesley notes that original sin corrupts the body and that it is the duty of a true Christian to wrestle with flesh and blood.

...even believers in Christ, till they are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, have need to wrestle with flesh and blood, with an evil nature....Original sin is the corruption of the nature of every man whereby man is in his own nature inclined to evil so that the flesh lusteth contrary to the Spirit.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> John Wesley, ‘On Sin in Believers,’ in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, ed. A.C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 317-8.



Whereas here, Wesley merely notes that man's nature is inclined toward evil, there is in other places a significant development of thought which deviates from the approach of Augustine. This can best be seen in his sermon, 'Original Sin,' when Wesley notes 'but still in his flesh dwelt no good thing: all his nature was purely evil.'<sup>241</sup> Significantly, Wesley makes this move from previous Western Christian orthodoxy to the human nature being evil because of his hypermasculine view of God.

...we knew there was a King of all the earth but yet we knew him not. Indeed we could not, by any of our natural faculties. By none of these could we attain the knowledge of God...No man loves God by nature...what we love, we delight in but no man has naturally any delight in God...We leave him to manage his own affairs, to sit quietly, as we imagine, in heaven, and leave us on earth to manage ours. So that we have no more fear of God before our eyes than that of the love of God in our hearts.<sup>242</sup>

It is because, as Wesley argues, humans do not naturally know the 'King of all the earth' that human nature is evil. In making this connection between the hypermasculine, all-powerful, God and an evil human nature, Wesley is making the argument that human nature is not simply tainted, but is actually evil, and yet, God remains identified as transcendent, hypermasculine, and love. Simply stated, Wesley's view of God is much like Augustine's view of God; that is, because of God's hypermasculine attributes, humanity is unable to know or understand Him. However, Wesley's view is different in the sense that this Divine hypermasculinity renders human nature actually evil because human beings know nothing of this disembodied and hypermasculine God.

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<sup>241</sup> Wesley, *Original Sin*, 175.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-8.

It is humanity's evil nature that makes it impossible to know God and this intensifies Augustine's dualism to a point where body/nature is evil and only the spirit is good. The difference is, however, that Augustine is unwilling to state that the body and human nature are actually evil; rather, they are void of good because of sin. Clearly though, while the legacy of a hypermasculine God can be tracked through the theological generations, by the time of Wesley, the body and human nature have taken a sharp downturn from tainted with sin (or void of good) to evil. I maintain that this negative evolution of the body and human nature is due to the intensification of the hypermasculine, unknowable nature of God and the subsequent masculine projection onto God. Further evidence of this comes in Wesley's view of sanctification by grace through faith in Christ – a doctrine inherited from Luther – to which we will now turn.

### ***The Doctrine of Sanctification***

As we discussed above, Luther promotes a doctrine of Justification through Faith alone in which Luther proposes that humanity is depraved because of original sin and has to rely upon the hypermasculine God for justification and salvation through faith. Wesley wholeheartedly agrees with this assessment of the God/human relationship<sup>243</sup> but whereas it is arguable that Luther desires to appease a wrathful God,<sup>244</sup> Wesley is consumed with how to be completely dedicated to God.<sup>245</sup> From this change in perspective, Wesley develops a doctrine of sanctification which will come to influence American Evangelicals in the future. In this move, Wesley maintains what has become the Evangelical normative view of salvation:

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<sup>243</sup> Jose Miguez Bonino, 'Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective' in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. T. Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 52.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

This then is the salvation which is through faith.... [it] implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner now believing on him, and a deliverance from the power of sin, through Christ formed in his heart.<sup>246</sup>

However, this salvation is not complete because sin remains in the flesh and salvation merely makes it possible for sin to not regain its previous domination of the flesh.<sup>247</sup> It is sanctification which helps to remove this remnant of sin on the flesh.

We allow that the state of a justified person is inexpressibly great and glorious. He is born again, not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God....His very body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and an habitation of God through the Spirit. He is created anew in Christ Jesus, he is *washed*; he is *sanctified*. His heart is purified by faith; he is cleansed from the corruption that is in the world.<sup>248</sup>

This sanctification begins as soon as the Christian has been Justified through Faith and it is through sanctification that sin is eradicated from the flesh.<sup>249</sup> However, sanctification and holy living is necessary because the flesh is wholly evil and not even faith in the saving work of Christ can eradicate this evil. One must actively work against the evil flesh through holy living. This is not a reversion back to pre-Reformation penitence. Instead, it is actively thinking about what one is doing moment by moment and actively choosing to do what is good over what is evil.<sup>250</sup> Because of this new focus, Wesley does not write against specific sins (such as illicit sex). Instead, he expects true Christians to follow the will of God which is known through salvation in Christ. However, this view of justification and sanctification is problematic:

Justification, and even sanctification, in such a view becomes a series of almost disconnected moments, always precarious and threatened by sin. Both the unity of the

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<sup>246</sup> Wesley, *Salvation by Faith*, 124.

<sup>247</sup> Wesley, *On Sin in Believers*, 319.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>249</sup> Rupert E Davies. 'Justification, Sanctification, and the Liberation of the Person' in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. T. Runyon Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 69.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

human subject and the faithfulness and unity of God's grace are obscured and distorted. Wesley's formulation of sanctification and perfection becomes in this way psychologically untenable for us. Spiritually, it opens the way for either an unhealthy scrupulosity or an equally harmful petulance.<sup>251</sup>

Thus, with Wesley's theology, people are no longer motivated simply to have faith because they are continually told that the body is evil and that they must work to eradicate this evil. It is my argument that this theology of the body comes from a hypermasculine idealisation of an ultimately unknowable God. This theology will have significant ramifications when it moves across the Atlantic and into American popular culture and Evangelical theology. I will be discussing how this harmful view can be seen in American Evangelical movements today in the next chapter. However, before moving into the present day, I would like, finally, to discuss Jonathan Edwards. Through the Great Awakening in America, and Edwards in particular, we can see how the Americans have inherited different aspects of Augustinian, Lutheran, and Wesleyan theology. However, this inheritance did change as it moved to the United States. In the hands of Edwards, God becomes wrathful and intent on destruction; while human nature, the body, and sexuality becomes even more demonized than it has been in the hands of his predecessors.

## Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) 'is widely acknowledged to be America's most important and original philosophical theologian,<sup>252</sup> and was one of America's greatest intellectuals.<sup>253</sup> He is a contemporary of John Wesley, but was born and raised in the United States and therefore comes from a different background which, in my opinion changes his theological emphasis. As we

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<sup>251</sup> Bonino, 'Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification,' 56.

<sup>252</sup> George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 93.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

have discovered, Wesley is concerned with right living but Edwards is much more focused on the wrath of God and salvation from hell as opposed to pleasing a loving God through holy living.

One possible reason for this theological shift may be that Wesley is preaching to an already thoroughly Christian nation with specific rules of theology and a particular relation to society that has already been established through the Church of England and/or Scotland.<sup>254</sup> Thus, Wesley is at liberty to preach personal holiness because he can assume that his listeners are already Christian – or at least ‘Almost Christian.’ On the other hand, Edwards is preaching to people from numerous denominations of the ‘Old World’ including Catholic and Protestant denominations<sup>255</sup> as well as people who have been influenced by Native American culture and belief.<sup>256</sup> This melting pot of theological differences does not give Edwards the certainty that he is already preaching to people he would consider to be Christians. This likely influences his focus on the wrath of God because this forces people to consider attributes beyond God’s mercy. There is also, perhaps, a general sense of rebellion against authority, which Wesley does not face, because Edwards lives in a world of competing ‘Old World’ cultures as well as an adolescent sense of invincibility.<sup>257</sup> Another influence upon Edwards is Calvinism, which Wesley disregards due to his distaste for predestination.<sup>258</sup> These factors have a deep impact on Edwards and focus his thought much more on sin in humans and the wrath of God.

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<sup>254</sup> Robert D. Rossel, ‘The Great Awakening: An Historical Analysis’ *American Journal of Sociology* 75 (May 1970): 909.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Wesley, *A Sermon on Salvation by Faith*, 122.

Edwards is one of the great theologians of the Great Awakening.<sup>259</sup> During the Great Awakening, preachers such as George Whitefield<sup>260</sup> and the father/son Tennants preached their revival to huge success.<sup>261</sup> The Great Awakening is characterised by many attributes which continue to be evident today in American Evangelical culture. First, during this time, creeds and doctrines of specific churches and denominations became less important than the ‘working of the Holy Spirit.’<sup>262</sup> Secondly, as the working of the Holy Spirit began to be more important, itinerant preaching is more normalised and evidence of righteousness is found in the works of the Spirit rather than through orthodox belief.<sup>263</sup> Thirdly, this working of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by emotionalism.<sup>264</sup> That is, for whoever is preaching, the goal is not to teach the laity traditional theology or continuation of belief from previous denominations. Rather, the purpose is to appeal to the emotions of the listener and encourage salvation through said emotion.

Emotional outbursts, crying, wailing, shouting, and fainting are all evidence of the working of

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<sup>259</sup> ‘The Great Awakening was the first large-scale revival in the history of the American churches. It set the example for the emotional outbursts which were to characterize many later revivals in this country, and it marked the beginnings of the Evangelistic spirit which was destined to play an important part in the subsequent growth of American Protestantism and which became a significant feature of nineteenth-century American culture.’ Leonard W. Labaree, ‘The Conservative Attitude Toward the Great Awakening’ *The William and Mary Quarterly* 1 (Oct 1944): 331.

<sup>260</sup> I am aware of many extraordinary preachers and theologians during this time such as Whitefield who may have been more influential worldwide than Edwards during this time. However, I am choosing to write about Edwards for two reasons. First, Edwards combines the wrath of God with God’s sovereignty in a way that few others do – particularly when considering his views on God’s mercy and the human being. Secondly, unlike Whitefield, Edwards was born and raised in America and I find it prudent to include at least one American in this chapter to show how theology changed (and remained the same) in the movement from the ‘Old World’ to the new.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

the Holy Spirit and anybody from a university trained minister to a farmer is considered gifted with the Holy Spirit when these things occur.<sup>265</sup>

Edwards himself is not overly keen on the emotive aspects of the Great Awakening, and possibly finds it dangerous because of its tendency to lack orthodox underpinning. However, Edwards does find use for the influence of emotions when preaching what he considers orthodox belief. Thus, his infamous sermon ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’ verbally depicts the fires of hell and a wrathful God so as to encourage belief by fear.<sup>266</sup> Edwards is significant during this emotive period because he emphasises the wrath of God as the primary reason to be saved.<sup>267</sup> This focus on God’s wrath might have been contained within Western orthodox Christianity from Augustine onwards, but few before Edwards combines this wrath and God’s sovereignty without being equally positive about God’s mercy or love. Therefore, in this section, we will look first at how Edwards understands God and then how his sermons depict the God/human relationship – particularly through ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.’

### ***Edwards View of God and Humanity***

As we will see in this section, Jonathan Edwards combines the supremacy of God with the sinfulness of humanity so eloquently, that it is nearly impossible to separate the two in his theology. In doing this, Edwards is showing yet another significant theological shift in Western Christianity which has significant impact upon present day American Evangelicals. Whereas

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Jonathan Edwards ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’ preached in Enfield Connecticut, 8 July 1741.

<sup>267</sup> Labaree, ‘Conservative Attitudes,’ 331.

Augustine and Wesley show the great love of God and therefore the duty of men and women to act in an upright and holy manner – and Luther, though he does discuss God’s wrath, is much more concerned with Justification by Faith alone – Edward’s preaching has been known as ‘fire and brimstone’<sup>268</sup> because of his emphasis on God as one of wrath and ultimate supremacy – his version of what has been previously referred to here as the hypermasculine God – while humans are nothing more than pathetic and sinful worms.<sup>269</sup> In his sermon, ‘The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners,’ Edwards demonstrates his hypermasculine view of God and the lowliness of humans who must obey when he states:

But God is a being infinitely lovely, because he hath infinite excellency and beauty. To have infinite excellency and beauty, is the same thing as to have infinite loveliness. He is a being of infinite greatness, majesty, and glory; and therefore he is infinitely honourable. He is infinitely exalted above the greatest potentates of the earth, and highest angels in heaven; and therefore he is infinitely more honourable than they. His authority over us is infinite; and the ground of his right to our obedience is infinitely strong; for he is infinitely worthy to be obeyed himself, and we have an absolute, universal, and infinite dependence upon him.<sup>270</sup>

For Edwards, like Augustine and Luther before him, God is ultimately unknowable because He absolutely transcends humanity. One can observe the projection of hypermasculinity upon God both in statements about God’s loveliness, and infiniteness; and this is the reason for complete human dependence upon Him. From this quotation alone, one can see that Edwards has such a low view of humanity that he has to project all that man is not (in this case beauty) onto God.

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<sup>268</sup> Justo Gonzalez, ‘The Thirteen Colonies,’ in *The Story of Christianity: From the Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 1983), 228.

<sup>269</sup> Jonathan Edwards *The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners*, accessed online, 3 June 2011 <http://www.apibs.org/classics/je003.htm>.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.



Unlike his predecessors, Edwards does not base God's knowableness, or immanence, in the love of God. Instead, Edwards takes Augustine's view of sinful man that we saw earlier<sup>271</sup> and modifies it by stating that there is no good in humanity whatsoever; which, for Edwards, reinforces the wrath of God and shows humans as completely full of sin and depraved:

But sinful men are full of sin; full of principles and acts of sin: their guilt is like great mountains, heaped one upon another, till the pile is grown up to heaven. They are totally corrupt, in every part, in all their faculties, and all the principles of their nature, their understandings, and wills; and in all their dispositions and affections. Their heads, their hearts, are totally depraved; all the members of their bodies are only instruments of sin; and all their senses, seeing, hearing, tasting, etc. are only inlets and outlets of sin, channels of corruption. There is nothing but sin, no good at all.<sup>272</sup>

Thus, through the work of Augustine, Luther and Wesley, the flesh becomes more and more closely linked to evil, but here, Edwards finds flesh and the will to be completely and irredeemably evil. In doing this, Edwards is rehearsing his argument that God shows His supremacy through the evil and nothingness of humanity; and yet humanity is evil and nothing because God is supreme. This cycle is most clearly evident when Edwards discusses the salvation of humanity by God:

When men are fallen, and become sinful, God by his sovereignty has a right to determine about their redemption as he pleases. He has a right to determine whether he will redeem any or not....By reason of his greatness and glory, by which he is infinitely above all, he is worthy to be sovereign, and that his pleasure should in all things take place...It is fit that he who is absolutely perfect, and infinitely wise, and the Fountain of all wisdom, should determine every thing [that he effects] by his own will, even things of the greatest importance...He is the Creator of all things; and all are absolutely and universally dependent on him; and therefore it is meet that he should act as the sovereign possessor of heaven and earth.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> P. 60.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

As we can see these contrasting, yet mutually defining, concepts of supremacy and nothingness determine Edwards' view of humanity just as much as they influence his theology of God. Not only is this view of God hierarchal following Augustine, but it could also be argued that Edwards also follows Aristotle as well since '[for Edwards] the less perfect is made in imitation of the more perfect, so beasts are made in imitation of men, plants are [a] kind of types of animals, minerals are in many things in imitation of plants.'<sup>274</sup> This use of Aristotle is significant because it indicates that Edwards is aware of less hierarchal theologies but he chooses to perpetuate Aristotelian thinking<sup>275</sup> because it supports his view of God as the ultimate hypermasculine Being and humanity as nothing because humanity is merely an imitation of God. Now that we have looked briefly at Edwards's interconnected view of God and humanity, and have noted that it is not only rooted in Western Christian theology but also Aristotelian metaphysics, we will turn to his views on women and sex.

While Edwards spends little time discussing the differences between men and women; and even less time discussing sex or the body, something about these subjects can nevertheless be detected from his work. First, it becomes evident that Edwards is scientifically informed as to the make-up of the female body.

Jonathan Edwards's writings reflect this transitional moment in the history of human anatomy. In a number of entries in his private theological notebooks he refers to theories of conception and fetal development that had recently been advanced by European anatomists. In entry 769 of the 'Miscellanies,' for example, Edwards shows his familiarity with the ovum hypothesis, speculating that the election of the man Jesus extended to the egg in Mary's ovaries from which the divine fetus was formed.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> William J. Wainwright, 'Jonathan Edwards and the Language of God' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48 (Dec 1980): 522.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ava Chamberlain, 'The Immaculate Ovum: Jonathan Edwards and the Construction of the Female Body' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57 (April 2000): 289.

However, while Edwards might understand in terms of a more modern scientific analysis that women have different reproductive organs from those possessed by men – this would be the first recognition of the fact that we have seen in our study of Western theologians – such an enlightened view would not necessarily extend to any enhanced opinion of women or of the sex act. Edwards does not move away from the normative position that woman is created to be the helpmate of man,<sup>277</sup> or from the Lutheran comparison between women and harlots, or from the view that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is an unlikely choice as the site of the incarnation because of her commonality with other women:

In his being the seed of such women as he was: as of Leah, the uncomely wife of Jacob, whom her husband had not chosen; and of Tamar, a Canaanitess and a harlot; and Rahab, a harlot; and Ruth, a Moabitess; and of Bathsheba, one that had committed adultery; and the immediate seed of Mary, a mean person.<sup>278</sup>

By depicting women in this way, Edwards is once again promoting the hypermasculinity of God in relation to women, who figure as little better than harlots.<sup>279</sup> The implication is that since women are whores, God's strength and might is proved yet again in overcoming this obstacle as He sends Jesus to be born.<sup>280</sup>

Furthermore, in light of the Aristotelian tendencies in Edwards's thought, we can see that as he is happy to consider woman as nothing more than a helpmate to man, then man must occupy a higher level, or be 'more perfect' than woman.<sup>281</sup> It may also explain why Edwards is very

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>278</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'Miscellanies, No. 769,' in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 14, ed. T.A. Schafer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>279</sup> Chamberlain, 'The Immaculate Ovum,' 302.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Wainwright, 'Jonathan Edwards,' 522.

explicit in his description of hell because if he thinks that men are harder to convert than women, then when evangelising them, he would be more descriptive in an effort to convert the men.<sup>282</sup>

The explicit descriptions of Edwards can best be seen in his famous sermon ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’ – to which we will now turn.

### ***Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God***

On 8 July, 1741 Jonathan Edwards preached his ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’ sermon in Enfield Connecticut.<sup>283</sup> This sermon is arguably his most important for the purposes of this thesis, because it combines his views of God and humanity in very clear language. He is preaching to people who may or may not be Christians, but are very likely aware of Christianity and the normative beliefs of Christianity.<sup>284</sup> That is to say, Edwards’s audience is likely to be Christian who are not necessarily Evangelical which, for him, means that they are not Christian.<sup>285</sup> Taking into consideration the first people to listen to this sermon makes his words seem even more intriguing and his views on God and humanity even more important, because Edwards is not shy about promoting his view that God is supreme – hypermasculine – while humans are completely depraved, sinful, and worthy of hell simply because they are human. Only those who have been ‘born again’<sup>286</sup> are truly Christian. That is, he combines the attribute of a wrathful God with the teachings prevalent in Wesley’s theology that one must believe in Christ and live in a holy manner daily in order to be truly saved. Thus, for Edwards, there is no difference between ‘the heathen’ and a Christian who has not converted to Evangelicalism – both

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<sup>282</sup> Cedric B. Cowing, ‘Sex and Preaching in the Great Awakening’ *American Quarterly* 20 (Autumn 1968): 629.

<sup>283</sup> Edward J. Gallagher, ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’: Some Unfinished Business’ *The New England Quarterly* 73 (June 2000): 202.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*.

are worthy of hell. This, again, illustrates the mutually self-defining nature of Edwards's descriptions of the supreme God in relation to the nothingness of humankind.

There is no want of power in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment. Men's hands cannot be strong when God rises up. The strongest have no power to resist him, nor can any deliver out of his hands. He is not only able to cast wicked men into hell, but he can most easily do it. . . . They are as great heaps of light chaff before the whirlwind; or large quantities of dry stubble before devouring flames. We find it easy to tread on and crush a worm that we see crawling on the earth. . . . thus easy is it for God, when he pleases, to cast his enemies down to hell.<sup>287</sup>

For Edwards, anyone can be sent to hell by God. Humanity does not deserve God's mercy and there is nothing that anyone can do to buy the grace of God. God, the hypermasculine – strong and disembodied – can do whatever He pleases and sends people to hell easily and for no reason other than it is His wish.<sup>288</sup> There is no knowing this God, because He is completely transcendent and wrathful. This wrath in God is perfect, but the sense of this sermon shows that even if one wants to know this God, it would be impossible. Whereas Augustine, Luther, and Wesley all claim that God is knowable through the love of God, when Edwards focuses on the wrath of God, this love is diminished and the perceived knowableness of God also disappears.

The wrath of God is also shown in Edwards' description of a humankind that deserves hell:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are then thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpents is in ours.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

This view shows that unlike other Western theologians, Edwards does not even consider humanity to be nothing compared to God. Rather, humanity is less than nothing – humanity is merely something to be taunted and tormented by an angry and wrathful God.

You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burnt it asunder...[you have] nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.<sup>290</sup>

The culmination of this hypermasculine God/less-than-nothing-human dichotomy is that humans must cower and fear an angry God for no other reason than that they have been born. For Edwards, the attribute of God's love is completely subsumed by the attribute of wrath. Not only is this God unknowable, but He is also cruel and despotic. There is no discussion of sex for Edwards because the issue for him is not individual acts; rather, the sin of humanity is simply being. In other words, the more hypermasculine God is, the less good humanity can be. There is no need for Edwards to discuss other aspects of theology such as sexuality or the body, the Holy Spirit, or even the incarnation beyond the wrath of God because all that matters is that one must fear God and submit to His bidding in the hopes of being chosen by God to be saved from hell.

Furthermore, Edwards is creating disunity in the 'bride of Christ' or the church by preaching that non-Evangelical doctrine is unimportant. Instead, only a narrow Evangelical view of salvation matters because as an itinerate preacher, he would go from town to town preaching the wrath of God with little concern for how this would affect congregations when he left. This shows that not only does Edwards hate the human body and nature; he has little (if any) respect for the

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

spiritual body of the church. Edwards is important for these attitudes because if ever there has been a theologian who believes in a completely hypermasculine God, it is Edwards. This one-sided theology continues to be dangerous today because as we will see in the next chapter, modern day American Evangelicals use Edwards' wrath of God in an odd combination with ideas (derived from Augustine, Luther, and Wesley) about the love of God that configure the God/human relationship in terms of a thinly disguised sado/masochism.

## **Conclusion**

It seems apparent to me that the hierarchal and patriarchal culture which influences Augustine's beliefs about God, humanity, the body, women, and sexuality also significantly influences Luther, Wesley, and Edwards. While Augustine's strict hierarchal worldview makes him believe that celibacy is better than marriage, it does not encourage Luther to maintain this view. However, Luther remains sceptical of the value of even 'proper' sex beyond a fulfilment of man's lust. In my view, this view of sexuality (and by extension, woman and the material realm) is reinforced by the hypermasculine God of Augustine. For Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and particularly Edwards, God is so hypermasculine that it is inconceivable that this God would be embodied. Yet only such a God could save humanity as Luther dictates in his theology of Justification by Faith.

Above all, in the work of the four theologians studied thus far, a hypermasculine view of God is never matched equally by the immanent view according to which God can be embodied and also still powerful. If this were possible, then I believe that there would not be such deep scepticism embedded in either Augustine or Luther's view of sex, the body, or woman. While Luther did liberate sexuality from the dark corners of celibacy, he then hid it again in marriage. Perhaps if

God was not a hypermasculine figure, then the Christology and Soteriology that followed would have been able to see human sexuality, woman, and the body as something positive instead of consigning it to the margins where women are demonized and men struggle to control their lust.

When this theology of God came to Wesley, he does not focus specifically on sexuality, woman, or the body; however, it is not difficult to see his disdain for the body – a disdain which, it is reasonable to assume, could be transferred to sex and woman. This is because, with Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification, believers continually look to an unknowable, transcendent, and hypermasculine God, and strive to please Him through restrictions on their bodies. And as noted previously, when one is so focused on a hypermasculine, disembodied God, then there is little room for the goodness of the human body and its functions.

Whereas Luther promotes Justification by Faith because of the all-powerful nature of God while demonizing woman, body, and sexuality; Wesley continues this line of thought with sanctification through good works without specific reference to sexuality or woman but continual reference to the evils of human nature and the body. The implications of this theology reach a peak of intensity with Edwards where we no longer see any love in God – only wrath. With this wrath comes hatred of humanity because God can only be sufficiently defined in relation to the nothingness of humankind and the (feminine) material world of dust and worms. When this happens, not even the bride of Christ is important. Later American Evangelicals are strongly influenced by this theology, as we will see in the next chapter with Joshua Harris who is unwilling to even kiss his fiancé out of a fear of the body, sexuality, and ultimately, God.



In the next chapter, I will attempt to show how this hypermasculine and hierarchal view of God is being lived out today in American Evangelical's views of God, woman, body, and sex where it is possible to believe that God is hypermasculine and that sexuality (or the body) is good at the same time because of the normative male projection upon both God and the body. Something has to give, and while American Evangelicals maintain that the goodness of God and the body can be seen in personal holiness, I will show that the focus on personal holiness is not enough to fix this disconnect. The legacy of patriarchy that can be observed when one views God as hypermasculine, and the scepticism about sexuality, body, and woman that American Evangelicals have inherited from Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Edwards, are not indicators of salvation as a free gift from God. Instead, this gift is conditional upon a belief that the material world is evil; and in my view, woman and the body are the losers.

## Introduction

In the last chapter, we looked at theologians of the past. During this examination, there emerged a correlation in the work of these theologians between the hypermasculinity of God and a negative view of the physical realm including the body, woman, and sex. Now, we will look at how this development is played out in American Evangelical thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In this context we shift from looking at theologians to writers who are primarily pastors and missionaries. The reason for this shift is that for American Evangelicalism, these ‘popular theologians’ are the people who create, emphasise, and encourage specific beliefs in lay Christians. In other words, it is people in the field (pastors, writers, and missionaries) who are responsible for the ethos of contemporary American Evangelicalism. In the first section, we will be looking at Jim and Elisabeth Elliot – two missionaries who evangelised to people in Latin America during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the second section we will look at Joshua Harris who wrote popular Evangelical theology before becoming a pastor in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There are three reasons why we are looking at these people. The first reason is to discover what American Evangelicals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward believe about God, sex, woman, and the body. Second, it is to see how, whether or not it is acknowledged, the theologians of the past have influenced (and continue to influence) these more contemporary understandings of God, sex, woman, and the body. The third reason is to make way for questioning the continued validity of these beliefs about God and the physical/material realm.

## Jim and Elisabeth Elliot

Jim Elliot was born in Portland, Oregon in 1927 to Evangelical parents.<sup>291</sup> His mother was a chiropractor who had her office in the home as she was also the primary care-giver, and his father was an evangelist.<sup>292</sup> Elisabeth Howard (Elliot) was herself born to a missionary family in Belgium, although they moved to America shortly after her birth.<sup>293</sup> Jim and Elisabeth met during their third year of college at Wheaton and both desired to become missionaries.<sup>294</sup> This story, however, is not a simple boy-meets-girl love story – which is why it has captured the imaginations and respect of American Evangelicals. Furthermore, because their story is well documented through journals, letters, and books, their thoughts about God and the material world, including sex, have become widely familiar. Therefore, this is particularly useful to my argument because it provides a classic example of an idealised Evangelical understanding of sex and specific gender roles. However, the views which pertain to God must be teased out of this body of writing – a somewhat peculiar characteristic of the work, given the Elliots’ desire to be missionaries and spread the Evangelical gospel to foreigners.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testimony of Jim Elliot* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1958), 25.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> I say ‘Evangelical gospel’ here because there is evidence that at least Jim did not see Roman Catholic belief as ‘true’ Christianity. This understanding of Evangelical beliefs as true Christianity can be observed when reading between the lines during Jim’s time in Ecuador. Specifically, he discusses how the indigenous people go between his group of Evangelical missionaries and a Roman Catholic monk working in the same area, trying to get necessities from both groups. Given the fact that there is a Roman Catholic monk doing missionary work there, and yet Jim (and his fellow missionaries) continue to see it as their duty to ‘preach to the unchurched,’ it is plausible that he sees his belief system as different, better, or more ‘Christian’ than that of the Roman Catholic monk. This attitude toward Roman Catholicism makes one wonder if his frustration regarding the lack of belief by the indigenous people is a lack of belief in Evangelicalism rather than general Christianity which would include Roman Catholicism. If this is the case, it indicates a disregard for his theological inheritance which will be further explored on pages 103 ff. Ibid., 236; 244.

Jim Elliot meets Elisabeth Howard (Elliot) in 1947 when they became friends and study partners in Greek class.<sup>296</sup> A year later, Jim confesses that he loves Elisabeth, but feels that God is calling him to be a single missionary in South America.<sup>297</sup> While Elisabeth finds this difficult because she is in love with Jim, above all, she wants to follow what she believes to be the will of God so she accepts this state of love without any form of commitment<sup>298</sup> and they decide to remain friends and ‘place their emotions in the hands of the Lord.’<sup>299</sup> Elisabeth graduates college that year and they leave things as they are without writing to one another until 1949 when Jim graduates from Wheaton and goes back to his hometown.<sup>300</sup> They begin to occasionally correspond and apparently continue to love one another but still are unwilling to move into a relationship beyond friendship because they do not feel God calling them to this.<sup>301</sup> After a few years, occasionally visiting one another, Jim reveals in his journal that he has received an indication from God that he might not be single forever, but is not to do anything about his love for Elisabeth yet.<sup>302</sup>

In February 1951, Jim sets sail for Quito Ecuador and in April, Elisabeth feels God calling her to be a missionary in Ecuador also, so she moves to the same city.<sup>303</sup> At this point, they both sense

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<sup>296</sup> Elisabeth Elliot, *Passion and Purity: Learning to Bring Your Love Life Under Christ's Control* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 12.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

that they will marry the other but since they believe that God has not told them that marriage is imminent, they remain friends and write love letters to each other.<sup>304</sup> Also during this time, they move to opposite sides of Ecuador to evangelise indigenous peoples.<sup>305</sup> In 1953, Jim writes to Elisabeth that he has received a word from God saying to marry Elisabeth and they marry in October.<sup>306</sup> They have a daughter in 1955 and then on 8 January, 1956, Jim is killed by the Auca tribesmen – with whom he had been making contact to evangelise.<sup>307</sup> Elisabeth later returns to the Auca tribe and evangelises them – converting the men who had killed her husband.<sup>308</sup> She subsequently goes back to the United States and has edited and written many books about her and her husband's life,<sup>309</sup> about virginity for singles,<sup>310</sup> and the proper role of a Christian woman.<sup>311</sup>

Arguably, this kind of commitment to God and the work of God is either noble or delusional. Yet whichever way one understands the Elliots' motives, there are clearly some fundamental beliefs being enacted upon. Because I maintain that the life and story of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot are upheld in American Evangelical circles as positive role models, it is, of course, important to understand some of these beliefs. Although in Evangelical circles, their theology is generally

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> E.g.: *Shadow of the Almighty*, *Through Gates of Splendour*, *The Savage my Kinsman*, and *The Journals of Jim Elliot*.

<sup>310</sup> E.g.: *Passion and Purity*, *Let me be a Woman*, and *Keep a Quiet Heart*.

<sup>311</sup> Elliot, *Passion*, 13.

presented as purely biblical,<sup>312</sup> it will be my task to show how they relate back to the theologians in the previous chapter. I will begin with some general beliefs that Jim Elliot (and arguably most other American Evangelicals) hold, such as: what it means to be a part of a ‘Fundamentalist Christian’ (or American Evangelical) church; the use of theological training/education; and being in the world but not of it. From there, I will look at how both Jim and Elisabeth understand God and show how this understanding of God directly influences, or leads to, their beliefs about sex, gender roles, and the body.

### ***General Beliefs***

One of the aspects of American Evangelicalism which Jim Elliot promotes is a curious form of Christian exclusivism from the rest of the world. He is specifically exclusivistic when it comes to his understanding of the church.<sup>313</sup> For Elliot, fundamental to a proper Christian belief is an understanding that the church should strive to live out all the principles and standards of the New Testament church.<sup>314</sup> That is, the goal of the church today should be to live like the church in the New Testament without concern for any subsequent doctrine or theology developed in the course of church history.<sup>315</sup> Elliot dismisses his theological heritage as ‘anything will do’<sup>316</sup> and also believes that one does not necessarily need to follow the teachings of clergy because, according to him, there were no clergy in New Testament times.<sup>317</sup> Instead of following the clergy, Elliot maintains that one should study the Bible for one’s self and follow the instruction discerned from

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<sup>312</sup> Elliot, *Shadow*, 59.

<sup>313</sup> We will later see an interesting correlation between his understanding of the ‘Bride of Christ’ or the church and his own wife. C.f. pp. 313 ff.

<sup>314</sup> Elliot, *Shadow*, 97.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

the Holy Spirit through the Bible.<sup>318</sup> Of course, if one follows the logic of his approach then his understanding of scripture must be viewed as the only one that is correct and alternative understandings will necessarily appear misguided. It does not matter to him then, that his own discernment of the Holy Spirit comes after 2000 years of learning and theological reflection. What matters for Elliot is that God gives him the understanding of the Bible personally through the Holy Spirit. Paradoxically, too, of course, he takes on the role of teacher and preacher, undermining his own claim that the laity should study the Bible and follow their own interpretation of God's word rather than relying on anyone else's preaching or theology.

Elliot continues to demonstrate his disregard for theological education and to promote personal study of the Bible through the whole course of his journals and letters. Two examples of this should suffice to show his mindset.

The acquisition of academic knowledge is a wearing process and I wonder now if it is all worth while....what thing better can a man know than the love of Christ, which passes knowledge? Oh to be revelling in the knowledge of Him, rather than wallowing in the quagmire of inscrutable philosophy!<sup>319</sup>

This is written during Jim's time at Wheaton, and while it might be understandable that he does not particularly appreciate all of his courses, it is rather strange that he finds all education useless and would prefer to obtain his knowledge from 'the love of Christ.' He also has some harsh words regarding systematic theology in specific:

2 Timothy 2:9 says, 'The word of God is not bound.' Systematic theology – be careful how you tie down the Word to fit your set and final creeds, systems, dogmas, and organized theistic philosophies! The Word of God is not bound! It's free to say what it will to the individual, and no one can outline it into dispensations which cannot be broken. Don't get it down 'cold', but let it live – fresh, warm, and vibrant – so that the word is not binding

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 42.

ponderous books about it, but rather is shackling you for having allowed it to have free course in your life. That's the apostolic pattern....And those who are arguing about foreknowledge, election, and such: read those verses 14-26, and then look how the apostle is willing to leave it a paradox. 'God gives repentance', and 'they recover themselves'. Yes, yes, I'm naïve, and glad to be so in such a case.<sup>320</sup>

What is clear here is not only Jim's disdain for the tradition from which his own approach is drawn, but also his assumption that everyone will understand the Bible in the same way that he does; without an apparent understanding of, or time for, any kind of hermeneutics. Liberation and feminist theologians, for example, would take issue with this assumption, and they would be right to do so. Not everybody has had Elliot's privileged upbringing, education, or the experience that allows him to make the hetero-normative conclusions that he does. Elliot's belief that the Bible will 'talk' to the individual is disconcerting because he is relying simply upon his own understanding of God and the Holy Spirit to guide him. By relying on one's own understanding of God without any kind of external reference – something like the witness of church history for example – it is easy enough to project idealised hypermasculine characteristics onto God in the biblical text. As we will see, when discussing Elliot's view of God,<sup>321</sup> this is exactly what occurs. In adopting this approach, Elliot takes a critical stance toward his theological heritage, and yet still effectively uses this heritage as a substitute for any more critical methodology. One example of this is when Elliot uncritically assumes Luther's position of *sola scriptura*<sup>322</sup> as the position of the Early church, and therefore correct, without even referring to the phrase *sola scriptura* or Luther. As we will see below, this do-it-yourself theology amplifies the hypermasculine attributes of God which we have already seen in Western

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>321</sup> C.f. pp. 107 ff.

<sup>322</sup> C.f. p. 108.



Christianity because left without any checks and balances (such as a peripheral eye on past theology), it becomes even more dangerous.

This threat is actualised in the death of Jim Elliot. In 1949, while contemplating becoming a missionary, Elliot writes:

What will I be doing one year from today is a complete mystery. Perhaps a sickbed or a coffin – glory! Either of these would be fine, but the latter would be immortality, a swallowing up by Life. For this I am most anxious.<sup>323</sup>

This is followed later by: ‘One of the greatest blessings of heaven is the appreciation of heaven on earth. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.’<sup>324</sup>

It becomes clear though his writing, that Elliot feels called by the Holy Spirit, in conjunction with his reading and interpretation of the Bible, to go to the mission field and preach to the indigenous peoples. It is also evident that his desire is to die there – and he does, leaving a wife and baby in the jungle of Ecuador. While the Holy Spirit does not tell him that he will die, leaving behind a young family, had he listened to the warnings of other missionaries,<sup>325</sup> or news regarding the Aucas killing people days before leaving for the village,<sup>326</sup> he would have figured out the likely outcome of his missionary endeavour.<sup>327</sup> It would seem from the above quotes that martyrdom is his desire. Whether or not this outcome has actually been determined by the Holy Spirit, it seems more like a self-fulfilling prophecy than the intervention of an immanent and

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 94-5.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 294.

loving God communicating by the Holy Spirit through the Bible. Yet the questions remain: how does Elliot get to a point where he takes this probable death sentence as a word from the Holy Spirit? Do past theologians influence Elliot's views of God? And, how does his understanding of God influence his lived-out understanding of sex, the body and gender roles? To these questions we will now turn.

### ***Jim and Elisabeth Elliot and God***

What kind of God must one believe in to be willing to die to spread his 'good news' and to believe that God speaks directly to Jim Elliot? In reading between the lines of both Jim and Elisabeth Elliotts' work, one is able to ascertain how they understand God and can identify the influence of past theologians in their ideas about God. By doing this work, we will see that the Elliotts' views of God are somewhat inconsistent. We will also see that this God is, to all intents and purposes, an idealised version of Jim.

One of the characteristics of the Elliotts' God is grace and happiness. 'Glad to get the opportunity to preach the gospel of the matchless grace of our God to stoical pagan Indians. Oh what a privilege to be made a minister of things of the 'happy God'.'<sup>328</sup> First, I should note that the 'Indians' spoken of are Native Americans to whom Jim preaches in the summer of 1948.<sup>329</sup> What I would like to focus on in this statement is the combination of the gracious God and the privilege to be a minister. The graciousness of God can, of course, be traced from biblical sources through to the present. However, when one combines it with the ministerial aspect, it is difficult not to think of Augustine. While Augustine might have taken his time in becoming a

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

Christian, once he had made that choice, he began to minister to friends, family, and parishioners with passion.<sup>330</sup> One need only look at his comments just after his conversion to see this

combination of a belief in a gracious God and the importance of ministering to others:

Good God, what massed in man to make him rejoice more at the salvation of a soul despaired of, and delivered from greater danger, than if there had always been hope of him, or the danger had been less? For so Thou also, O merciful Father, dost 'joy over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.'<sup>331</sup>

Thus, for both Jim and Elisabeth Elliot, and for Augustine, God can be seen as good, merciful, and gracious with the resulting obligation being ministry.

However, while the love, mercy, and goodness of God are a part of Jim and Elisabeth's understanding, so is the wrath of God:

Behold, the Son of God comes! One flash of His burning eye will melt all our polished marble and burnished gold to nothing. One word from his righteous lips will speak destruction to the vast rebellion we call the human race. One peal of His vengeful laughter will rock the libraries of our wise and bring them crashing to a rubble-heap.<sup>332</sup>

These words strongly indicate the influence of Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening as we spoke of in the last chapter where one of Edwards' main preaching tactics is to vividly describe hell to the listener. These devices seem visible here within Jim Elliot's thinking, and while he consistently promotes the grace and mercy of God, the wrath and anger of a righteous God are also present. His words also reveal aspects of Wesley's focus on the free gift of salvation;<sup>333</sup> as well as the importance of the cross as described by Luther<sup>334</sup> – although these

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<sup>330</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.III.5.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.III.6.

<sup>332</sup> Elliot, *Shadow*, 116.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

aspects of God are less prominent in the Elliot writings. If these great theologians are unconsciously drawn upon in Elliot's thinking, then it makes sense to wonder if the hypermasculine view of God is also embedded in his theology. While Jim Elliot does seem to have a different, or at least an additional view from some of his predecessors, of God's immanence and closeness, the answer to the question of whether or not Elliot understands God as hypermasculine would, in my view, have to be yes.

As we saw in the last chapter, a hypermasculine understanding of God is most clearly revealed in descriptions of the ideal relationship between human beings and God – and Jim Elliot's description fits into this Western Christian understanding. In his writing, God is seen as the ideal masculine husband, with Jim Elliot as the continually desiring, obedient, and submissive feminine wife. This should be born in mind as we review how Elliot understands both the church and himself as bride of God:

To gaze and glory and to give oneself again to God, what more could a man ask? Oh, the fullness, pleasure, sheer excitement of knowing God on earth. I care not if I ever raise my voice again for Him, if only I may love Him, please Him. Mayhap in mercy He shall give me a host of children that I may lead through the vast star fields, to explore His delicacies, whose finger-ends set them burning. But if not, if only I may see Him, touch His garments, and smile into my Lover's eyes – ah, then not stars, nor children shall matter – only Himself.<sup>335</sup>

When I first read these words, I was surprised by the erotic tone as well as the discussion of children. This is because it is unclear whether Elliot desires to be a father of human children or a mother to God's children. Upon reflection, it occurs to me that it does not really matter whether these children 'fathered' by Elliot are human or divine because of his view that the church should

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 179.

be the ideal Bride of God and the people in it to whom Elliot ministers would be his ‘children.’ The words show that Elliot understands God as an ultimate lover and carer of the beloved (Jim). Yet, this hypermasculine God can create humanity<sup>336</sup> out of nothing and because God creates humanity he can care for them in a much more intimate way than a God who has not been imbued with hypermasculinity (or as Nelson would claim, had a characteristic of flaccidity).<sup>337</sup> This God cares for the Beloved, and His children, as an almighty and ultimately transcendent Father.<sup>338</sup> Furthermore, the eroticised God is not merely a creator of humanity, He is also the ultimate lover and Elliot is the adoring wife who is completely (and eternally) fulfilled, pleased, and excited. Elliot also seems to take a somewhat sexualized masochistic turn when he states:

Father, let me be weak that I might loose my clutch on everything temporal....Even, Father, would I lose the love of *fondling*. How often I have released a grasp only to retain what I prized by ‘harmless’ longing, the fondling touch. Rather, open my hand to receive the nail of Calvary, as Christ’s was opened – that I, realizing all, might be released, unleashed from all that binds me now.<sup>339</sup>

Here, Elliot wants to be ‘pierced’ by the ‘nail of Calvary’ so that he might do the bidding of his Lover/God. I would maintain that he very much sees his role in the God/man relationship as a woman idealised in a male-normative context – waiting eagerly to be loved, filled, and ‘nailed’ by a hypermasculine God who can fulfil all of his wants and desires. This has very interesting indications for how he views the husband/wife relationship (which we will discuss below) as well as how he views the Bride of God, or the church.

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> C.f. pp. 58 ff.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 69.

Above, I noted that Elliot thinks that God wants the church to be like the New Testament church – without clergy and infused with the Holy Spirit and the ‘Word.’ Given the above statements, it is now possible to give a brief view of how Elliot thinks the church should be. It should be as a lover who is waiting for fulfilment. While this fulfilment is bodily, or evident in a bodily sense, it is also one of willing pain for the glory of an unseen and hypermasculine Father/Lover/God.

The hypermasculine God comes to humanity through the Spirit as they read the Bible. However, because one is not to look back to the theology of the past, or even to the clergy of the present, one must somehow know that this is the Spirit and not the self (or the Devil) influencing ordinary human Christians and the church. To bring in Beauvoir briefly, she notes that ‘condemned to play the part of the Other, woman was also condemned to hold only uncertain power: slave or idol, it was never she who chose her lot.’<sup>340</sup> While Beauvoir is describing physical women here, the quote also applies to the church. By reducing the church to a female lover longing for sexual fulfilment, Elliot is also reducing the church to an Other who is condemned to be a slave of the charismatic leader. For Elliot, the role of the church is to be a slave to his whimsical theological reflections. However, Elliot also desires this female role for himself because he also wants to be the ‘Bride’ of Christ though he realises that this is not enough. Why he should think that this would be enough for the church or for women is a mystery, but it is clear in his writing that a desire for God is not enough for him:

I cannot understand man, even a godly man. Having been conquered by a power unseen and willingly owning the sway of the Absolute, thus ‘finding himself’ and satiating the ultimate longings of his breast, he can ache with a perfect fury to be subjugated still further to the rule of a woman’s love. Or perhaps it is his desire to possess, having been strangely dispossessed by owning Christ as Lord. And within I feel the very same. Oh that Christ

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<sup>340</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 111.

were All and Enough for me. He is supposed to be, ...but oh, to be swept away in a flood of consuming passion for Jesus, that all desire might be sublimated to Him.<sup>341</sup>

In these very honest words, Elliot is summarising his view of God and his relationship with God. God is the absolute lover, friend, and hypermasculine husband/God. And yet, Elliot feels dispossessed because he owns Christ. It is possible that through this recognition of possessing Christ and yet feeling dispossessed for this possession, Elliot is the closest he ever comes to recognising his own need of embodiment. This is because at this stage in his life, Elliot understands that it is not enough to project his need for physical love onto God. He feels guilt for needing the love of a woman due to his embodiment and understands that disembodiment and the love of a hypermasculine lover/God is not enough. Thus, while Elliot sees God as the ultimate husband, he also possesses God and this possession is not enough because, like Augustine in *On the Trinity* before him, he longs greatly to be completely within God. These statements lead one to an inevitable conclusion – that for Elliot, God is an image of himself. He longs to be an idealised lover of God when he is unloved physically. He desires to be nailed to Calvary when he is feeling guilt for loving Elisabeth. And ultimately, he possesses Christ while feeling dispossessed when recognising the hold that a woman's love has upon him.

In James Nelson's words discussed in the last chapter,<sup>342</sup> God is the phallic male to Elliot's flaccidity. When Elliot is unable to execute his physical longing for human contact, he projects it onto God. In doing this, Elliot creates at once a hypermasculine God who fulfils all of his

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<sup>341</sup> Elliot, *Shadow*, 72-3.

<sup>342</sup> Pp. 58 ff.

cravings, as well as a God that he is able to possess. Elliot is able to possess God because, ultimately, Elliot sees God as a husband figure. In *Apocalyptic Bodies*<sup>343</sup> Tina Pippin notes:

The ultimate bonding of God and men occurs in the divine eternity in holy matrimony with the deity. The female church (like the traditional minyan) is all men. The male body identifies with the male God. The male becomes female to unite with God – Eve’s trick without Eve, and without God’s interference. Lilith and Eve (and Asherah, God’s consort) are demonized to make room for the men who become women to unite with God. By becoming women, men can love a man (God) without the threat of homosexuality.<sup>344</sup>

Becoming feminine in relation to a hypermasculine God is an essential aspect of maintaining and perpetuating the American Evangelical male normative belief system because ‘...unless the idea of a hypermasculine Father God is abandoned heaven remains a sanitized place where the only role for the female is played by men.’<sup>345</sup> That is, without a hypermasculine God married to the man playing the feminine role, the whole system of belief breaks down because God becomes undefined and the male has no ideal in which to live. Being the feminine counterpart of a hypermasculine Husband God has specific implications for Elliot’s views about sex and as we will see, he and Elisabeth have very specific ideas as to the ‘proper’ role and goodness of sex which has as much to do with their view of God as it has to do with sex. We will now turn to the Elliots’ view of sex.

### ***The Elliots and Premarital Sex***

I chose to discuss both Jim and Elisabeth Elliot in this portion of the chapter because, while Elisabeth’s writing has not been influential up to this point of the chapter, she did edit Jim’s

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<sup>343</sup> Tina Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>345</sup> Elliot, *Shadow*, 123.



works which perhaps indicates that she agrees with his assessments of God and sexuality.<sup>346</sup>

Furthermore, she has written a book, *Passion and Purity* which discusses her relationship with Jim and promotes it as a model of a godly way to be in compliance with God's will while being unmarried. From this author's viewpoint, Jim's sources and Elisabeth's later book are congruent in thought which is why both of them are mentioned in this chapter and not just Jim Elliot. In *Passion and Purity*, Elisabeth Elliot sums up the normative view of American Evangelical belief about sex:

A question of chastity. An outmoded word, the world says, but the truth is it's a Christian obligation. It means abstention from sexual activity. For the Christian there is one rule and one rule only: total abstention from sexual activity outside of marriage and total faithfulness inside marriage. Period. No ifs, ands, or buts. Monks and nuns take vows of chastity, which for them means a lifelong of continence, since they do not marry.<sup>347</sup>

This view will be challenged in the next chapter with the concept of 'appropriate vulnerability,' but for the moment, we will be looking at what happens when this normative view of sex is lived out; what it means for the single person, its implications for marriage, and what it indicates for one's relationship with God (given the previous discussion about the Elliot understanding of God).

It would seem that 'total abstention' from sex has a fairly obvious meaning; however, even during their courtship the Elliots are unable to define 'how far is too far' for themselves. They conclude that 'chastity meant for us not taking lightly any least act or thought that was not appropriate to the kind of commitment we had to God.'<sup>348</sup> Thus, even for the Elliots who are wholly committed to their idea of God, they are unsure where to draw the line with physical

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>347</sup> Elliot, *Passion*, 124.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 125.

intimacy. In fact, there are few leaders in American Evangelicalism who will state specifically how far is too far – although, as we will see in the next section, Joshua Harris does discuss the line. But the question must be asked why one must abstain? American Evangelicals have many reasons that go beyond ‘God said no.’

The Elliots concur that it is their commitment to Christ that is the reason they do not connect physically, and when they hold hands, for example, they feel guilt for it.<sup>349</sup> Elisabeth also notes that:

...there is no purity in any of us apart from the blood of Jesus. The love life of a Christian is a crucial battleground, there, if nowhere else, it will be determined as to who is Lord: the world, the self and the devil, or the Lord Christ.<sup>350</sup>

This is an important point. Elliot is stating here that the real reason one must remain ‘pure’ is because one’s purity shows who is Lord. Although this is paradoxical – because presumably the Lord would be the Lord regardless of whom one has sex with – it is also telling. From this statement, one could maintain that a person should not have premarital sex, or any other form of sex beyond that which is male normative, because in doing so, they are dirtying the blood of Jesus<sup>351</sup> as well as associating themselves with the Devil.<sup>352</sup>

So, if one is to abstain from sexual activity until marriage so as to not be associated with the Devil, what joys do married men have to look forward to?

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

A wife demands a house; a house in turn requires curtains, rugs, washing machines, *etcetera*. A house with these things must soon become a home, and children are the intended outcome. The needs multiply as they are met – a car demands a garage; a garage, land; land a garden; a garden, tools; and tools need sharpening. Woe, woe, woe to the man who would live a disentangled life in my century. If Timothy 2:4 is impossible in the United States, if one insists on a wife...Be on guard, my soul of complicating your environment so that you have neither time or room for growth!<sup>353</sup>

It would seem that for the Elliots, one cannot win for losing. Either, one is associated with the Devil, or if a person does marry, he or she is well on the way to failing in respect of the will of God. There is no indication about the joys of sex within marriage here, just a possible material outcome because the only objective of sex is procreation and this forces ties to the physical and material realm. I realise that the Elliots would say that there are many joys in relation to sexuality within the bounds of approved marriage, particularly since, according to Elisabeth, one reason for not having premarital sex is that it then makes sex boring within marriage.<sup>354</sup>

However, this inconsistency is important to note, because, as we will see in the next paragraphs, the inconsistent ‘joy’ of sex within marriage is not limited to the bedroom. Instead, it spills out onto views of the proper roles of women; what men want from women, and how women are supposed to act when they are single.

The Elliots fall in line with traditional and patriarchal normative roles for women such as were also promoted by Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Edwards. The role of a woman is that of a helpmate for the man, nothing more or less than that.<sup>355</sup> However, in her description of how

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<sup>353</sup> Elliot, *Shadow*, 147.

<sup>354</sup> Elliot, *Passion*, 14.

<sup>355</sup> Elisabeth Elliot goes so far as to indicate that there is no proof of there ever being a matriarchal society and notes that woman’s biology naturally makes woman more suited to being a helpmate to man. At this point, I will leave that discussion with Rosemary Radford Ruther (e.g. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1993), 167.) and other feminists who would heartily disagree with Elliot. Elliot, *Passion*, 109.

single women should act, Elisabeth Elliot seems to indicate that the real reason for this is because men are confused about what they want. In one chapter of *Passion and Purity* entitled ‘What Women Do to Men,’ Elisabeth begins by stating that ‘women are always tempted to be initiators. We like to get things done. We want to talk about situations and feelings, get it all out in the open, deal with it.’<sup>356</sup> However, only two chapters later, she states her reason why God wants women to wait for men to initiate a relationship:

By the grace of God we have not been left to ourselves in the matter of who is to do the initiating. Adam needed a helper. God fashioned one to the specifications of his need and brought her to him. It was Adam’s job to husband her, that is, he was responsible – to care for, protect, provide for, and cherish her. Males, as the physical design alone would show, are made to be initiators. Females are made to be receptors, responders.<sup>357</sup>

Thus, according to Elliot, women are initiators and have ‘natural’ inclinations toward this via verbal ability/need.<sup>358</sup> However, it is men who are created to be initiators because Adam was created first.<sup>359</sup> Not only this, but Elliot seems to go back to a single-sex model such as that of Galen<sup>360</sup> to show that women are meant to receive and men to give. The basis of the single-sex model states that:

Instead of being divided by their reproductive anatomies, the sexes are linked by a common one. Women, in other words, are inverted, and hence less perfect, men. They have exactly the same organs but in exactly the wrong places.<sup>361</sup>

While I am sure that the Elliots are well aware of their own physical anatomies and would not say that the woman’s sex organs are literally inverted, the remains of this millennium old belief

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Galen, ‘On the Natural Faculties,’ in *Loeb Classical Library*, trans., Arthur John Brock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 3.2; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 8, 30.

<sup>361</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 26.

are firmly entrenched in their understanding of gender roles and conception of how one should relate to God. It is this single-sex belief system that makes it possible for Elisabeth to state that men are meant to be initiators and women are merely receptors. It is also this model which encourages a belief in a hypermasculine God with the man alone being the feminine in relationship with this God. This sexualized ‘evidence’ for why men should initiate instead of women is confusing and inconsistent. Because of this, I will again move back to the Elliots’ view of God and how this view directly affects their understanding of premarital sex and relationships. I would suggest that, in a way similar to what we have seen in the last chapter with past theologians, the problem stems from a hypermasculine understanding of God.

For the Elliots, God is hypermasculine – creator, Almighty, consummate male lover. However, as the quotes above indicate, He is also possessed by humans, and there is a real possibility that Jesus’ blood could be tainted by their actions. Furthermore, from the way in which Jim conceives of God, one could say that God is an idealised mirror image of Jim, with hypermasculine qualities. This understanding has serious ramifications for the Elliots’ views about premarital sex. While they are not sure of how far is too far, crossing the line has dire consequences and is to be equated with the Devil. Furthermore, while one is supposed to wait in eager anticipation for sex on the wedding night, when discussing the prospect of being married, sex does not even come into the conversation – only material ‘trappings’ and children. Finally, there is confusion as to how a woman is to act when she is single. Is she meant to follow her natural instincts and initiate or should she follow what Elliot tells her is appropriate and wait for the man because she has a vagina and not a penis? This goes directly back to Jim’s statement about longing for Jesus to be enough to eternally satisfy him, and yet feeling dispossessed

because he possesses Christ. Is he the one who is possessed or is he the possessor? This confusion indicates that the belief systems surrounding God and premarital sex has much less to do with God and sex and much more to do with an individual projection on God and sex.

Unfortunately, because historical theological thinking is not recognised or encouraged and the lay person is not to go to the clergy, the individual is left with the ‘Word’ and the Holy Spirit to interpret it with the help of the Elliots. This may be a form of intimacy, but one must question the use of it. In the next chapter, we will look in-depth at an alternative, perhaps more coherent, viewpoint. Now, however, we will continue with normative Evangelical belief in contemporary America, by looking at Joshua Harris. Harris has noted the importance of both Jim and Elisabeth Elliot in his work<sup>362</sup> and he also writes specifically about God and sexuality so we may hope that perhaps he will be less confusing as to the relationship between the two.

## Joshua Harris

Joshua Harris was born in Oregon, USA to an American Evangelical family in 1976.<sup>363</sup> He was homeschooled and wrote his first book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* at the age of 21. After the publication of this book, Harris became an instant success in the American Evangelical community due to the supposed radical ideas contained within the book.<sup>364</sup> The premise of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* is that the normative American beliefs surrounding dating are fundamentally flawed leading to heartache, frustration, and unhappiness for single people.<sup>365</sup> For Harris, the only positive solution to this conundrum is to follow the Bible’s teaching about dating

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<sup>362</sup> Joshua Harris, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 1997), 17; 83-84.

<sup>363</sup> Accessed online [01 July 2011]. [www.joshuaharris.com](http://www.joshuaharris.com)

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

and one's life with the result that one has to give God complete control over one's love life.<sup>366</sup> Subsequently, Harris has toured and given conferences on dating and he has also moved across the country to Maryland where he is now married, has three children, is the senior pastor at a Covenant church, and has written four more books about dating, the church, and (eventually) theology.<sup>367</sup> I have chosen to finish my research on American Evangelicals with Harris for three reasons. First, as a popular author, pastor, and theologian, his writings are important to many lay Christian readers – and as such, I am taking his writings as an example of normative American Evangelical belief. Secondly, while he rarely states it, it is evident in his writing that his ideas come from a tradition that includes Augustine, Luther, Wesley, Edwards, and the Elliots – connections which I will be pointing out in the rest of this chapter. Third, Harris is significant because he writes about both premarital sex, the role of women, and theology. It is perhaps curious to the academic that he wrote about premarital sex before learning about his theological past, but he did eventually study theology and has written extensively about both topics and continually refers to both in his books.

### ***Harris on God***

In this section we will be looking at Harris's views on topics relating to God; specifically we will consider his ideas regarding: the importance of studying theology, God's characteristics, and Jesus. While much of this information comes from Harris's most recent book, *Dug Down Deep*<sup>368</sup> a significant amount of what he understands about these topics was formed before he

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Joshua Harris, *Dug Down Deep: Unearthing what I Believe and Why it Matters* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 2010).

began to study theology, which is important because it shows that these are not simply his thoughts, but are prevalent in American Evangelicalism more generally.

Whereas in the previous part of this chapter about the Elliots little significance was placed on theology, but Joshua Harris does understand that it is an important aspect of Christian life. This can be seen when he states: ‘messed-up theology leads to messed-up living.’<sup>369</sup> However, instead of looking at significant figures in Western Christianity, Harris focuses solely on the Bible; how Evangelical biblical theologians interpret the Bible, as well as his own interpretation of it. This is an important point because, like the Elliots before him, Harris has little regard for Christian historical theology; rather, he is concerned with his personal relationship with the Bible and how he can live this out, regardless of whether or not it fits into a wider context of Western Christianity. This does not lead him to become a martyr like Jim Elliot; however, it does significantly influence how he understands God.

The Bible presents itself as a living communication from a personal God to the human race – more specifically to *you*...Getting the doctrine of Scripture right is essential for having a solid foundation as a Christian. If you don’t understand that God has spoken through the Bible, or don’t trust the Bible, how can you know him or cultivate a real relationship with him?<sup>370</sup>

This focus on the Bible and biblical living is very significant for Harris because when he discusses having a real relationship with God; it is here where the immanence, or closeness, of God comes into play. Harris, of course, believes that God came down to earth 2000 years ago through the person of Jesus Christ, but for Harris, it is not necessarily the only instance of divine immanence – God’s will and closeness comes to humanity when one studies the Bible and is

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 55-6.



active in one's local church. For Harris, the immanence of the scripture is how God speaks and how one is to know God.<sup>371</sup>

Unfortunately, what Harris, and the vast majority of American Evangelical theologians, does not seem to take into account is that his reading of the Bible can only be accomplished with the aid of his body. In *Introducing Body Theology*, Isherwood and Stuart remind the reader that:

The body in its entirety is the site of experience. Further, the body does not refer to only to the white male elite body, it cannot be colonized in the same way as reason has been. The body is far more expansive and inclusive. By focusing on experience the body becomes the site of personal redemption and redemptive interdependence. A reality that is not in any way new or against the teaching of Jesus but rather revives a process that has been crushed under the weight of patriarchal power.<sup>372</sup>

This main theme of body theology directly challenges Harris and those who claim that the only way to know God is through scripture with the aid of the disembodied Holy Spirit. By forgetting that in order to understand scripture there is no avoiding the body, Harris is clinging closely to a church tradition which declares that the body and material realm are unimportant because an idealised hypermasculine God will move the reader beyond the physical body to the realm of the spiritual – a realm where, as we have seen, there is only room for a hypermasculine husband and an ultimately submissive man in the feminine position.

Due to the fact that for Harris, God's characteristics are mediated exclusively through the Bible, it is immaterial that they have been the focus of theologians before him. For example, Harris lists God's characteristics as: creator, eternal, self-existent, omnipotent, almighty, all-knowing,

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology*, 39.

holy, strong, unchanging, steadfast, and full of mercy.<sup>373</sup> This list is complete with further descriptions and biblical examples. However, it fails to recognise at any point, that previous theologians might similarly have made their life's work discussing and working through these divine characteristics. For example, as we noted in the last chapter, Augustine discusses God as creator *ex nihilo* in great detail because for Augustine, God being able to create out of nothing is not taken for granted. However, Harris assumes that God created *ex nihilo* and there is no sense in his work that he realises it could have been otherwise:

I am created. *God is Creator*. I am made. God is the one who made all things, who 'created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1). He spoke and created the world out of nothing.

This assumption of God's all-powerful ability reflects His hypermasculinity because if God is all-powerful, then the human is necessarily subordinate and feminine. This is the basis of Harris's understanding of God although he does not recognise how the work of Augustine, for example, is subsumed within it. Moreover, while God may well be merciful, wrathful, etc., these attributes always originate from the belief in the hypermasculinity of God.

Another characteristic of Harris's God is mercy. Whereas Wesley spends much time wrestling with the mercy of God and desires to live a holy life because God is merciful, Harris assumes God is merciful, but does not connect with this strong emphasis on holy living.

But the greatest glory of the Cross is what it tells me about God. A God of justice and mercy. A God who loves helpless sinners like me so much that he came to die so we could be free to know and worship him for eternity.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Harris, *Dug Down Deep*, 41-5.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Harris spends a lot of time discussing holy living, but when writing about the cross, he does a poor job persuading the reader that one should connect God's mercy at the cross with holy living as Wesley does. Instead, Harris connects God's mercy with selfishness by stating that the only reason God is merciful and died for humanity is to make humans worship Him. To do anything for humanity for the sole purpose of making humans worship God is selfish and from these statements, Harris is allowing room for the argument that God is only merciful so He can be selfish and have humanity worship Him. I am not suggesting that Harris believes that God is selfish; however, this does seem to be a logical interpretation of Harris's theology and is arguably the result of Harris not acknowledging or drawing much more fully on the wealth of historical theology. He does not draw on this theology because it is not biblical in the way that he is led by his American Evangelical background to believe it should be. Or put in another way, Harris does not look at his theological heritage because it is not contained in the Bible – although he does unknowingly draw on aspects of this heritage.

Joshua Harris has other theological visions or ideals and in some contexts it would appear that, like Jonathan Edwards, he envisions God as wrathful:

The result of Christ's substitution is that God's wrath is satisfied and turned away....God's justice demands death for sin. Jesus' blood poured out, his life given in our place, satisfies the demand....At the cross God's wrath was satisfied. Our sins were paid for so we could be forgiven and accepted by God.<sup>375</sup>

It would be true to say that Harris spends much more time contemplating the mercy of God than God's wrath, but it is clear in his writing that, though he does not mention him by name, Harris has been influenced by Edwards' concept of God's wrath. This is because for Harris, while God

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 112.

is merciful, God is also a God of perfect justice<sup>376</sup> – which includes wrath. God is wrathful because humans are sinful and human nature (and flesh) is filled with sin and this sin must be eradicated before God can save humanity.<sup>377</sup>

It is not simply Harris's lack of interest in the insights of past theologians or his failure to properly reference them that is problematic, nor even his possible confusion as to the purpose of the cross – be it, God's selfish mercy or God's wrath. The real problem is that Harris looks only at his own interpretation of the Bible to discover 'proper' theology. By using elements of one theological position but not looking beyond this position or acknowledging that other positions exist,<sup>378</sup> Harris places himself, and his readers, into the most questionable and the narrowest of frameworks. At best, this simply reflects in the most uncritical way, the patriarchal values of the past as we have discussed in the previous chapter, but at worst it puts the present day reader in an untenable situation where they are forced to choose between 'right' belief and values of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We will first look at the aspect of questionable biblical belief in relation to the person of Jesus.

...the idea of God being a human – a bundle of muscle, bones, and fluid – is scandalous. Hands. Arms. Feet. Body hair. Sweat glands....In the womb of a virgin, a human life was conceived. But no human father was involved. The Holy Spirit, in a miracle too wonderful for the human mind to comprehend, overshadowed a young woman. And in a split second that the cosmos is still reeling from, God 'incarnated.' He took on our humanity.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>378</sup> Or for that matter holding a cannon within a cannon and only using specific portions of the Bible and/or reinterpreting the Hebrew Bible based upon the New Testament – as Harris does. Ibid., 13.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 82.

This normative Evangelical statement of the incarnation of Jesus is not, in and of itself, particularly unique or questionable beyond the fact that Harris assumes that God without Jesus is completely disembodied. However, when one looks at what Harris chooses to include, or rather exclude, from his description of God becoming human, there is an inherent problem with Harris's description of Jesus. While he is happy to discuss Jesus' body hair and sweat glands, he conveniently forgets to mention sexuality in connection to Jesus; the God who became 'wholly man.'<sup>380</sup>

Given the length of time during which Harris has been writing about Christian sexuality – and particularly about how to allow God to control one's life in the area of sexuality – it is, to say the least, odd that he does not mention the sexuality of Jesus – or for that matter consider God as anything other than male.<sup>381</sup> This is particularly problematic when we recognise that his target audience is not a group of theologians who know how to critique his ideas, but lay people within the church who would not necessarily know how to question them, or arguably have the confidence in such a patriarchal structure to do so.

Moreover Jesus' humanity is also seriously problematic in relation to sex because, according to Harris's account, the only reference to sex focuses on the impregnation of the Virgin Mary which

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>381</sup> Chapter 9 in *Dug Down Deep* specifically betrays Harris's belief that God is a male. This is due to the fact that in this chapter Harris is discussing the Holy Spirit. He never mentions *Sophia* or any form of wisdom in the female form. Furthermore, while Harris maintains that the Holy Spirit is spirit, he continually refers to the Spirit in particular and God in general in terms of the male gender. Thus, the simple lack of stating that God is genderless while using gendered language is indicative of Harris's belief that God is, indeed, male.

even for him is beyond comprehension. Not only does the Holy Spirit ‘overshadow’ Mary,<sup>382</sup> in a manner quite mysterious, but when discussing the birth, he seems taken up with the messiness of it and the unaccountability of God still being willing to become human.<sup>383</sup> This is particularly confusing because elsewhere he has so much to say about humans, the *imago dei*, and sex. In fact Harris specifically states that: ‘being a sexual being with sexual desires as part of it means to be a human created in God’s image.’<sup>384</sup> While passing over the supposed willingness on the part of Mary to be ‘overshadowed’ is not unusual, it is significant that he would promote the sexuality of humans by linking it to the *imago dei* and yet be unwilling to include sexuality in the attributes of Jesus.

I see two options for solving this dilemma. Either Harris simply does not think of the person of Jesus in relation to sex, which is an odd possibility given his writing about sex. Or, while Harris maintains that sex is good, it is not good enough for Jesus. However, as one attempts to solve this dilemma, it becomes clear that Harris’s understanding of the humanity of Jesus is somewhat ambiguous given his view of humanity and the flesh more generally.

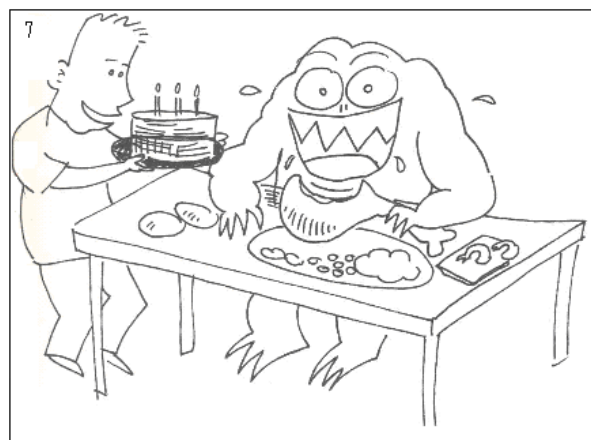
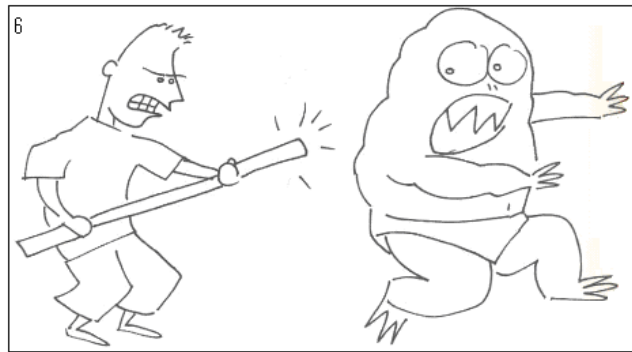
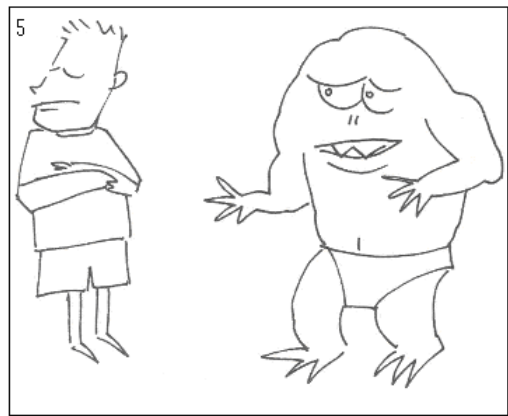
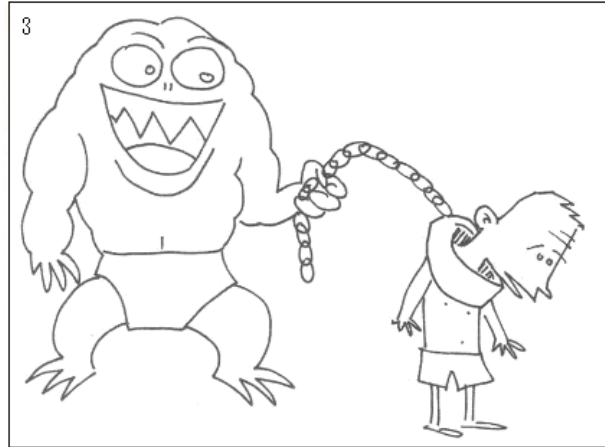
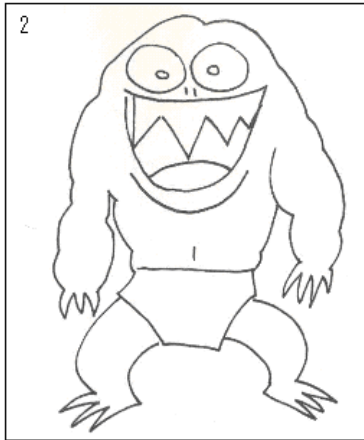
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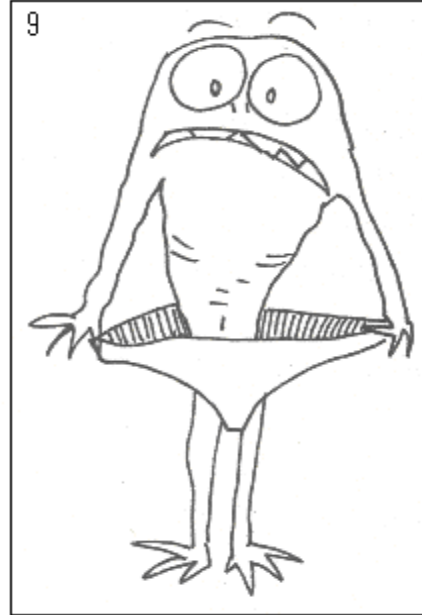
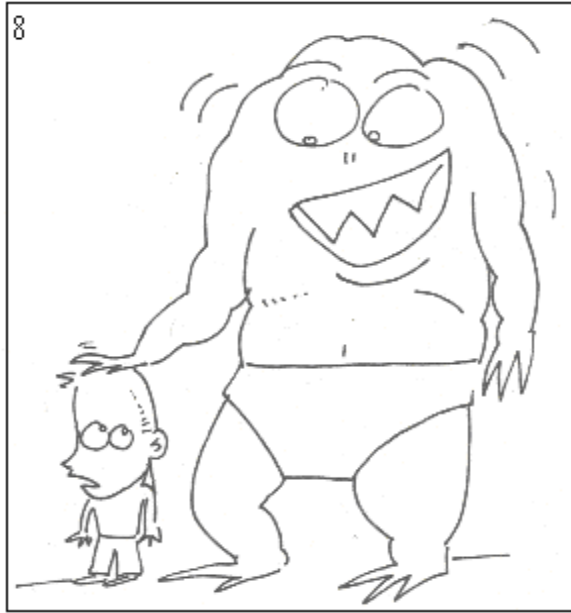
<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>384</sup> Joshua Harris, *Sex is Not the Problem (Lust is)* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2003), 34.

***Harris and the Flesh***





These pictures were drawn by Harris and are included in his chapter about sanctification.<sup>385</sup> In reflecting generally upon what he states is a need for sanctification, it is important to understand Harris's beliefs (and ambivalence) about the flesh before moving on to consider how his 'biblical' beliefs have influenced his understanding of sexuality. As we saw in Chapter 2, Augustine blames sin on the will and sees the body as essentially good because God created it; Luther thinks that the flesh had to be killed by the Spirit; Wesley focuses on sanctification and holy living as the means of loving a merciful God; and Edwards concentrates on the sinful nature of humanity. Harris, however, does not note this development of thought. Instead, he combines them together in one overarching discourse on 'the flesh' and in doing so, reveals both his view of God and his hatred for the body.

<sup>385</sup> Harris, *Dug Down Deep*, chapter 8; pp. 145-174.



The first picture shows some kind of a man. Here, Harris references God as creator while stating that humans are made in the *imago dei*. In doing this, he is calling upon a very Augustinian belief that men are created in the *imago dei* and given Augustine's disregard for females; one is free to assume that either women are assimilated into the male or are nonexistent. Harris must recognise a problem of some kind because he notes 'Ladies, sorry you have to identify with a little guy.'<sup>386</sup> However, it is significant that he does not fix the problem. It is also important to note that the 'little guy' is shirtless. As we will soon see, this is significant because the nearly naked 'little guy' is powerless and clearly, as the narrative proceeds, is shown to be in need of clothes.

The second picture shows the flesh. Harris defines the flesh as

...represent[ing] the sinful, corrupted desires of our hearts. It's not a reference to our bodies – our bodies are created by God and are good....The flesh represents our sinful cravings to live for ourselves and disobey God's laws and commands (Romans 7:18).<sup>387</sup>

Before moving on, it would be good to reflect on the 'flesh.' Notice the huge arms, lack of a shirt, oversized mouth, and general blob-like characteristics. While I am not a psychologist or art critic, I would surmise, although he says it is not so, this is how Harris actually sees his body – as an unformed and greedy blob – because we experience our desires through our bodies. It is true that Harris specifically notes that this 'flesh' is not the body, and he is right – it is not a body, it is a blob – an undefined and inarticulate mass of flesh.

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 156.

While Harris might not define the ‘flesh’ as anything beyond a corrupt heart and desires, feminist theologian Pamela Sue Anderson has gone much farther defining what the flesh is:

‘Flesh’ is the phenomenological term for that which connects bodies and world(s) inter-subjectively. Flesh constitutes a generality from which particularity emerges; in the mythical portrait, Eve emerges as a particular person. Flesh and ‘fleshy’ recall the biblical myth of Eve’s body whose negative imagery has been rejected by some philosophers and feminists who think we have – and should have – left mythical stories and images behind. However, descriptions of flesh remain part of our ethical, social and spiritual imaginary: ‘fleshiness’ remains part of how we imagine and think about sexed bodies...the female body becomes ‘the second sex.’<sup>388</sup>

By being unable to properly define ‘flesh’ Harris is doing more than showing he is a rather sloppy theologian. He is revealing a major weakness within his theological framework. Not only does he forget that his body literally connects his mind to that which is spiritual, but because of uncritical assumptions about the association between women and flesh which has been drawn from unacknowledged theological sources, every time he talks about the ‘flesh’ he inadvertently evokes these misogynistic tendencies while still not really addressing the issue of what it means to be a woman or female within his work. Yet ironically, this picture shows the control that the ‘flesh’ has over the ‘little guy’ – a slave. The flesh is happy and the shirtless ‘little guy’ is downtrodden and does not try to escape from the chain even though it would seem that he could do so easily enough by ducking out of the shackle.

Suddenly, the ‘little guy’ has clothes and the chain is broken. No more skinny arms and legs. Now he has clothes and can cover up his body with faith in Jesus’ work on the cross and salvation from sin and desire. For Harris ‘this is what happens when we trust in Jesus.’<sup>389</sup> The

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<sup>388</sup> Pamela Sue Anderson, ‘Chill the Hived Body, Gender and Confidence,’ in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate*, ed. Pamela Sue Anderson (London: Springer, 2010), 165.

<sup>389</sup> Harris, *Dug Down Deep*, 158.

‘flesh’ is still there but the centre focus of the drawing is neither the cross nor the ‘flesh.’ The focus is the ‘little guy.’ The ‘flesh’ remains roughly the same – without clothes and an undefined blob. Yet in the next picture, after the ‘little guy’ believes in Jesus, the

flesh does not leave. It remains to tempt the ‘little guy’ even though he abstains from looking at it. The cross is no longer in the picture, but ‘the Holy Spirit indwells believers and empowers us to say no to the flesh.’<sup>390</sup>

Suddenly, the ‘little guy’ becomes angry and has a big stick to beat the ‘flesh.’ The ‘flesh’ is afraid of the well defined ‘little guy’ with clothes and Harris states that ‘we have to attack it and deny it and kill it.’<sup>391</sup>

The next picture is of the ‘little guy’ and the ‘flesh’ having a feast which is important because, while Harris talks a lot about living for God, he indicates in this drawing that the ‘flesh’ feeds on all desires and that one must not feed the ‘flesh’ with these desires. In this picture both are happy and fat and enjoying life – but this is wrong.

The final two pictures are perhaps the most indicative of Harris’s beliefs about the body and ‘flesh.’ In the first one, the ‘flesh’ is becoming more defined and the ‘little guy’ has less and less definition. This happens because the ‘little guy’ fed the ‘flesh’ and himself. Furthermore, it would appear that the ‘flesh’ is patting the ‘little guy’ on the head in a gesture of friendliness (although Harris maintains that this is the ‘flesh’ pushing the ‘little guy’ around).<sup>392</sup> Thus, for Harris and his interpretation of the Bible, when one feeds desire, it becomes well defined and more human looking while the body becomes less defined and begins to look indistinct. It is also

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 162.

significant that the 'little guy' no longer has a shirt on – a further indication that the 'little guy' is becoming less distinct because the 'flesh' is becoming more defined. This is perhaps due to the 'little guy' losing his faith and salvation because he fed his desire and allowed it definition.

The final picture shows a starved flesh because 'when we starve the flesh, it's easier to resist temptation and walk in obedience.'<sup>393</sup> The 'little guy' is no longer in the picture – it seems as if his goal, after all, has been to become transcendent and disembodied like God. Perhaps, since the starved flesh remains centre stage in the last drawing, it was not the 'little guy' who was significant in the first place. If the 'little guy' has become disembodied like God, then perhaps this drawing is about women whose only gendered association with the pictures, we might say, has to be with the fleshy blob.

I show these pictures because they are indicative of Harris's problematic theology. Not only must women identify with either a 'little guy' or an undefined fleshy blob, but all must believe that the body is better clothed than naked – or that it is better to hide the embodied self in clothing (or disembodied hopes for the future). Furthermore, the flesh is defined as 'sinful desire,' however this definition is muddled because there is no definition of what a 'sinful desire' is; or perhaps, more significantly, there is no definition of what a non-sinful desire is.

Presumably it is Harris who should define it for the believer. These pictures are also problematic because, for a man who has an Evangelical belief system, it is odd that he does not focus on the cross which is the basis for a human relationship and understanding of God. The 'flesh' is

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 163.

important and the more the 'flesh' becomes defined and fed, the smaller, more insignificant, and embodied the 'little guy' becomes.

These drawings are also intriguing because each of them shows an aspect of theology which Harris ascribes to the Bible but which, in fact, is clearly derived from a rich theological tradition. In them, for example, Harris betrays an almost Augustinian 'flesh' which wills to control the good body that God created. It draws on a Lutheran theology of the cross where God gives clothes to the 'little guy' as some kind of reward for belief. That is, only when the 'little guy' has faith will he be saved, or justified. There is a Wesleyan sense of holy living illustrated in the way in which the 'little guy' refuses to acknowledge the presence of the 'flesh.' It indicates an Edwards-like hatred for the 'flesh' (or as I would maintain, for the body). And finally, it demonstrates an Elliot-like impetus towards martyrdom where all desires deemed to be sinful are starved and killed.

From these drawings, their explanations, and the confusion regarding God, God's characteristics, and the nature of Jesus without any form of sexuality in his humanity, emerges the unmanageable and confusing theology promoted by Harris. God is good, God created the world, God is merciful, and yet God is also full of wrath and would have His creation destroyed because an ill-defined 'flesh' has control of humans. Yet when this (feminine) flesh becomes larger and more significant, the human being becomes less substantial and the work of God through Jesus becomes less distinct, forcing a God of mercy to become wrathful. According to Harris, this cycle has been broken because of the work that the sexless God-man Jesus did on the cross. Furthermore, Harris goes on to discuss holy living through total submission to God through

sexual abstinence. One could, at this point, wonder why God would care about human sex given that He seems to be completely without any sex or a body. However, before moving on to this question, let us first consider Harris's views of sexuality where we will see a unique combination of patriarchal focus on virginity and a concentrate on holy living which indicates how his hypermasculine God-concept influences views on sex and the body.

### ***Harris and Sex***

As I mentioned earlier, Joshua Harris began his career by writing a book called *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. The goal of this book is to:

help you examine the aspects of your life that dating touches – the way you treat others, the way you prepare for your future mate, your personal purity – I look at what it means to bring these areas in line with God's Word. So even though in one sense this book is about dating, in another sense it isn't *really* the point. The point is what God wants. Discussing if or how to date isn't an end in itself. Talking about it serves a purpose only when we view it in terms of its relation to God's overall plan for our lives.<sup>394</sup>

Basically, much of Harris's work is about sanctification, or in his terms telling the reader 'how to make your life pleasing to God.'<sup>395</sup> The nature of God becomes important in relation to this aspect of Harris's work because unless one simply accepts the Evangelical premise that sex before marriage is wrong, the question of why such a powerful God cares so much about what human beings do with their genitals might naturally arise.

When Harris was about 19,<sup>396</sup> he began to reflect on his first serious relationship and its failure.

He states:

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<sup>394</sup> Harris, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, 10.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*

For the first time, I really began to question how my faith as a Christian affected my love life. There had to be more to it than ‘don’t have sex’ and ‘only date Christians.’ What did it mean to truly love a girl? What did it feel like to really be pure – in my body *and* my heart? And how did God want me to spend my single years? Was it merely a time to try out different girls romantically?<sup>397</sup>

There are two important aspects to this statement. First, Harris does not feel that his salvation through Christ is enough. He feels that there should be more to it, that something is still not right; that he is not free from the ‘flesh’ and that salvation is not enough to rid him of this ambiguous mass of desire. Some might say that his hormones are in full force and that perhaps this is a natural part of being a 19 year old male, but Harris does not think of it in this way. He feels that there is more he needs to do for his salvation to be complete – he has to starve his sexual desire. He also does not know what it feels like to be pure even though he has been a Christian for the vast majority of his life and at this point has never had sex.<sup>398</sup>

The second significant aspect of what Harris says here is the sense in which it indicates his attitude towards dating and a level of ambivalence about Christian dating. He clearly feels there is something not quite right with the concept of dating because, for him, it amounts to nothing more than trying out girls. He claims that dating, even Christian dating, is not good enough for Christians; it has to involve something more: ‘We were walking toward the commitment of marriage, not simply seeking how romantically involved we could become for the sake of a good time.’<sup>399</sup> These statements imply that dating for Harris is akin to marriage for Augustine – in other words, it is not good. They also show that because Harris’s state of salvation is not good

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<sup>397</sup> Joshua Harris, *Boy Meets Girl: Say Hello to Courtship* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2005), 16.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 28.

enough for him; even the impetus towards dating is viewed with suspicion; as if it was just an excuse to have sex.

Two questions come to mind. First, what kind of God is entailed by Harris's belief that he must continue to work for his salvation? As I indicated earlier, he views God as almighty and ultimate creator, yet also as wrathful. It is this wrath which is important because while Harris strives for holy living in a Wesleyan vein – because God is merciful and wants His followers to work toward purity and perfection – Harris also, and significantly, connects fear of God's wrath to sanctification.

My own self-centered approach to romance started young. Even though I grew up in a Christian home, by the time I reached junior high I had embraced a very ungodly attitude toward relationships. I didn't fear God. Despite my parents' diligence and godly example, I was living for sin and my own pleasure.<sup>400</sup>

He goes on to describe the 'proper' fear that one should have when he notes:

Every man and woman who refuses to turn from sexual sin and trust in Christ for forgiveness will one day look into the eyes of a Holy Judge – the short-lived pleasure of sin will be forgotten, and it will be too late for mercy.<sup>401</sup>

In statements like this, Harris could be a modern day Jonathan Edwards. He has clearly inherited Edwards' notion of the wrath of God and it is this wrath which motivates his view on premarital sex.

The second question that comes to mind is what has caused God's wrath; what is it about humanity that God (and Harris) hates? Harris never states explicitly why it is he thinks that the flesh is evil, although he clearly follows the tendency provided by his theological predecessors:

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<sup>400</sup> Harris, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, 15.

<sup>401</sup> Harris, *Boy Meets Girl*, 149.



when we destroy our lustful desire, we come not to the end of desire, but to the beginning of pure desire – God centred desire, which was created to carry us into the everlasting morning of God’s purposes.<sup>402</sup>

Yet arguably once again, for Harris, this has everything to do with his image of God and nothing to do with the actual human. Somehow, human desire is not enough – although desire is from God, this desire is easily swayed toward an unclear concept of evil. Just as Augustine battles with the will, Harris battles with desire which, if not trained continually upon God, is evil.

If premarital sex is considered evil because of the illicit desires it fosters, what is it about marriage that makes these desires good? Yet again, the answer seems to be God’s desire for glory:

Falling in love was God’s idea. He was the one who made us capable of experiencing romantic feelings. He was the one who gave us the ability to appreciate beauty and experience attraction. And He was the one who invented marriage so that the blazing fire of romantic love could become something even more beautiful – a pulsing, red-hot ember of covenant love in marriage. Why did He do it? For the same reason that He made sunsets and mountain ranges and fireflies! Because He’s good. Because He wants to give us a million different opportunities to see just how wonderful He is.<sup>403</sup>

Harris does not explain why it is that God wants praise or what it is about marriage that gives people this opportunity any more than committed couples who are unmarried. Nor does he explain how not giving God praise makes humans sinful – although this is the clear indication.

Considering the different theologians we have studied, Harris comes closest to Augustine in this respect because Augustine thinks that celibacy is preferable to marriage which takes a person away from working for and loving, God. While the other theologians we have encountered have

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<sup>402</sup> Harris, *Lust*, 28.

<sup>403</sup> Harris, *Boy Meets Girl*, 35.

had reservations about sex because of human nature, both Augustine and Harris attribute these reservations to the hypermasculine attributes of God such as power, being almighty, and creator – although only Augustine explains the reasoning behind this move. The final question for this chapter is related to the cultural patriarchal influences of Western Christianity.

### ***Harris and Patriarchy***

There are two aspects of Harris's writing that show his tendency to adhere to patriarchy; maintaining the normative male tendency to make woman Other. The first is Harris's willingness to treat a woman as an object under either her father's or husband's control. The second is his discussion on the different roles for each gender. We will begin with the daughter under the father's control and then move on to gender divisions before coming to some conclusions.

According to Harris, once a man decides to court a woman, he must be upfront with her and her parents about his intention to marry her at some point in the future:

A young man ought to show respect for the person responsible for the girl. If that means approaching her pastor or grandfather, do it. If it means writing, calling, or e-mailing her folks on the other side of the world, do that. Go the distance to give them the respect they deserve.<sup>404</sup>

Later, in his second book on relationships, Harris discusses why this is so important, and in doing this, he seems to recognise there is an historical context for this concern. He relates the necessity of a man disclosing his intentions to his future in-laws and claims that:

[t]hroughout history, communities and couples knew that meaningful intimacy shouldn't outpace commitment. So they adopted certain practices – certain agreed-upon guidances for behavior – that helped them balance appropriate intimacy with the level of commitment. A man only pursued a woman romantically when he had the intention of

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<sup>404</sup> Harris, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, 197.

pursuing marriage. He honored the protective care of the girl's parents by seeking their approval for pursuing their daughter. With intentions clearly understood a couple was given the privilege of time together. A physical relationship was saved for the total commitment of marriage.<sup>405</sup>

I must admit that I am uncertain about what kind of 'history' Harris has in mind. It is possible that Harris is referring to a time when the daughter was considered property to be bought and sold, although I find it hard to believe that he views his daughter in such a way. It seems that Harris himself romanticises the parent/child relationship whereas, in fact, in historical terms this seems much more a pragmatic matter of transferring property and maintaining a patriarchal family line. If this is the case, then this begs the question of why a man must ask the parents (if possible before the girl) for permission to court her? If, as he claims, it is out of respect for the parents, then what about respect for the girl in question? It would seem that Harris is following Elisabeth Elliot's dictum that only men should initiate a courtship which makes one question whether Harris assumes that women do not have a brain, or any form of freedom of choice, or that she is the same as the man and can not control her sexual desire; with the result that the man must go to her parents? We will look at that next as we examine the different roles for each gender so as to discover what Harris really thinks about women.

In chapter 7<sup>406</sup> of *Boy Meets Girl: Say Hello to Courtship*, Harris discusses what he perceives to be godly roles for both men and women. In this chapter Harris notes that:

within the context of their [Adam and Eve's] equality, God assigned men and women different roles. He made Adam first, signifying his unique role as leader and initiator. He created Eve from Adam and brought her to Adam to be his helper in the tasks God had assigned him. She was made to complement, nourish, and help her husband. God's

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<sup>405</sup> Harris, *Boy Meets Girl*, 26.

<sup>406</sup> Harris, *Boy Meets Girl*, 103-120.

greatest gift to man was ‘a helper suitable for him’ (Genesis 2:18). This doesn’t minimize a woman’s role, but it does define it.<sup>407</sup>

This traditional interpretation of the second creation story in Genesis is further explained as Harris describes some specific roles for each gender. Men are to assume responsibility for the leadership of women;<sup>408</sup> they are to be spiritual leaders to women;<sup>409</sup> communicate care, respect, and desire to protect women;<sup>410</sup> and they are to encourage women to ‘embrace godly femininity.’<sup>411</sup> Thus, the only male roles promoted here are those of leaders and protectors of women. These roles for men are not outlined particularly clearly but when Harris discusses the roles of women, they do not seem any more obvious. This is because women are instructed to: encourage men to practice leadership;<sup>412</sup> be a sister to the Christian men;<sup>413</sup> ‘cultivate the attitude that motherhood is noble and fulfilling,’<sup>414</sup> and ‘cultivate godliness and inward beauty.’<sup>415</sup>

Thus, to summarise, men are to be leaders and protect while women are to practice godly feminism, and cultivate attitudes of motherhood and inward beauty. From this description of ‘godly’ roles, one could be forgiven for thinking that Harris lives in a 1950’s dream world. However, it is clear that while Harris might be shamelessly idealising these male and female

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 117.

roles; he is certainly also being influenced by some form of patriarchy. These roles, in reference to which a woman's life is summed up in her relationship to her menfolk, become significant when one remembers that the church is meant to be the 'Bride of Christ.' One may compare Harris's idealised roles for women to the role of the church which is also, presumably, to encourage Christ to lead, provide sisterly love and community for other Christians, generate more Christians, and cultivate inward beauty. On reflection then, this sounds much more like Harris's vision for the Christian church than an appropriate description for a woman to follow in relation to her husband. I would like to conclude this chapter with a reminder of where we have been and where we are moving to next.

## **Conclusion**

In the last chapter we looked at four significant theologians in relation to how they understood God, woman, the body, and sex. We began with Augustine's hypermasculine view of God which I concluded, reflected his desire to be in the submissive female role of a hypermasculine Divine/human relationship. This view of God also influences Augustine's view of marriage as he finds it a distraction from serving God in this submissive role. Subsequently Luther actively encourages people to marry claiming that one can not take an eternal vow of celibacy. This move does not necessarily dislocate or challenge the view of God as hypermasculine, or help women, as they are then forced to marry instead of having at least the possibility of leaving certain aspects of the patriarchal normative world behind in a convent for example. Wesley focuses on holy living to please a merciful, yet hypermasculine, God and in doing so indicates his disregard for the body and human nature. Edwards picks up on this theme as he preaches the wrath of a hypermasculine God and hatred of the body.

Then, in this chapter, we looked to see how the traditions of Christianity to which the four theologians contributed, influenced (and continue to influence) contemporary popular Evangelical theology. We saw how Augustine's God, exemplified by creation *ex nihilo*, has been combined by Wesley's merciful God and Edwards' wrathful God; resulting in a God of complete hypermasculinity where the (male) human's role is to become a submissive wife figure and where women are idealised and at the same time marginalised into non-existence. Without acknowledging their historical predecessors, the Elliots take pieces of different theologies of hypermasculine husband-God; submissive (male) wife; and woman as Other. This results in Jim becoming a martyr for his husband-God and Elisabeth writing about total abstinence before marriage and the characteristics of a Godly woman from an exclusively hetero-normative perspective which reinforces woman as Other.

Finally, we looked at Joshua Harris and detected certain confusion about his ideas of God and the flesh. He has hints of past theologians within his work which specifically reinforces the hypermasculine husband-God/male-wife relationship that began to emerge in Augustine and was particularly perpetuated by Luther and the Elliots. Ultimately, it seems that Harris's biblical hermeneutic draws uncritically on centuries of Christian patriarchy which reproduces a familiar pattern of negativity and confusion about woman, sex and the body. The result is that men are to lead and protect while stereotypes of women as submissive virgins, good wives and mothers are constantly emphasised and both of these images are widely reproduced in Harris's popular publications. Here too, we are sure that one must not have sex before marriage, but it is not clear if the purpose of abstinence is to appease God's wrath or pacify a God who desires praise. We

do know, however, that ‘flesh’ is bad – although we are not sure why this is – but we do know that it has something to do with God.

In the next chapter, we will be looking at an alternative to this confusion about God and the body by looking into body theology as well as the concept of ‘appropriate vulnerability.’ Again, this has much to do with God, woman, the body, and sex, but one can hope that it is a bit clearer than Harris.

## Introduction

We have looked at the idea that over many centuries Western Christianity has been formed by patriarchal structures and that adopting the viewpoint of the normative male; Western Christianity has forced women wholesale, into the category of the ‘Other’ as Beauvoir defined it in *The Second Sex*. At the same time, God has been projected in terms of hypermasculinity, in relation to which, mankind (sic.) adopts an idealised submissive (feminine/Other) position. In doing this, we have tried to show that the Western Christian understanding of sex as a whole is rooted in male normative conceptions of the God/humankind relationship that have much more to do with how men have understood their masculinity than with woman, body, or sex in themselves. Having traced these notions from early Christianity with Augustine through the Reformation with reference to Luther and later Wesley, Edwards, Elliot, and, up to the present case of an influential American evangelical like Harris, we will now look at a possible alternative<sup>416</sup> to these patriarchal, normative Christian beliefs about the body and sex, drawing on the work of Karen Lebacqz.<sup>417</sup>

Lebacqz is an ethicist who is primarily concerned with social justice.<sup>418</sup> While her principal interest does not directly concern us and she has written little about sex in detail,<sup>419</sup> she does

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<sup>416</sup> I am not suggesting that my alternative is the only one. One example of another is Jürgen Moltmann’s Crucified God. (Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1967).; *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ As the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1973.). My model, however, is a specific reaction to the theologians studied in this thesis and the present day context of American Evangelical Christianity.

<sup>417</sup> Lebacqz, ‘Appropriate Vulnerability,’ in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, eds., James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow (London: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1994), 256-61.

<sup>418</sup> Karen Lebacqz biography accessed online 8 September 2011 [<http://www.counterbalance.org/bio/karenl-body.html>]



provide particular insight on this issue by means of hints about an alternative to the normative patriarchal perspective on sex in Western Christianity – and American Evangelical Christianity in particular. In this chapter, I intend to develop these hints in a manner that Lebacqz may not have intended so as to both draw her into the conversation and to widen the conversation to include an understanding of God. The approach of appropriate vulnerability is obviously a model, with all the limitations of any model, but its strength lies in the fact that it does not reproduce the potential for mindless obedience and subordination which is one of the worst consequences of the model promoted by Elliot and Harris as we saw in chapter 3. In terms of the reality of people's lives, it takes genuinely into account the nature of relationships as reciprocal; both people have to count. Lebacqz looks at the normative Christian understanding of sex, which influenced Evangelicals like Harris and the Elliots which states that only sex within heterosexual marriage is proper and she challenges it, encouraging Christians to analyse the appropriateness of sex instead, in relation to the individual's readiness for this sexual and emotional vulnerability. Of course, in doing this, Lebacqz is challenging the whole notion that woman is Other and male is normative.

By doing this, Lebacqz proposes that the appropriateness of intercourse should depend on the vulnerability of any individuals involved and whether or not they feel the level of vulnerability is appropriate at any given time. In this context, no one need accept the idealised submissive role. For American Evangelicals, in particular, this would challenge the idealised role of women as Other and the theologically confused, and unjustifiable 'romance' between man (sic.) as the

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<sup>419</sup> For example, the only other writing by Lebacqz on sex that this author was able to find was an article co-written with Deborah Blake. Karen Lebacqz and Deborah Blake, 'Safe Sex and Lost Love' in *Religious Education* 83:2 (1988: Spring), 201-210.

submissive to the dominant, hypermasculine Lover/God. Appropriate vulnerability requires a different way of framing the relationship between self and God by showing how a better self-understanding makes it unnecessary to project perceived inadequacies onto others – one of the key consequences of contemporary forms of Evangelical Christianity.

Vulnerability may be the precondition for both union and procreation: without a willingness to be vulnerable, to be exposed, to be wounded, there can be no union. To be ‘known,’ as Scripture so often describes the sexual encounter, is to be vulnerable, exposed, open. Sexuality is therefore a form of vulnerability and is to be valued as such. Sex, eros, passion are antidotes to the human sin of wanting to be in control or to have power over another. ‘Appropriate vulnerability’ may describe the basic intention for human life – which may be experienced in part through the gift of sexuality. If this is so, then a new approach to sexual ethics follows. If humans are intended to have appropriate vulnerability, then the desire to have power or control over another is a hardening of the heart against vulnerability. When Adam and Eve chose power, they lost their appropriate vulnerability and were set against each other in their sexuality. Loss of vulnerability is paradigmatic of the fall. Jesus shows us the way to redemption by choosing not power but vulnerability and relationship.<sup>420</sup>

While I believe that Lebacqz’s proposal of appropriate vulnerability is a positive beginning, I will also be critiquing this view where I believe Lebacqz falls back onto the hypermasculine model – or does not work hard enough against it. My goal in this critique is to maintain the pressure on the idea of hypermasculinity, continuing to address the problems incurred, for example, by people who still internalise the normative Evangelical model of God promoted by Harris in his books. Using Beauvoir’s analysis, body theology, and discussing how this idea of appropriate vulnerability in human sexuality can also be associated with a view of God, I will engage with, challenge, and enrich Lebacqz’s proposal. I also intend to analyse how using the idea of appropriate vulnerability in interpersonal relationships as well as in relation to God can recast Christian theological relationships. This will be done by showing how, with greater self-knowledge, it is no longer necessary (for men) to make themselves feminine in relation to a

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<sup>420</sup> Lebacqz, ‘Appropriate Vulnerability,’ 259.

hypermasculine God because there is no longer any need to project that vulnerability away from themselves. Finally, I will discuss a possible next step and add some concluding thoughts to this thesis.

## **Appropriate Vulnerability**

Lebacqz begins her argument for appropriate vulnerability by referring to the patriarchal normative – and American Evangelical – view that premarital sex is always wrong. In her discussion of this problem, Lebacqz either discounts or at least does not show an awareness of Roman Catholicism and pre-Reformation church history in her criticism. This is evident from the first page, where she outlines the problem by stating:

The scriptural witness on singleness is virtually ignored, despite the fact that Jesus never married and Paul preferred singleness. Throughout history, Churches have simply assumed that marriage is the norm for Christians....Churches clearly expect that those who are single will get married and that those who have been married and are now single through divorce or widowhood will simply disappear into the closet until they marry again.<sup>421</sup>

Although her summation of the problem is accurate for American Evangelicals, it is clearly inaccurate for contemporary Roman Catholicism or for the historical record prior to the Reformation. While a study of Roman Catholic views regarding marriage is beyond the scope of this research, it is important to remind the reader that in attempting to simplify the problem of unhelpful views toward premarital sex, Lebacqz is, perhaps herself, failing to recognise the full complexity and range of Christian views on this issue. As we have seen already, Augustine is very concerned with male lust and considers marriage little better than a necessary evil. He attempts to make singleness and virginity normative, or show that celibacy is better than

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 256.

marriage, for Christians. As we have already noted, Augustine expects those who are unable to control their lust for things other than God to marry so as to curb their illicit lust but it seems improbable that Augustine would expect single people to ‘disappear into the closet’ because for him, this is the state in which he expects Christians to remain so they can best serve God.

On the other hand, Lebacqz’s view does ring true for Christian opinion after the Reformation. Luther clearly thinks of marriage as normative because the alternative, for him, is one of cloistered singleness with monks and nuns; an unnatural state because in his view nobody is able to take an eternal vow of celibacy.<sup>422</sup> The works of Wesley and Edwards speak very little of the issues of singleness or marriage but this is undoubtedly more because – again in a way characteristic of Evangelical Christianity – by being solely concerned with individual holy living and the afterlife, they put *all* issues of sexuality into the proverbial closet; in other words they do this because of their concern for holy living rather than because of any interest in life-long celibacy as something to be valued. And finally, in the cases of the Elliots and Harris, this view of the normative nature of marriage reflects their points of view very clearly. Both of them discuss the difficulties of being single and do not address divorce or widowhood because of the magnitude of this view for them both. Thus, Lebacqz’s statement can be criticised for ignoring the pre-Reformation era, without any kind of disclaimer dealing with Roman Catholic beliefs about marriage and the priesthood. However, it is a fair summary of contemporary American Evangelical beliefs about singleness and marriage and, since these issues are our primary focus here, we will continue with Lebacqz’s argument and correct her where necessary as well as explain and develop her idea of appropriate vulnerability.

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<sup>422</sup> Luther, *An Answer to Several Questions on Monastic Vows*, 148.

Specifically, Lebacqz wants us to:

...thread our way between two views of sexuality: the ‘old testament’ or ‘thou shalt not’ approach exemplified by much of church tradition, and the ‘new testament’ or ‘thou shalt’ approach evident in much of our current culture.<sup>423</sup>

For Lebacqz, the primary example of the ‘thou shalt not’ norm in Western Christianity is the fear that is associated with premarital sex.

The ‘thou shalt not’ ethic was characterized by fear – fear of pregnancy and venereal disease – and by a series of ‘don’ts’: don’t have sex, don’t take pleasure in it (at least, not if you are a woman), and don’t talk about it.<sup>424</sup>

This ‘thou shalt not’ culture can be exemplified in reference to all of the Western Christian theologians contained within this thesis. As we discussed above, Augustine’s primary ‘thou shalt not’ pertains to marriage because of his fear of sexual lust. Luther writes extensively about the ‘thou shalt not’ and, for example, relates it to disease when he warns young men against going to prostitutes.<sup>425</sup> Wesley and Edwards write about the ‘thou shalt not’ although they connect it to God more than they associate it with physical acts such as sex. Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification implies many ‘thou shalt nots’ as he notes that the ‘Altogether Christian’ is crucified to the desires of the flesh.<sup>426</sup> The ‘thou shalt nots’ are also evident when Edwards writes about the wrathful God and the insignificant human. The ‘thou shalt not’ is contained implicitly because when Edwards writes about the ‘puny humans’ and thereby perpetuates the

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<sup>423</sup> Lebacqz, ‘Appropriate Vulnerability,’ 256.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Roper, ‘Luther: Sex, Marriage and Motherhood,’ 34.; C.f. pp. 73 ff.

<sup>426</sup> Wesley, *The Almost Christian*, 141.

hypermasculinity of God; he is essentially telling his audience that there is nothing humans can do right and thus everything is a ‘thou shalt not.’<sup>427</sup>

Furthermore, when Elliot discusses his understanding of Christianity and creates his own theology, the ‘thou shalt not’ is complete. Whereas Edwards has made everything humans do a ‘thou shalt not,’ Elliot suggests that any view that is not in accordance with his interpretation of scripture, is a ‘thou shalt not.’ While he frames this in such a way as to make it seem permissive to believe as he does, in fact the result is to create further potential for fear. This is intensified still further in Harris’s writing as the ‘thou shalt not’ drives him even to resist kissing his wife before they are married because of a desire to be holy before a wrathful God.

These examples of what Lebacqz considers to be an ethic of the past are still clearly detectable within an American Evangelical consciousness concerning sex which is exemplified by the Elliots and Harris. It is even possible to find the remnants of this ethic expressed in her own writing. Specifically, for example, she notes that contained in this ethic, is the implication that women are not supposed to enjoy sex. Yet she seems to assume that women’s sexual feelings have been acknowledged in this way – even if ultimately discounted.

I would maintain instead, that she is far too easy on the tradition and that women’s distinctive enjoyment of sex is rarely if ever considered in normative Western Christian beliefs about sex.<sup>428</sup> Men’s sexuality is certainly considered – why otherwise would men be warned against the

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<sup>427</sup> C.f. pp. 93 ff.

<sup>428</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Gospel According to Women*, 5-6; Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1992), 37.

enjoyment of sex in various ways? However, when theologians from Augustine to Harris categorise women as virgins, mothers, or whores, they are not recognising the possibility that women might enjoy sex; rather, they are simply classifying women, and in doing this are very expressly not cognisant of women's views about the sex act. It seems that these men, and arguably Lebacqz as well, all assume that women's views of the enjoyment of sex are the same as those of men, because none of them raise the issue of a possible difference.

Another example of how normative Christian views of sex continue to inform Lebacqz's work comes in a later statement on the 'thou shalt not' ethic of sex: "Bad girls' and 'good girls' were defined according to their willingness *to be* sexual or not."<sup>429</sup> This comment suggests that to some extent, Lebacqz accepts the premise that one can choose whether to be sexual or not; at least she is not prepared fully to challenge the idea. Many feminist theologians would disagree fundamentally with this assumption. For example, when Karen Armstrong discusses why the body is hated in Christianity, she assumes that the body *is* sexual:

the body is hated because it is sexual, and in a vicious circle this hatred of the body increases the Christian sexual disgust, for in sex, man is at his most physical and so furthest from God.<sup>430</sup>

Sexuality is not a choice; it is part of the human state of being. One has a choice about whether to view sex as positive or negative; however, there is arguably no choice but to be sexual.

While this might seem like a minor point, it is arguably important to register these small inconsistencies because if one is going to embrace the idea of appropriate vulnerability, it is vital

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<sup>429</sup> Lebacqz, 'Appropriate Vulnerability,' 257. Italics mine.

<sup>430</sup> Armstrong, *The Gospel According to Women*, 23.

that one remains extremely alert to the possibility of it being corrupted by any perspective, such as contemporary Evangelical Christianity, that is hostile toward women and the body. Thus, to accept the idea within Christianity, that sexuality is in any way outside the human is to allow a hypermasculine view of both humanity and sexuality to slip back into view. In other words, part of the value of appropriate vulnerability, as a means of helping the Christian to understand their human subjectivity – which is arguably one purpose of ascribing to the tradition they do – is rejecting the duality which has been so vital in the past to the normative Christian understanding of the self. For many traditional Christians this duality has been illustrated through the hierarchy of men over women or the spiritual above the bodily. But when the traces of a patriarchal duality are detected in Christian feminist writing – in this case, the work of Karen Lebacqz – it must be pointed out and dismissed as inconsistent with the positive message of the feminist author. Nevertheless, in spite of Lebacqz's work being in some ways itself, vulnerable to a feminist critique, her concept of appropriate vulnerability is still worth looking at positively as a particular way of addressing the shortcomings of contemporary Evangelical Christianity.

To continue this assessment of appropriate vulnerability as a viable model, let us note that Lebacqz writes, for example, that:

The two redeeming purposes of sexuality have always been understood as procreation and union. With these purposes in mind, Christian tradition maintained that marriage was the proper context for sex, since it was the proper context for raising children and achieving a true union.<sup>431</sup>

Lebacqz also notes that in normative Christian belief, and certainly in Evangelical Christian circles, both genital and nongenital sexual expressions outside of marriage are suspect.<sup>432</sup> She then critiques

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<sup>431</sup> Lebacqz, 'Appropriate Vulnerability,' 257.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 258.



this traditional view because ‘it is difficult for single people to claim their sexuality or to develop a positive ethic for that sexuality.’<sup>433</sup> Ultimately, however, Lebacqz appears to agree with the normative assessment of sex<sup>434</sup> that it is safest within marriage, the difference is that she adds the stipulation that another God-given purpose of sexuality beyond procreation and union is vulnerability.<sup>435</sup> That is, she states that the ‘God-given’ purpose of sexuality is to maintain a space where both men and women are appropriately vulnerable – from which comes union and perhaps children.<sup>436</sup>

In explaining what appropriate vulnerability is, Lebacqz notes that:

Sexuality has to do with vulnerability. Eros, the desire for another, the passion that accompanies the wish for sexual expression, makes one vulnerable. It creates possibilities for great joy but also for great suffering. To desire another, to feel passion is to be vulnerable, capable of being wounded.<sup>437</sup>

This is the vital point of Lebacqz’s argument that is so important for this thesis – the recognition that sexual activity of any kind involves vulnerability – that all activity, from holding hands, to kissing, to genital contact, must be appropriate for each person. In normative Western Christianity, and especially Evangelical Christian teaching on the subject, a boundary has been placed upon this vulnerability via heterosexual marriage. However, this boundary is insufficient because, for example, it could be said that a husband pressuring a wife to have sex when she is not feeling appropriately vulnerable is just as wrong as a stranger pressuring her for the same reason. Lebacqz goes farther than this as she maintains that a part of appropriate vulnerability is letting down one’s guard and if either partner does not, or is unable to let down their guard and

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> C.f. p. 153.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

become equally vulnerable, then the vulnerability, and thus the activity as a whole is inappropriate.

Any exercise of sexuality that violates appropriate vulnerability is wrong. This includes violations of the partner's vulnerability and violations of one's own vulnerability. Rape is wrong not only because it violates the vulnerability of the one raped, but also because the rapist guards his own power and refuses to be vulnerable....Any sexual encounter that hurts another, so that she or he either guards against vulnerability in the future or is unduly vulnerable in the future, violates the 'appropriate vulnerability' which is part of the true meaning and purpose of our God-given sexuality.<sup>438</sup>

This is a significant shift in boundaries from that of the normative Christian assumption, which is so particularly prevalent in contemporary Evangelical teaching and guidance on the subject; that all sexual and genital contact outside of marriage is wrong. Lebacqz is developing a rationale for the rule, but is also inviting the individual to discover what is and is not appropriate for him or herself. That is, both people in the relationship must feel comfortable with any form of intimate contact that takes place which means that each person needs to have enough self-knowledge to know whether holding hands, for example, is proper at any given moment.

Thus, Augustine or Luther might have advised a wife that it is her duty to have sex with her husband when she does not wish to do so to prevent the man from going elsewhere to satisfy his lust, and this approach has arguably continued to inform Evangelical attitudes regarding a wife's 'duty' to her husband. However, Lebacqz recognises that this attitude does nobody any good because losing the vulnerability in a relationship by forcing the wife to have sex with the husband does nothing to promote unity between the partners, nor does it make it a particularly good environment to rear children.

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 259.

These normative purposes (procreation and union) for marriage are evident in, for example, Harris's attitudes when he writes that:

Falling in love was God's idea. He was the one who made us capable of experiencing romantic feelings. He was the one who gave us the ability to appreciate beauty and experience attraction. And He was the one who invented marriage...<sup>439</sup>

This shows that one of the primary goals for women – in Harris' view – should be to 'cultivate the attitude that motherhood is noble and fulfilling.'<sup>440</sup> Yet there is no mention of how falling in love, getting married, or cultivating the attitude of motherhood, promote (or is necessitated by) any form of unity let alone vulnerability. Instead, Harris continues to perpetuate the normative ideal of the husband being in control of the 'little woman' just as the Lover God controls the feminine and submissive man.

Consequently, this is where the larger issue of male normativity comes into direct conflict with appropriate vulnerability. That is, if, as normative Christianity from Augustine to Harris suggest, the primary purposes of marriage are to curb male sexual lust and procreation, then the model of woman as Other and male subjectivity works perfectly fine. However, the model is seriously flawed because, of course, the goal of marriage cannot only be male-centred. Seeing sex as merely about male sexual lust and procreation for the male is of little use within communities that claim to be concerned with both men and women, and where there is any form of 'true union' between them. This is what is wrong with the contemporary Evangelical model – it still does not recognise how normative forms of Christianity have not moved beyond a view of woman as Other. With appropriate vulnerability, both men and women require self-knowledge

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<sup>439</sup> Harris, *Boy Meets Girl*, 35.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

and as a consequence, can, and must, make their own decisions about their personal vulnerability. In a working model of appropriate vulnerability, women are no longer Other because they see themselves as subjects and men do not encourage women to fulfil the idealised feminine role, because they are able to recognise their personal vulnerability and own it instead of projecting it onto women. When this occurs, true union can take place. With appropriate vulnerability between the two partners as the ultimate goal for a marriage (or partnership), it would not occur to the husband to pressure the wife to have sex because it would not promote the appropriate vulnerability of either individual.

The concept of appropriate vulnerability also goes a long way to answering the question often posed within American Evangelical Christian singles' groups of 'How far is too far to go sexually before marriage?' Harris tends to give dogmatic and occasionally non-answers to the question, such as: 'Focusing on the physical is plainly sinful. God demands sexual purity. And He does this because He is holy.'<sup>441</sup> For Lebacqz, however, the answer is simple, 'It is appropriate to go as far as you feel comfortably vulnerable.'<sup>442</sup> Unfortunately for American Evangelical Christian singles, this answer is not as easy to act upon as it is to give because rather than simply following rules, it requires the individual to know and understand him or her self, and know what is likely to make, or not make, the individual appropriately vulnerable. Whether this means kissing on the first date, or having intercourse before a commitment of some kind is discussed, depends on the individual and the couple in question. Nobody can answer if it is right for the couple except for the individuals within the relationship. Appropriate vulnerability

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<sup>441</sup> Harris, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, 41.

<sup>442</sup> Lebacqz, 'Appropriate Vulnerability,' 261.

allows individual people to discover their own sexuality for themselves. It also enables those who do not wish to marry and homosexual people to be involved because it is an alternative to the normative goal of procreation within heterosexual marriage which excludes singles and homosexual couples. In sum it discourages the projection of Otherness by men onto the female partner because when one has some self-knowledge, there is no need to do this.

Before I move on to discuss how this concept of appropriate vulnerability could influence a view of God, I want to critique Lebacqz on two further points where she seemingly steps back toward the normative male model of Evangelical Christianity. First, when she defends the concept of appropriate vulnerability, she states:

Sex is not ‘just for fun,’ or play, for physical release, for showing off or for any of the host of other human expressions that are often attached to sexuality. It is for the appropriate expression of vulnerability, and to the extent that the expression is missing, the sexual expression is not proper.<sup>443</sup>

Once again, Lebacqz arguably bends here to normative male Evangelical Christian belief since she does not make it clear exactly why sex can not be ‘just for fun’ without it being taken out of the bounds of appropriate vulnerability. Again, Karen Armstrong makes the point that:

Christianity has created a climate where sex can never be regarded simply as play. You have to love it or hate it passionately....Sex is too serious and too dangerous to play at.<sup>444</sup>

In my view, if we are to accept sexuality as part of who we are as humans, then there is no reason why sex can not be just for fun, play, release, or showing off. Just because sex is not always taken seriously does not mean that it violates one’s vulnerability. Indeed, it can enhance the appropriateness of the vulnerability. On the contrary, I would suggest that sexual encounters

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>444</sup> Armstrong, *The Gospel According to Women*, 45-6.

which are void of the seriousness that Lebacqz and normative Evangelicals Christian attitudes encourage can, and should, confirm the appropriateness of the vulnerability. When one can laugh at oneself in the presence of another and not feel wounded or hurt, then the potential vulnerability is increased because it is a confirmation that the actions are appropriate and it creates unity which is, according to Lebacqz, the purpose of sexual interaction.

The final target for criticism of Lebacqz is her assertion that although appropriate vulnerability is important, marriage is still safer than singlehood.<sup>445</sup> It seems odd that she says this, given all she has claimed. One might agree that being in a committed relationship provides a better atmosphere in which to develop one's vulnerability than not being in one, but why must this commitment be in the form of marriage? If, after all, the basis of Evangelical marriage is mutual commitment in the presence of God, then is it not conceivable that all committed couples are, in a sense, married, even though this commitment has not been blessed by the Church or regularised by the state?<sup>446</sup> Furthermore, marriage does not necessarily guarantee commitment because it is arguably easier to fall into a routine, without considering whether specific actions are appropriate, when one is married. Certainly, one could hope that in a committed relationship one would feel less pressure to act inappropriately, but this cannot be proven to be universally or

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<sup>445</sup> Lebacqz, 'Appropriate Vulnerability,' 260.

<sup>446</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to debate the definition, execution, and church doctrine surrounding what is and is not 'marriage.' For example, biblically, marriage occurred with intercourse (e.g. Genesis 2:22-23; 4:1). While for Luther, it was dependent on a father giving his daughter to a man as discussed in chapter 2 pp. 75 ff. While a father might 'give away' his daughter in a marriage ceremony today, this is merely a gesture to past patriarchal attitudes and not a fundamental definition of what marriage is. This is evidenced by the fact that the woman signs the marriage certificate instead of the father signing a contract stating that the woman is now the property of the husband. My argument here is simply to note that a legal document stating that two people are married does not create the commitment Lebacqz states is necessary for appropriate vulnerability. While I would argue that today, marriage is a function of the State and not the church; this is not the critical issue. The issue is that a marriage certificate, and church sanction, does not create commitment, it can only give evidence to such a commitment.

necessarily true. In fact by insisting on the relative safety of marriage, Lebacqz seems mostly to be reverting back to patriarchal norms characteristic of Evangelical circles because she is advocating that the responsibility for one's vulnerability be handed over to a (male) partner.

I would argue that this is not very different from Luther writing that a woman is nothing more than the property of her father until she becomes the responsibility of her husband, or Harris insisting that a boy must ask a girl's parents before proposing marriage.<sup>447</sup> It is as if Lebacqz breaks away, in a positive and helpful sense, from patriarchal norms of sexuality in American Evangelical Christianity, only to revert implicitly back to them. In the next section, we will take this idea of appropriate vulnerability farther and show how it enables us to address and move beyond contemporary Evangelical Christian ideas about relationships between human beings and God.

### **Appropriate Vulnerability and God**

Not everything Lebacqz said in her argument for appropriate vulnerability has been entirely satisfactory as a means of addressing the problems raised so acutely within contemporary American Evangelical communities in relation to the question of sex and marriage. However, her emphasis on the appropriateness of sexual activity being measured by one's willingness and ability to be vulnerable and accept the possibility of being wounded, is helpful when looking for an alternative to the dogmatic prohibition on any kind of premarital sex. Moreover, it could also suggest an alternative way of understanding and relating to God, given that the normative Western Christian view of an idealised hypermasculine God is so problematic and feeds directly back into the lived reality of contemporary Evangelical Christians trying to negotiate the key

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<sup>447</sup> Luther, *On Marriage Matters*, 277.; Harris, *Boy Meets Girl*, 26.

issues of sex and marriage within their communities. For the purposes of this thesis, I will build upon Beauvoir and body theology critiques as well as Lebacqz's work in order to shed further light on American Evangelical anxiety about the potential corruptions of materiality while suggesting ways of addressing this concern without being forced to adopt a problematic patriarchal belief system.

Firstly, the view of God described previously in this thesis is problematic because the normative Christian perspective on God was – and still is in American Evangelical contexts – patriarchal and therefore excludes theological contributions from marginalised groups such as women, children, gay people, or those who are economically poor. Arguably, in the past, each theologian's view of God has been an idealised reflection of himself (sic.); the hypermasculine God taking on the characteristics that the individual theologian desires, but is unable to obtain for himself.

For example, although Wesley and Edwards live and preach at roughly the same time and in the same language, their different cultural values and understanding of society produce different understandings of themselves and thus different theologies and individual beliefs about the primary attributes of God. As we have seen, Wesley sees God as one of mercy. However problematic this understanding of mercy might be, it does still determine the character of his theology.<sup>448</sup> Conversely, Edwards does not see any mercy in God which is evident by the fact that he understands God purely as one of wrath.<sup>449</sup> Yet in spite of these wide differences

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<sup>448</sup> Wesley, *The Almost Christian*, 137.

<sup>449</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.'



between two contemporaries, not to speak of earlier or later theologians, there is an undeniable preponderance of educated (white) male figures who disallow the possibility of women (or lower class and minority men) to contribute to the theological conversation. This exclusive tendency also furthers patriarchal beliefs that women (and some men) are rightly to be subjected and that their concerns regarding any form of appropriate vulnerability are unimportant.

While I have already discussed Daly and Beauvoir, it is important to revisit their criticism of normative male belief here so as to help emphasise the need for appropriate vulnerability in a relationship with God. Mary Daly discusses structures and not the policies of theology and their representation, but I would argue that the patriarchal male understanding of God is, in fact, an idealised mirror image of the male self. However, drawing on Beauvoir's work, Daly also employs the images of projection and reflection to outline her vision of the patriarchal God-figure and how it represents the normative male view:

The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fulfilling. If God in 'his' heaven is a father ruling 'his' people, then it is filling in the 'nature' of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated. Within this context a mystification of roles takes place: the husband dominating his wife represents God 'himself.' The images and values of a given society have been projected into the realm of dogmas and 'Articles of Faith,' and these in turn justify the social structures which have given rise to them and which sustain their plausibility.<sup>450</sup>

This 'mystification of roles' between those who are Other and the theologian can be seen very clearly in the example of Jim Elliot. Two elements of Elliot's belief system stand out. First, there is his distrust of the missionary work undertaken by a Catholic monk with the indigenous

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<sup>450</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 13.

people in the same area as Elliot.<sup>451</sup> This shows that he had no regard for dogmas and creeds with which he did not happen to agree. Had he done so, he might have worked with the monk instead of against him.<sup>452</sup> This exclusive attitude is also seen in Jim Elliot's view of marriage and its connection to his view of his relationship with God. Not only is he unable to recognise the purpose of marriage other than as a burden,<sup>453</sup> his understanding of himself as the bride of Christ is also very confused, poorly thought out, and excludes anybody else; let alone any woman, from this framework.<sup>454</sup>

As I noted previously, Elliot's whole desire is to be seen by, and to give himself to, his Lover. There is no thought in his mind beyond his image of God and how to fit within this image. The only way that he can see himself in relationship with the Lover is by completely giving himself up to a hypermasculine God. In this context, of course, because Elliot occupies a position of male privilege, he has things he can voluntarily 'give up' and loses himself in this relationship by wishing to be pierced by the nail of Calvary. Not only does this masochistic view of love suggest that Elliot desires to be overwhelmed, possessed, used, hurt, and even made to suffer by his Lover, but it also exemplifies Daly's criticism of patriarchal Christianity. His dogma is specific to himself, but it also suggests that his relationship with his wife is not overly different than with God because for both of the Elliots, man is created to be the initiator even though it is within woman's nature to initiate.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Elliot, *Shadow*, 97.

<sup>452</sup> Elliot, *Shadow*, 42.

<sup>453</sup> Elliot, *Shadow*, 147.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 179. C.f. pp. 115 ff.

<sup>455</sup> Elliot, *Passion*, 109.

Other evidence of this exclusive and masochistic connection between the Elliots' view of God and their own relationship is the strict division of gender roles. Specifically, while both are expected to perform both traditional male and female roles when living alone, once they are married, there is a strict division of labour along traditional gender lines.<sup>456</sup> While it is possible that Jim simply prefers building houses while Elisabeth prefers cleaning the tent, the fact that Jim is unwilling to do the 'woman's work' once they are married, indicates a rigidly patriarchal element to his theology of marriage. Maintaining this patriarchal stereotype of gender roles also allows a space for Jim to project his discomfort with his body onto Elisabeth because while he is out 'doing God's work,' her role remains bodily and without a spiritual dimension.

As much as this gender division may disturb my feminist sensibilities, this in and of itself is not the key issue. The problem with this kind of division of labour is what it indicates for Jim Elliot's – and ultimately, for those Evangelical Christians who have drawn on his writing – understanding of his relationship with God. The same difficulty can be seen in Joshua Harris's view of God expressed through his 'righteous' perspective on the proper roles of men and women. In *Boy Meets Girl*, Harris writes about how single men and women who are godly should act. In his lists of appropriate actions toward the opposite sex, Harris is quite clear about how Christian men should act toward women. He specifically notes that God calls men to 'to be servant initiators – firm but gentle, masculine yet caring, leaders, yet servants'<sup>457</sup> and they should 'encourage women to embrace godly femininity.'<sup>458</sup> Yet, Harris is much less explicit about what

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<sup>456</sup> Elliot, *Passion*, 98.

<sup>457</sup> Harris, *Boy Meets Girl*, 110.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

‘godly femininity’ is or how women are to act toward men. That is, beyond calling women to be mothers, the attributes could really be applied to all humans who desire to be appropriately vulnerable in relationships. Specifically, Harris notes that women should: ‘...encourage and make room for them [men] to practice servant leadership;’<sup>459</sup> ‘...be a sister to the men in your life;’<sup>460</sup> ‘cultivate the attitude that motherhood is a noble and fulfilling calling;’<sup>461</sup> and ‘cultivate godliness and inward beauty in your life.’<sup>462</sup> I would suggest that arguably, all people should encourage others to lead in relationships because there are two people in every relationship and each should have the opportunity of having their voice heard. Similarly, few people would discourage genuine kindness and caring or inward beauty in individuals. These attributes are not specific to godly women. Rather, they are general principles which could apply to both sexes.

I bring these supposed attributes of godly singles to light because they give insight into Harris’s views about his relationship with God. Not only does his view of God take on all the male roles above, all of humanity takes on the more questionable female roles. For Harris, God is a servant initiator and leader via Jesus.<sup>463</sup> God desires to protect humanity and, noted earlier with the Daly quote, encourages humanity to act properly through the Bible and the dogmas contained within the Bible.<sup>464</sup> Furthermore, the less than precise description of women shows how Harris envisions the human relationship with God. Humans are to allow God to be the leader by

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

following the rules without question,<sup>465</sup> be ‘good’ brothers and sisters to each other,<sup>466</sup> procreate within marriage,<sup>467</sup> and the only true value of the human is in relation to God via inward beauty (or spirituality).<sup>468</sup> Thus, as Daly notes that just as the female is ultimately the glorification of the male, so is humanity the glorification of a hetero-normative, hypermasculine, male God<sup>469</sup> – which means that there is then no precise role for woman (or humankind) which is differentiated from the male.

Consequently, the role of sex becomes very important because all of the theologians who specifically discuss women in this study note that the primary roles of women are to serve God, their husband, and bear children. As Daly notes:

Subtly flattering to the male is the invariable tendency...to describe woman strictly within the categories of virgin, bride, and mother, thus considering her strictly in terms of sexual relationship, whether in a negative or a positive sense. It would not occur to such writers to apply this reductive system to the male, compressing his whole being into the categories of ‘virgin, husband, and father.’<sup>470</sup>

While I would argue with Daly that the theologians I have used do ‘compress’ themselves into categories of sexuality when relating to a hypermasculine God, I also take her point that women are *always* placed into sexual categories whether or not they would choose to be. I would suggest that perhaps men place themselves into sexual categories when relating to God because God is the ultimate Husband and they are the ultimate Bride. This compression into sexual

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 60.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 153.

stereotypes, that I would maintain can be similar for both males and females, is due to the male theological relationship to God – and especially the male Evangelical theological relationship to God in contemporary America. Specifically, theologians who see God as the ultimate idealisation of themselves understand themselves, then, as the lowly and submissive wife who should be content to succumb to the Husband's every whim – be it sexual (procreation) or obedience to rules. And of course, from a male perspective, this view of what women are and do is always going to be to some degree idealised, since men have no actual experience of being female and the feminised relationship with God is thus always a kind of male sexual fantasy.

### **Appropriate Vulnerability and Body Theology**

If it is true that the dominant Western Christian ideal of God adopted with such particular enthusiasm by American Evangelicals is one of a mirror image of the individual male,<sup>471</sup> and in creating this, men see themselves as an idealised female or an Other in relation to God's hypermasculine subjectivity, as we have already suggested, the key questions raised are why is this problematic and how can the concept of appropriate vulnerability aid the situation? Lisa Isherwood notes that:

Living within an image is much easier [than living in the vulnerability and vitality of the flesh] as an image creates a 'no body' and so we do not have to deal with emotions, desires, and passions, since the image has already dealt with this for us and decided what we think and feel.<sup>472</sup>

Isherwood is referring, in this instance, to anorexia and body dysmorphia, but her points are equally applicable to creating attributes for an unknowable God in the context of our conversation within this chapter. Creating an image and understanding God to be the

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<sup>471</sup> Krondorfer, *Male Confessions*, 135.

<sup>472</sup> Lisa Isherwood, *The Fat Jesus: Feminist Explorations in Boundaries and Transgressions* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2007), 15.

unchangeable ineffable figure at the top of a hierarchy means that humans then do not have to really consider this God as one would consider another human being *because* of the unknowable nature of God.

Furthermore, because American Evangelical theologians emphasise this unknowableness by understanding God as disembodied, they allow themselves to feel shame and guilt because of their bodies; the body has desires whereas a disembodied God does not have desires, only attributes such as wrath. I maintain that a major contributing factor to the American Evangelical adherence to patriarchal values surrounding the body and sex is that their knowledge of God is limited to what they know (and yet refuse to critically examine) – their own existences within a patriarchal culture and the very limited sense of incarnation and embodiment that is restricted to the life of Jesus, 2,000 years ago. Instead, if American Evangelical Christians are able to widen their understanding of God, and the incarnation, to one where the body is an essential part of the incarnation and knowledge of God, then I maintain that the body and sexuality would not be problematic. It would not be problematic because there would not be a division between body and spirit. We will now turn back to the work of James Nelson in hopes of furthering an understanding of this hypermasculine God, of how this is detrimental, and of a seemingly alternative view of God.

In chapter 2, we looked at Augustine and critiqued him with James Nelson's claims that the Christian view of God has been one of a phallic God<sup>473</sup> which is large, powerful, dominant and hard. As we have seen, this God has been given these attributes because as men have attempted

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<sup>473</sup> Nelson 'Embracing Masculinity,' 198.

to understand the world around them, one way in which many have looked at themselves has been with a focus on the penis.<sup>474</sup> Thus, in a way, this would be good way to understand God, or at least the hypermasculine God of patriarchal Evangelical Christianity. From the time of Augustine onward, Western Christianity has understood God in this way – strong enough to create the world and powerful enough to govern humanity even with evil in the world.<sup>475</sup> Within this view, God also helps men gain wisdom so that they may become closer to Him through biblical interpretation and the Holy Spirit. Nelson also says that when one views the penis (and God) in phallic terms, then there will inevitably be a hierarchy where one has to master the erect penis, and God has to master the human.<sup>476</sup> This process of thought where God must master humans can still be seen, however, in Edwards, for example, when he discusses the divine attribute of wrath. After all, even in his sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, Edwards does not indicate how it is that humans have angered God, but clearly as we discussed in chapter 2, God is very angry and desires to control humans.

Before Edwards, Augustine believes that the penis and desires are questionable, and leads men to sin which is why the erect penis must be mastered,<sup>477</sup> but he does not do this because the penis is ‘evil’ in and of itself. Later, Elliot and Harris are influenced by God’s irrational wrath and need to control humans as well as Augustine’s problems with desire. This is, perhaps, why both Harris and Elliot take the dualistic view that God is disembodied and yet the ultimate Husband, while man (sic.) is the ultimate Bride. Thus, since American Evangelical Christians have a

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid.

<sup>475</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 59. Book III.17.

<sup>476</sup> Nelson, ‘Embracing Masculinity,’ 196.

<sup>477</sup> Clark, *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, 91.



problem with sexuality, because it is distracting from God, and yet they understand God to be phallic as Nelson puts it, there seems to be an irreconcilable problem rooted in the body that tends to distract the Christian male from his duty to God. This God is a phallic God but when this phallic attribute is seen in humanity, those aspects which are noble in God somehow become bad. This is because from Augustine to Harris, the erect penis (and thus sexuality more generally) is a sign of loss of control.

If this is how the proper relationship between God and man has been portrayed and accepted due to patriarchal influence upon Western Christianity, the question becomes whether or not there is a positive way of proceeding with the best aspirations of Evangelical belief – living in the world but not being overwhelmed by its potential for duality and marginalisation – without accepting a normative state of exclusivity and hiding. I would suggest that Lebacqz's idea of appropriate vulnerability, supplemented through the insights of body theology supplies this positive understanding of God and the material world. If, as Lebacqz notes, one should maintain an attitude of appropriate vulnerability within one's sex life because it is right that one is knowledgeable enough about oneself and one's partner to allow one to be completely vulnerable, then why should this attitude not extend to one's concept of God? That is, if the value of any relationship is dependent upon an appropriateness and willingness to be wounded and vulnerable; where the vulnerability is appropriately received, then should this understanding of God and a relationship with God not be one of appropriate vulnerability?

This thesis has shown that, for the majority of Western Christianity at least, the normative view of God has been one of ultimate power and patriarchal conquest. Appropriate vulnerability

would not only address issues of sex and marriage but, more significantly, turn this concept of God on its head. Taking on a model of appropriate vulnerability with God would enable one to understand that one's perception of God is, in reality, little more than an idealised mirror image of oneself – be they male or female – due to the fact that self-knowledge is necessary for one's relationship with others and God.

On the face of it, this seems little different than what I have been discussing for the past three chapters. After all, it is my claim that theologians from Augustine to Harris have understood God in terms of a hypermasculine ideal of themselves. However, the significant difference is that in rejecting a normative Evangelical Christian model of God via appropriate vulnerability, it becomes a requirement for one to have an understanding of the self in such a way where one knows and understands the portions of the self which one is uncomfortable with. This self-knowledge would necessarily change one's image of God because instead of projecting one's dis-ease onto God, one is able to recognise it and therefore not project it onto God.

For example, if Elliot had been able to see that his understanding of God as hypermasculine Lover was largely a result of his unease with his desire for physical love, then it is possible that he would not have become a martyr leaving a wife and young child in the jungle. The self-understanding which is necessary for an appropriate vulnerability model of God is key because it forces one to consider whether or not the idealisations one has of God are a result of unease with one's self due to patriarchal remnants, or if these idealisations are appropriate for the individual.

The recognition in and of itself that one's perception of God is an image of oneself is one of vulnerability because it requires one to consider whether God's image is harmful to one's self or is negatively indicative of one's relationship with other people – for example, if one has a hypermasculine conception of God, one would then need to ask one's self if, in relationship with other people, one is marginalising and othering people. Beyond this, one's image of God is also vulnerable because not only is the understanding a known projection, but this concept could be easily challenged and discounted by others – and in turn the person them self could be challenged and discounted. But even this is more appropriate and inclusive than perpetuating a dogmatic and exclusive view of God because it is based in a reality that takes into account the nature of relationship which moves beyond stereotypes and categorisation.

Part of appropriate vulnerability, then, is about understanding oneself and how an understanding of the self relates to one's conception of God. For example, when Edwards describes humans as less than worms and nothing more than a play thing of a hypermasculine and wrathful God, there is no room for any kind of appropriate vulnerability, or self understanding at all. There is no need to question who one is or how the body might be involved in a complex relationship with God because the answer is already laid out – humanity is nothing and God is everything. When theologians such as Edwards place humanity in such a position where humans must be evil, the answers become clear and easy. Giving up the securities of this position would mean having to develop a more subtle theology of vulnerability, for example, putting oneself in a position to say that humans are not necessarily evil but simply humans and that their idea of God is an idealised version of the self.

Recognising this idealisation means that humans do not have to be evil so that God can be good. It means that humans can be humans and God can be God and that the way in which one comprehends God is not complete, but a full understanding of God is not necessary to be in relationship with this God – in fact, it allows space for a fuller understanding of the self, the world, and God. This is a theology of vulnerability because it requires a degree of vulnerability to acknowledge the limitations of any human representation of God. In relation to American Evangelical theology, appropriate vulnerability affords much greater access to women and other marginalised groups, and also allows for the inclusion of material and bodily elements presently generally excluded.

For example, as a body theologian, my belief about God is significantly influenced by my bodily experiences. Recognising that, as a white American woman, my body has lived under the oppression of normative male patriarchal attitudes towards God and the body, my understanding of God reflects this. Where some might envision God as all-powerful, wrathful, and ultimately masculine;<sup>478</sup> when I think of God, I think of my daily struggle to be comfortable with my body. Growing up within American Evangelical Christian contexts, I had developed a view of God that compensated for this by making God a shadow figure with breasts and arms to give big hugs. That said having moved and found bodily acceptance in the United Kingdom, I am beginning to understand that this shadowy figure of God is not necessarily appropriate for me anymore because it is shadowy and only partially embodied.

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<sup>478</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 13.

Therefore, I am currently beginning to understand God based on several experiences I had in the United States before moving to Scotland. While working toward my undergraduate degree, I worked part-time at a bank in an area of my home city which was known colloquially as the gay quarter. During this time, I had begun to question and leave behind my American Evangelical heritage. I had great fun with my customers who ranged from super-rich lawyers to the homeless collecting their government cheques. One of my favourite customers was a gay man in his 50's named Tom. Tom owned a gay strip club down the road and enjoyed teasing me about my 'down-home and wholesome upbringing.' We became good friends and one day he invited all of the employees of the bank, and particularly me, to a free night at his strip club to celebrate Mardi Gras. It was quite an experience, penises everywhere, gay pornography, and gay men stripping on stage at the front of the club. All of this was new to me. The atmosphere was one of complete acceptance, and, while I was a straight woman, the club-goers and employees had no problem with my being there.

However, the most memorable part of this evening was when I saw Tom who was dressed in all his finest drag clothes. I remember being amazed at him – not because of his appearance, but because of his complete comfort with himself. Later, I had to do a university project which included interviewing people about their worldview and I wanted to interview Tom. So one day, I summoned the courage and asked him if I could interview him and, giving me his home address, he said sure. After my strip club experience, I had no idea what to expect upon going to his house. Would it be like the club – full of fun and penises? I quickly discovered that Tom lived like most people I know. His house was decorated tastefully and there was not a penis in sight. I do not remember very much about the interview itself, but I do distinctly remember that

above all, I felt comfortable and that Tom was a normal man who had had loves and losses, highs and lows, and was determined to make the best of his life.

For me personally, Tom and my experiences with him have had profound influence on my current understanding of God. This God is not young, but is certainly not old – which for me indicates both the wisdom that comes with age and a sparkle in the eye which can fade with time. Tom had this sparkle as well as wisdom. This God has a wicked, yet poignant, sense of humour and refuses to be overly serious while knowing when a sense of gravity is required. Importantly, this God also has a sense of self-knowledge and independence. Like Tom, God knows who God is and it does not matter what other people think of God because God is going to be God regardless. This God has been through trials and tribulations, but is still determined to engender goodness in the world rather than anger or wrath. This God has seen the normative male experience and rejects it because it has hurt God and others. Finally, since Tom has a penis, this symbol of God recognises that for the time being there will be some remnants of the patriarchal structures in which I was raised. This penis, or normative male perspective, may continually become smaller and smaller the longer I examine it and refuse to allow it to be my normative belief. Yet, I recognise that in all likelihood, it will never vanish completely even if I do refuse to allow God to be an idealised reflection of my childhood Evangelical beliefs.

This is where the importance of appropriate vulnerability with God becomes revolutionary. In recognising that, to some extent, patriarchy will always affect my relationship with God, I am thus able to actively work against its toxic effects. I agree with Beauvoir at the end of *The Second Sex* where she says that:

It is for man to establish the reign of liberty in the midst of the world of the given. To gain the supreme victory, it is necessary, for one thing, that by and through their natural differentiation men and women unequivocally affirm their brotherhood.<sup>479</sup>

This does not mean that I am unable to recognise patriarchal tendencies in my own relationship with God and actively work against them. If nothing else, this thesis has shown that Beauvoir is right; that in order to bring about change generally men must recognise their responsibility for developing and sustaining this category of women as Other. Men in theological authority must begin to recognise and then refrain from projecting that which they fear or are unable to control onto God and women. Until this occurs, then unfortunately, the normative male perspective inherent in American Evangelicalism will not change.

While we have to be realistic with regards to the way in which many, perhaps even the majority, of American Evangelical Christians view God and as a consequence view their relationship with sex; it is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that it can be altered without becoming overwhelmed by the negative influences of the world. Both men and women of this group would lose the safety and security of being ‘right’ – and, for a tradition where the sole focus is heaven as a reward for the righteous, the possibility of not being right is unthinkable. Because appropriate vulnerability requires one to think in grey areas, to know oneself, and to make decisions based on this self-knowledge rather than so-called biblical truth, the risk of this form of self-knowledge would be too great for most American Evangelicals. It is unfortunate, therefore, that this tradition claims to be living in the world of the physical, and yet is so far outside of it because their views of God are, as we have seen in the previous chapters, so clearly affected by the world of patriarchy. This is illustrated by their extremely ‘this worldly’ concerns about body,

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<sup>479</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 741.

sexuality, masculinity, power, and femininity. While I would suggest that appropriate vulnerability is compatible with the best aspirations of Evangelical Christianity not to be overwhelmed by the physical world by means of knowing oneself well enough to know where and when to be vulnerable, I would argue that it nevertheless refuses to accept normative views of the physical world as inherently evil which would be problematic for many American Evangelicals.

Although I may not be able to effect much change in American Evangelicalism, within the whole phenomenon of American Evangelicalism, I can refuse to contribute to the patriarchal influences of this system. I can refuse to conform to the Otherness which is so easy for me to live in. For me, the starting point is recognising that my model of God is a transsexual – and the transsexual aspect is essential because of the penis. While I can continually work to make the penis flaccid, as Nelson would encourage, and also to encourage men to accept their embodiment through appropriately vulnerable relationships, at least some of the normative male ideals which are immortalised in the erect penis will, in all likelihood, remain. Yet, this recognition is positive because it suggests an alternative to a situation where, to combine Beattie<sup>480</sup> and Krondorfer's<sup>481</sup> criticisms of patriarchal Christianity, Adam must have Eve so she can be a mirror to show him how to maintain an ultimately submissive position to God. Instead, Adam can look to his own relationship with God where neither he, nor Eve needs to be a symbol of complete submission. Instead, if Adam can recognise his own embodiment, then he will be able to have an appropriately vulnerable relationship with both Eve and God where neither are projections

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<sup>480</sup> Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 114-115.

<sup>481</sup> Krondorfer, *Male Confessions*, 135.



because Adam is comfortable (or at least becoming comfortable) with his embodiment and his spirituality. This frees Eve from a position of absolute embodiment and subordination. It would also free God from a position of absolute disembodiment and hypermasculinity. This is because when man is able to come to terms with his own embodiment, he frees woman to define herself and he also frees himself to discover God through his body resulting in appropriately vulnerable relationships.

That said I am well aware that my bodily experiences of life and God are not universal – this is another place where appropriate vulnerability comes in. If another person does see God as more traditionally masculine like Augustine, Edwards, or Harris, I am happy to learn about this person's experience of God. By being vulnerable enough to share and converse with other people about God, my understanding of God (and myself) is enriched because I can choose not to be so vulnerable that I am led back into a negative understanding of God.

In appropriate vulnerability, there must be recognition of incompleteness and a willingness to be wounded. However, there is no room for an exclusive hypermasculine Lover/God figure who arbitrarily dictates what is right or wrong about the body or its actions – e.g. prohibiting or demanding sex beyond the boundaries of heterosexual marriage. This Lover/God figure comes from an idealised image which the male theologian has created for himself. This image is born out of a patriarchal worldview which is detrimental to many who are marginalised by it. To present the alternative case, being appropriately vulnerable allows individuals to have an understanding of God that both recognises the extent to which images of God are dependent upon an embodied existence, and that is honest about where it comes from and how it fits into

Christianity. Now that we have a handle on the concept of appropriate vulnerability and how it can affect a theology of God and sex, it is time to turn to what could come next with this work.

## Future Use

There are two options of where to take this thesis next and this decision depends entirely upon the intended audience and motivating factors for writing this thesis. If I am trying to appeal to those of whom I am writing – American Evangelical Christians – then the next move is obvious. Although in the end, it may still be impossible to convince contemporary American Evangelicals that my approach is consistent with those aspects of Christianity they hold dearest, my first attempt to convince would necessarily begin with the Bible because of their strict belief in *sola scriptura*. Let me attempt to build my case on biblical foundations first by translating Genesis 1:1-8 from the Hebrew text. I am choosing to translate Genesis 1:1-8 from the Hebrew text for two reasons. First, that is the beginning point of any good exegete. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there is room in the Hebrew text to translate it, specifically the first verse, differently than the commonly accepted translations in English. As we will see, by translating it differently – and in my view more accurately and closely to the Hebrew text – there is scope to see how appropriate vulnerability can be observed and used in this text. My translation of Genesis 1:1-8 from Hebrew<sup>482</sup> is thus:

- 1:
- 1 When God began to shape the heavens and the land.
- 2 And the land was formless and empty and obscurity upon the face of the abyss and the spirit of God hovered upon the waters.
- 3 And God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And there was light.
- 4 And God saw that the light was good and God separated between the light and the obscurity.
- 5 And God called light day and obscurity he called night and there was evening and there was morning: day one.

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<sup>482</sup> K. Elliger, and W. Rudolph., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983), 1-3.

- 6 And God said, ‘Let there be a solid expanse in the midst of the waters to separate waters from waters.’
- 7 And God made the solid expanse and he divided between the waters which were from the under part of the expanse and between the waters which were over the expanse and it was so.
- 8 And God called the solid expanse heaven and there was evening and there was morning: day two.

An exegetical reading of this pericope with a focus on appropriate vulnerability would then follow dealing with four main issues in this passage. First there is the question of what God creates the universe from. Second there is the question of the difference between the concepts of ‘shape’ and ‘create.’ Next, there is a question about God’s ability to speak. Finally, there is a debate by Hebrew scholars about the firmament or solid expanse in verses 1-8.

The first two verses of Genesis 1 begin with a statement of God shaping the world.

Traditionally, this has been a discussion that has reinforced the notion of God at the top of a hierarchy. Augustine and those who follow this line of thought believe that God creates the world *ex nihilo*<sup>483</sup> because if there is nothing God does not create, then God has more power and only if He creates *ex nihilo* is His rightful place, as creator of everything out of nothing, at the top of the hierarchy of His creation. Many other scholars disagree with this proposal.<sup>484</sup>

Scholars like Pfeiffer, Anderson, and Westermann would agree that this is a doctrinal statement about the nature of God, but the difference is that they would say God shapes the earth from a

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<sup>483</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis: Volume I*, trans. John Hammond Taylor (Spokane: Gonzaga University), 19.

<sup>484</sup> For example: Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1948); W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966); Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion, S. J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987); William P. Brown, ‘Divine Act and the Art of Persuasion in Genesis 1,’ in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes*, eds., M. P. Graham et al. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

primordial mass or chaos.<sup>485</sup> According to these scholars this does not impede the character and power of God. They also say God using pre-existent material to create the world does not weaken the concept of God that P<sup>486</sup> is attempting to describe, because the idea of creating out of chaos is a common notion in cosmologies and would not be unique to P. This argument carries into verses 4 and 5 with the creation of light. The obscurity is already on the ‘face of the abyss’ in verse 2, and is something different than the spirit of God. In verse 3 the light is created and wholly other than the darkness. Proponents of the concept of chaos believe this is evidence that a pre-existent mass is not created by God, but instead is already in the story before the creation act begins. That is, God’s power is not diminished by not having created everything; instead, it allows for a more flaccid idea of God to come at the beginning of the story. Of course, by losing *ex nihilo*, one loses the hypermasculine creator-God concept from the very beginning of creation. With the simple act of changing the first sentence from ‘In the beginning God

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<sup>485</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 365. (hereafter cited as BDB). The word in question can be translated obscurity or darkness. For many scholars this includes the concept of chaos.

<sup>486</sup> While the debate about the JEDP theory and the debate surrounding it are well beyond the scope of this thesis, it is prudent to discuss it briefly here so the influences of the Genesis 1:1-2:3 myth are clear. In 1574, Andreas Masius published a work stating that Ezra and those around him had made insertions in the Pentateuch Moses had written. This view was widely held in scholarship until the end of the 1700s. There were differing opinions regarding how much of this work was originally from Moses and how he obtained the information for his writing, but the basic belief that Moses authored or at least compiled the Pentateuch remained intact without debate. At this time, scholars such as Johann Gottfried Eichhorn and Karl David Ilgen concluded that there were different strands of the Pentateuch that did not come from Moses at all. They said that by looking at the different uses of God’s name in the text, one can detect different strands from which the Pentateuch had been pieced together. The J source primarily used the name ‘Yahweh’ in reference to God whereas the E source used the term ‘Elohim’ for God. As scholars later discerned these strands, they were referred to as ‘J’ and ‘E’ respectively. As the theory progressed, it was argued that Deuteronomy was an independent work from the previous four books of the Pentateuch. This argument held that Deuteronomy was a condensed version of the former books, woven together from the J and E sources. Later scholars saw a separate P source within the Pentateuch. This source is understood to have been written by a priest or group of priests in the temple, which is how it received its name - the Priestly source or code. The work in this strand of the Pentateuch contains mainly genealogies and portions of law. There are also some story elements in P, including the narrative found in Genesis 1:1-2:3. C.f. E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), 119; 123.

created...’ to ‘When God began to create...’<sup>487</sup> one is changing the concept of who this creator-God is. By losing a creator-God who must create *ex nihilo*, one begins to lose the hypermasculinity of God because God’s power does not come from creating out of nothing. Instead, God creates from something and is thus vulnerable insofar as God is using pre-existent materials.

Another part of the concept of creating is the power of God’s word. In Genesis 1:1-8 God’s word is enough to form everything and God does not need to fight for power as in other cosmologies.<sup>488</sup> With the power of a word, God separates between the created and the obscurity, and God considers this creation good. The chaos that is already in existence has no place in the created order. Therefore God controls chaos by simply speaking.<sup>489</sup> This would have had a tremendous impact on the Judean reader living in Babylonian exile when it is thought that this myth was written.<sup>490</sup> This God is not only one who can create, as many gods are able to do, but he is able to create by simply using words. Chaos can be eliminated with a word, and there is no use of force, or violence to form the cosmos, but simply speaking is enough.<sup>491</sup> In today’s world, this idea shift is akin to the difference between resolving differences like a thug with fists, and sitting down and having a dialogue to resolve misunderstandings. One way is one of power and a refusal to be vulnerable while the other requires vulnerability.

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<sup>487</sup> NKJV

<sup>488</sup> William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 57.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>490</sup> C.f. footnote 486.

<sup>491</sup> Walter Bruggemann and Hans Walter Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 105.

The power of the spoken words is evident throughout the Genesis 1 cosmology. Nowhere is this power more necessary than when speaking of the ‘solid expanse.’ The concept of the ‘solid expanse’ is a very difficult one in the text. Theologically, the expanse indicates the differentiation between the created and the chaos. It tells what is believed to be good by God and that which is considered bad. The waters above the expanse do not belong to the ‘good’ of creation. Instead, only what is underneath the expanse is ‘good.’<sup>492</sup> Linguistically it is also difficult to determine exactly what the solid expanse is understood to be. There are some who believe that it is the same concept as Job 37:18, which discusses the sky being spread out like a molten mirror.<sup>493</sup> Others envision the solid expanse as an optical illusion and a part of the concept of legend within the Genesis story.<sup>494</sup> Another idea is that the solid expanse is a giant bell or a sheet of metal upon which the sun and stars have been hammered.<sup>495</sup> Although the notion of ‘firmament’ or ‘solid expanse’ is debated, these different conceptions of the solid expanse are helpful because, at the very least, they indicate that there were commonalities in how the earth was envisioned by ancient peoples – commonalities which encourage dialogue about the nature of God (or gods).

At this point in the discussion, we can already see how interpretation can lend itself toward or against appropriate vulnerability. Specifically, if God has to create the world *ex nihilo*, then God

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<sup>492</sup> Westermann *Genesis 1-11*, 16.

<sup>493</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1., eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Baker (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 20.

<sup>494</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History*, trans. W.H. Carruth (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 7.

<sup>495</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans., J. H. Marks (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), 51; E. A. Speiser, *Anchor Bible*, vol. 1 (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1964), 6.

is already on His way to being one defined by His hypermasculinity who dominates the world through the power of creating out of nothing. Furthermore, as we can see from Augustine to Harris, this form of creation is the principle evidence of why God is holy and must be obeyed. Alternatively, if God creates out of pre-existent materials, then it is possible that this God is not threatened by these materials and yet, can still create. This is an important distinction because it is commonly agreed by more liberal scholars that the Genesis 1:1-8 pericope and its larger section, Genesis 1:1-2:3 creation myth is borrowed from the ancient Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma Elish*. In *Enuma Elish*, the earth (and particularly the firmament) is created out of the body of a rebellious goddess Tiamat (representing chaos) who has been defeated by her son Marduk. Because all that is physical, particularly humans, is created out of the body of the goddess, the whole material realm is considered evil. Alternatively, the creation myth preserved in Genesis 1:1-2:3 allows God to create the world from pre-existent material and it also promotes the goodness of the physical – both human bodies and the world. This assertion for the goodness of the material realm is a beginning point for body theology and a positive step toward a biblical understanding of appropriate vulnerability.

Unfortunately, while there may be some American Evangelicals who would be convinced by this proposed exegetical project; ultimately, it would likely do little to convince those with an American Evangelical worldview to be less suspicious of the material world and move past a hypermasculine understanding of God. This is because it is as yet beyond their personal interpretation of the Bible and reason for accepting the existing interpretation includes everything from inertia to downright terror or infatuation.

Therefore, I would propose that, perhaps, a more beneficial next step might be to make an ethnographic study of this work and see how these negative attitudes toward the material which we have explored in this thesis interact with the materialism of ‘the world’ in American Evangelical daily life. Through this work, I would be looking to see how American Evangelicals understand God by mapping, in relation to the body, what they believe is right and wrong. I would also be interested in the interplay between God and the body that is represented by the very physical and material use of money that appears to be less regulated by Evangelical authorities than sex and marriage. Questions relating to money and how it is used are also important, of course, because the ways in which we spend our money are highly indicative of what we think about our own embodied existence and the nature of God.

For example, I would suspect that if one’s conception of God is similar to that of Jonathan Edwards – one of complete wrath – then there is no need to consider the physical (including body, sex, or how one spends money) because the answers are already laid out in black and white for the individual. In other words, the body would only be significant in so far as it and the things it allowed the Christian to do (like accumulate wealth) brought that Christian to a proper recognition of God’s righteous wrath. In fact, there would be no place for appropriate vulnerability in any aspect of one’s life. There would be no need to be appropriately vulnerable with one’s spouse just as there would be no need for appropriate vulnerability with any of the rest of the world. This study would exemplify how far a concept of God influences the individual in the physical realm – from the daily relationships one has, to how one understands one’s body, to what one spends money on – it is all less good than God and therefore, it is all evil and should be discounted. However, of course, the proper purpose of such an ethnographic study



would not be to prove or illustrate this conclusion but to investigate whether these suppositions about attitudes toward God and the body were actually born out by the views and opinions of contemporary American Evangelicals themselves.

Unfortunately, American Evangelical Christians are unlikely to take my analysis seriously because the existing theological presuppositions are so entrenched and underpin the nature of both family and community life. However I believe that the case I am making could be strengthened even further by (a) forms of relevant biblical interpretation and (b) forms of ethnographical research designed to show how the idea of the hypermasculinity of God determines not only the nature of family and community life but also the ways in which Evangelical Christians spend and/or invest their money. In sum I would say that even though contemporary Evangelical Christians in America might be difficult subjects with whom to engage about biblical hermeneutics and the nature of human relationships with God, it seems very likely that the case I am making about appropriate vulnerability would only be strengthened and confirmed by further work along these lines. This is at least partly because, as I have already suggested, existing attitudes toward sex and marriage in contemporary American Evangelical Christianity rest on such problematic principles.

## **Conclusions**

Ultimately, this thesis comes down to my recognition of the importance for Christians – and perhaps especially contemporary American Evangelical Christians – to have a degree of self-knowledge and acceptance. I have attempted to show the patriarchy that is inherent in the American Evangelical Christian theology of God and the material – specifically in all things relating to woman, the body, and sex. I have shown where these patriarchal ideas come from,

how they have been perpetuated, and where there have been some changes. Furthermore, I have attempted to account for an American Evangelical Christian concept of God that is connected to sex in a way that is detrimental to both men and women because it imposes on them negative and impossible ideals. Particularly, it creates an ultimate ideal of a hypermasculine God, in relation to whom men seek to live in feminine submission while continuing to subjugate real women in homes and congregations. As I noted above in reference to Isherwood,<sup>496</sup> it is much easier to live with an ideal than with one's own body – because the ideal is a fantasy instead of a difficult reality in relation to which one will usually fail and feel insufficient. I have employed the notion of appropriate vulnerability, to indicate one way in which both men and women could realistically participate in relationship with God and one another without being excluded or stereotyped as the Other. The alternative is to trade away knowledge of the self for a black and white box of safety and security which, in the end, is neither safe nor secure because this safety and security is nothing more than a fantasy where one is encouraged to simply hide away, gazing narcissistically at the self as the submissive wife of a hypermasculine God who will never let anything bad happen to her. But this narcissistic gaze breeds danger because it is not, in any way, real – although the idealisation can bring real harm, for example to the women it identifies through absolute exclusions, as either 'pure virgins', 'good mothers', or 'evil temptresses.'

To conclude this thesis I would like to give an example of why this work is necessary as well as explain why my thesis is entitled *In the World but not of It: A Critique of American Evangelical Views of God and the Material*. In 1997, there was a popular Christian rock band called 'Jars of Clay.' They had long hair and, according to my first college roommate, were gorgeous. Upon

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<sup>496</sup> P. 163.

writing chapter 3, I decided that it would be a good idea to immerse myself in that world again. I put on the only Jars of Clay cd that I own and shuddered upon hearing the following song:

In open fields of wild flowers  
 She breathes the air and flies away  
 She thanks her Jesus for  
 The daisies and the roses  
 In no simple language  
 Some day she'll understand  
 The meaning of it all.

He's more than the laughter, or the stars in the heaven  
 As close as a heart beat, or a song on her lips  
 Some day she'll trust him, learn how to see him  
 Some day He'll call her  
 And she will come running  
 And fall in His arms  
 And the tears will fall and she'll pray:

I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I  
 want to fall in love with you.

Sitting silent wearing Sunday best  
 The sermon echoes through the wall  
 With grace sufficient through it  
 Calls to the people  
 Who stare into nowhere  
 Can't feel the chains on their souls  
 He's more than the laughter, or the stars in the heaven  
 As close as a heartbeat, or a song on their lips  
 Someday we'll trust him  
 Learn how to see him  
 Someday He'll call us  
 And we will come running  
 And fall in his arms and the tears will fall down and we'll pray:

I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I  
 want to fall in love with you.

We want to pray  
 Lalalalalalalalalalalala

Seems too easy to call you saviour  
 Not close enough to call you God  
 So as I sit and think of  
 The words I can mention

To show my devotion

I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you, I want to fall in love with you (repeat and fade out).<sup>497</sup>

This song is disturbing to me not only because I once worshipped God in these terms. Rather, it is alarming because it exemplifies the problem of this thesis. It opens as a love song might do – with a girl in a field contemplating her (male) lover. The middle verse contains a person alone at church contemplating the same (male) Lover/God. It is about desire. This desire is as strong as that for a physical lover; although of course, there is no actual mention of sex in the song. There is only a reference to love – and I might add, a normative male concept of love where one is completely distracted by the lover – and when ‘she’ sees ‘him’ the song implies this (female) Christian will fall into his arms of chaste love and be happy for the rest of her life.

Then, without missing a beat, the song suddenly turns to a desire about a God who is indescribable. It’s too easy to call God ‘saviour,’ and too distant to call God ‘God.’ There is no resolution to this problematic description of God, but it is clear that one should consider this God the lover that both the girl and the lonely person in church are coveting in a kind of perilous piety.

There is no need to give attributes to the Lover/God in the song because either the listener’s authority – charismatic pastor or theologian – has already told the listener about this God’s hypermasculine attributes; or it is simply assumed knowledge as part of the Evangelical rhetoric

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<sup>497</sup> M. Bronleewe, C. Lowell, D. Haseltine, and S. Mason, *Love Song for a Saviour*, Sung by Jars of Clay (Nashville: Essential Records, 1997 [1995]).

which has been designed to imprint the hypermasculine God onto the imaginary of every Evangelical Christian. This is not so different from what all the previous theologians we have studied have done in previous times. And this is where the criticism must come in. The *In the World but not of It* aspect of the title comes through in the love song as well. American Evangelical Christians are in the world such that they participate in society. They are influenced by, and share many of the standards of the world and society including its normative patriarchal structure so clearly defined in terms of extremely 'this worldly' concerns about body, sexuality, and masculinity as we have seen from Augustine to Harris. However, they claim not to be of the world at the same time.

It is my contention that this is an impossible paradox. By virtue of being influenced by, and participating in American culture and its patriarchal influences, Evangelical Christians are necessarily not outside of that culture. This influence can be seen in American Evangelical views of, and desire for, God, but the 'world' aspect is decidedly lacking in their views regarding the material. It is my contention that this is because, just as the singer in the song is ambivalent about what to do with the girl, there is ambivalence about what to do with God. That is, there is ambivalence in the American Evangelical Christian male understanding of himself as both embodied and in relation with God. This is problematic not only for the individual (or for that matter, collective) male. It is problematic because this ambivalence is displaced, in different ways, onto both God and woman. It makes God hypermasculine in the idealised image of the individual theologian or charismatic Church leader, and it equates women with stereotypes of sexuality as either virgin, good wife and mother, or whore without remainder.

The aim of this thesis has been to understand how this has happened, how it affects an American Evangelical Christian view of sex and marriage, and whether or not there is a viable alternative which speaks both to the problem of God and woman in idealised fantasies without allowing a feeling of overpowering anxiety about the material to horribly distort the model. Appropriate vulnerability takes us a step beyond these idealisations because it forces the normative male to take account of himself whereas before he was ‘free’ to live in accordance with an unchallenged normative perspective. By addressing his discomfort with both body and spirit and ways in which he projects this discomfort, unchallenged, onto either God or woman, this analysis presents contemporary American Evangelical Christians with some ways of restructuring or reconceiving human/divine relationships. This might not solve all of the world’s problems but arguably it makes a move in the right direction. Or, as St. Paul would say ‘For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.’<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> I Corinthians 12:12 NKJV.

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