

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S TEACHINGS ON MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

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"Since love grows within you, so beauty grows. For love is the beauty of the soul." – Saint Augustine

This paper explores Augustine's perspectives on sexuality and marriage, with a key point of contention between Augustine and the Pelagians centered on the nature of concupiscence in the context of original sin and baptism. The Pelagians argued that concupiscence is inherently good and only becomes problematic when in excess. In contrast, Augustine viewed concupiscence as a mark of original sin, leading individuals towards sinful behavior. Augustine clarified that carnal desires stem from original sin, rather than marriage itself. He also distinguished between the positive aspects of marriage and the negative influence of carnal desires, highlighting the importance of conjugal chastity. Augustine's insights remain relevant today as they continue to shape and challenge contemporary perspectives on marriage and sexuality.

Keywords: Concupiscence, Conjugal love, Marriage, Procreation, Sexuality

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, our understanding of human sexuality has evolved. Today's cultural sexual revolution has resulted in a defacement of the individual through the idolatry of the body. Sexuality has been trivialized and stripped of its significance. Procreation and reciprocal self-giving are not connected to sexuality. According to this perspective, sexuality and corporality are cultural creations rather than natural, constitutive aspects. Therefore, even sexual identity can be chosen. It is significant to highlight that birth control methods like sterilization, abortion, and contraception have been used as a result of the existing policies and mindset in our society. These methods not only endanger human life but also degrade human dignity. There is no longer a norm for sexual behavior in today's culture, no understanding that gives it a complete and powerful meaning beyond which it has to be viewed as aberrant. Having an "active" sexual life—regardless

of the shape that this activity takes—appears to be accepted as normal in today's society and seems to apply to everyone. The sacred, meaningful, and exclusive nature of marriage—a connection between two people—has been replaced with the idea that sexual encounters are appropriate for as long as two people are couples, whether married or not. Sexual relationships can be casual, transient, and promiscuous; they are not connected to significant commitment or faithfulness of persons.

To raise awareness and impart to the public the deep significance of human sexuality and marriage, I think we need to critically examine the issues and changes that are behind all of these issues, which have an impact on many people's lives and futures. I think St. Augustine's ethical philosophy provides some profound inspiration and insights. We can find some moral answers to some of the issues facing our society now by using his teachings. The focus of sexual education is on marriage, responsible reproduction, and ethical love and marriage. This was the reason behind my decision to conduct research on Augustine's ethical ideas. Thus, Augustine's views on sexual pleasure and concupiscence in marriage were taken into consideration in this regard.

In this study, I have delved into Augustine's perspective on marriage in conjunction with his beliefs on sexuality, concupiscence, and conjugal chastity. This exploration has highlighted the importance of a lasting commitment to establishing family stability. I have also evaluated the continued significance of Augustine's teachings in today's context, drawing on insights from notable scholars and philosophers to support the validity of his views on sexuality and marriage in contemporary marital relationships.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON THE MANICHEAN THOUGHT

Augustine (354-430), was born on November 13, 354 AD, in Tagaste, in the African province of Numidia (now Souk-Ahras, Algeria). St. Augustine enjoyed a place of prominence among the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. As a writer, Augustine was prolific, persuasive, and a brilliant stylist. His best-known work is his *Confessions* (397-400 ca.), in which he wrote about his early life and conversion. In his great Christian apologetics, *The City of God* (413-426), Augustine formulated a theological philosophy of history.

Regarding Manichaeism, Brown (1969) contends that at the age of nineteen, Augustine began to "hear" Manichaeism. Augustine was captivated by the Manichaean solution to the question of where evil comes from. Still, he was restless because he could not find a satisfactory response to the fundamental concerns that burned within him. After nine years, Augustine broke with and disassociated himself from Manichaeism. He vehemently opposed the Manichaean beliefs, which held that marriage—which was once seen to be the institutional means of procreation—was equally wicked, that the body is the devil's creation, and that the propagation of the body is evil. Burke (1990, 1), however, contends that sexual activity is not very important as long as pregnancy is prevented because it just impacts the body and not the spirit. Paradoxically, though, Su Park (2011, 110) says that his detractors had charged him with never having fully broken away from his childhood religion. But Augustine rejected the Manichean dualistic understanding of marriage and the body. *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae* (On the Morals of the Catholic Church) and *De Moribus Manichaeorum* (On the Morals of the Manicheans), two

treatises published by Augustine in 388, are particularly useful for comprehending Augustine's disagreement with the Manicheans. According to Augustine, the flesh is excellent in its own right to the extent that it is good in the body itself. Augustine argues that the body is not inherently bad in opposition to the Manicheans. Not every flaw in human behavior stems from the body. Augustine vehemently upheld the virtues of sexual diversity and the matrimonial union. God made males and females out of his will, according to Augustine: "He created them male and female." Gen: 5.2. Holmes (1956, 251) states that God, the Creator, is the source of the two beings' equality, respect, and dignity. Since both men and women were made in God's image, they are equal before the Almighty. They are, therefore, expected to exhibit in their connection the wisdom and goodness of the creator. Consequently, the infinite perfections of God are somewhat reflected in man and woman: in the qualities of a mother, a father, and a husband. Augustine believed that marriage was a gift from God in addition to being a positive thing. As we shall see in more detail later, Augustine addressed the three goods of marriage in his early book *De Bono Coniugali* (On the Good of Marriage), which was written to counter the charge of Manichaeism against the Catholics. Augustine says, "Marriage, therefore, is a good in all the things which are proper to the married state and these are three: it is the ordained means of procreation, it is the guarantee of chastity, and it is the bond of union" (Augustine 2001, *De Bono Coniugali*, 1.5).

ST. AUGUSTINE'S TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

Pius XI's 1930 encyclical *On Christian Marriage (Casti Connubii)* was inspired by Augustine's dissertation *On the Good of Marriage (De Bono Coniugali)*. Clark (1996, 1) demonstrates the significance of Augustine's theory to the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage. According to Hunter (1992, 22), "*On the Good of Marriage*" is the earliest systematic philosophical examination of marriage, even though it is not the first Christian-authorized work on the topic, and its influence on later Christian thought has been immense. De Ferrarri (1955, 3) contends that Augustine's two-part treatises, *On the Good of Marriage* and *On Holy Virginity (De Santa Virginitate)*, were in response to a dispute that occurred in the late fourth century between Jerome, who denigrated marriage in favor of virginity and the arts, and Jovinian, a monk "who had extolled the goodness of marriage" and asceticism in regard to spirituality. Additionally, it is his defense against the Manichaean assault on Christian instruction. According to Hunter (1992, 22), Augustine tried to concede the superiority of virginity but upheld the goodness of marriage in his justification of the importance and goal of Christian marriage. This was an attempt to strike a middle ground between Jovinian and Jerome. Augustine bases his case for marriage's benefits on the idea that bearing and bringing up children in the faith is marriage's main benefit since it causes human society to come together as God intended when He created all people from one.

According to Zincone (2005, 354)¹ Augustine thought that the Lord's acceptance of his presence at the wedding feast at Cana validated the divine institution of marriage. Since the Lord himself acted as the bridegroom in the aforementioned Gospel episode, the Lord highlighted marital fidelity and The Lord emphasized the conjugal chastity and manifested the mystery described by marriage. Thus, people who view marriage

adversely are condemned. Augustine believed that marriage is good. He makes a distinction between many kinds of goods, one of which is the marital union, which he regards as essential to the continuation of the human species. An important good for the social consortium arises from this type of loving relationship. Because Augustine believed that marriage was good in and of itself, rather than just in connection to the evil that adultery represents, which it breaks and curbs, marriage was not only good as continence, even if it is superior, but also a lesser evil. As a result, marriage is excellent, and we can legitimately defend it against every defamation. Zincone (2005, 354–355) confirms that it appears interesting that Augustine, when wondering why marriage is beneficial, notes that it is not only for the procreation of children but also for the natural society, established between the two sexes. The fact that a couple's marriage relationship endures serves as evidence of this. That is something they cannot lose, not even old age or the death of a kid. In a happy marriage, the vitality between the husband and wife endures, even if the fervor between the sexes wanes over time. This affective disposition, together with the reciprocal love and esteem that couples provide for one another in the chastity of the soul, is what Augustine refers to as the *Ordo Caritatis*. In this context, with delicate tones and rich psychological introspection, Augustine also sheds light on the mechanism by which the intemperance of the youthful age and the lust of the flesh are conveyed. Recalling 1Cor. 7:34 and connecting it to 1 Cor. 6:19, Augustine has no doubt applied the words of the consecrated people to the married people. St. Paul says: “The one who is not married is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that she may become holy in body and spirit” (1Cor. 7:34). We must not understand it in the sense that a chaste Christian wife is not holy in body. Biblically speaking, “It has been said to all the faithful: do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Cor. 6:19). Meanwhile, theologically speaking, they are all members of Christ. Therefore, they participate in the holiness of Christ (Augustine 2019, *De Bono Viduitatis*, 6, 8).

Regardless, Zincone (2005) asserts that from this perspective, a virgin who is less obedient is inferior to a married woman who is more obedient by adopting the criterion of obedience to the holy laws. Therefore, if it is true that there are two goods—maritality and virginity—and that virginity is the better of the two, then it follows that obedience is a better good than continence. This gives rise to the young people and girls who choose to give their virginity to God as an encouragement to humility. According to Clarke (1986, 139), marriage is beneficial even in situations where it is a second marriage due to widowhood. Even though the frequency of these marriages indicates a certain impropriety, Augustine is afraid to condemn marriage that is repeated in this situation. Augustine responds to criticism by citing the witness of St. Paul, which does not place a cap on the number of marriages following widowhood. He stipulates that the wife will be obligated to her husband for the duration of his life, after which she will be free to marry anybody she chooses upon his passing. In the case of a woman who had seven husbands, Augustine alludes to the story in which Jesus argued with the Sadducees on the resurrection and emphasizes how the Master did not seem to condemn the woman for having seven marriages. It is important that the Bishop of Hippo always pays attention to the text because, in the absence of its authority, he does not aim to denounce several marriages (Augustine 2001, *De Bono Coniugali*, 9.9).

Additionally, Finke (2013, 5) makes the argument that marriage is preferable to virginity because it deals with goods in both situations. However, Augustine formulates

the relationship between these two chaste states of existence in distinct ways using the same image (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 2, 3 as cited in Mathisen 1997). Marriage would be good even in the absence of original sin because God made the sexes, as the scripture states, "male and female he created them" (Gen: 1.27). Those who choose not to marry do not escape the marriage as a bilge of sin, but fly across the hill of a lesser good to go to rest on the mountain of continence, which is a greater good. Augustine rejects the accusation that moved the Pelagians to oppose marriage and confirms that even without sin, the generative process would not be subjected to the lust of pleasure but to the control of the will. Thus, marriage was instituted by God from the beginning. Procreation and communion are the goals of this good, according to Zincone (2005, 358). Like many heavenly gifts, humanity is not bereft of the senses of his flesh and limbs even after being condemned for his fault; so too were they not deprived of this benefit. The passage in Genesis 2:24 about a man and his wife becoming one flesh could have happened without the mess of lust if sin had not happened. It is noteworthy that Augustine believes the devil caused a wound in man but not in marriage, where man's goodness does not change, as a result of encouraging man to sin.

Augustine makes a clear distinction between the benefits of marriage and the drawbacks of carnal concupiscence, which is what caused humanity to acquire original sin in the first place and existed before marriage. Augustine synthesizes what St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:29 about relativity, historical time, earthly experiences, including marriage, and the apostle's call to marry in 1 Corinthians 7:29 by asserting that marriage is always beneficial (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1.5 as cited in Mathisen 1997). The bishop of Hippo frequently draws comparisons between the patriarchal era, when marriage was a means of following the law in order to perpetuate the human species, and the current reality following Christ's revelation. Since there is such a large number of spiritually begotten sons in the world now as a result of Christ's resurrection and public declaration, the urgency that existed in the past has dissipated. Nonetheless, marriage remains, for the time being at least, a means of overcoming human frailty, which would otherwise encourage intemperance and even a form of solace connected to the innate drive for reproduction. As affirmed by Zincone (2005, 361-362), a husband and wife's inherent link is the source of a marriage's benefits. It stems from people's innate social nature and the strength of friendship. The creation of the woman by God from the side of man best describes the tight relationship that binds them. The words "Side by side, in fact, unites those who walk together and those who look together at the same destination" (Augustine 2001, *De Bono Coniugali*. 1, 1.) were used by the Bishop of Hippo to describe the unity of intent between spouses are significant. Augustine distinguishes marriage and its use by pointing out that, even in the absence of a sexual relationship, there may have been a friendly and fraternal union between both sexes.

Because of this, Mary and Joseph were legitimately married, and despite their lack of sexual relations, both were deserving of the title "parents of Christ." All three of the benefits of marriage—offspring, fidelity, and the sacrament—were achieved in them; the indissolubility of their union is a sign of the former's adherence to the flesh and the latter's spirit (Joseph). Despite their lack of cooperation in the generation of Christ, Augustine maintains that Mary and Joseph were bound by a real marital bond that preserved their affection for one another and allowed them to observe continence by mutual agreement

(*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1.3 as cited in Mathisen 1997). This is in accordance with the *Ordo Caritatis* that we have already covered. Augustine points out that the directive given to Joseph by the angel to give Jesus his name indicates that Joseph's fatherly power was not taken away. He was undoubtedly a father, even if not biologically, due to having no sexual relations with Mary. Augustine, therefore, draws the customary expressive conclusion that Mary's husband was even more of a father because of his chaste human parenthood.

ST. AUGUSTINE ON SEXUAL PLEASURE

Augustine's *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* (Mathisen 1997) demonstrates how Julian of Aeclanum had misrepresented Augustine's views on concupiscentia, making them seem to cast doubt on the validity of sexual attraction. He accuses Augustine of disapproving of sexual differences, marriage, or procreation. However, Augustine vehemently disputes this. Augustine says that "nothing of these qualities, inasmuch as sexual differentiation pertains to the bodies of the parents, while the union of the two pertains to the procreation of children, and their fruitfulness to the blessing pronounced on the marriage institution. Nevertheless, all these things are of God" (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 2, 5 as cited in Mathisen 1997). As per Pollman and Otten (2014), Augustine endeavored to demonstrate the distinctions between the Christians and the Manicheans in his dissertation on marriage and concupiscentia. Augustine contends that although marriage is a desirable thing, man is born with concupiscentia because of original sin. In other words, while marriage is a nice thing, having sex is a mix of good and evil. Procreation and sexuality are not seen as consequences of the fall. The fall's result is concupiscentia, a symptom of human nature's degradation.

Julian of Aeclanum contends that sexual desire was not corrupt in the slightest and that it was nonsensical to believe that it differed from the impulse that God had given to Adam and Eve (Clark 1996, 86). He maintained that sexual desire was a natural aspect of being human and that it was good when it was expressed in a valid marriage. According to Augustine, Adam and his offspring suffered from the gap between volition and sexual drive as a fitting penalty for their transgression. According to Augustine, the sense of nakedness in Genesis 3:7 is associated with sexual shame, and this humiliation is appropriate. Adam and Eve's resistance to God's will caused them to become partially resistant to their own will. They had a new sense of the alien, in the form of sexual sensations that were out of their control (Augustine 2001, *De Bono Coniugali*. 1, 3. 5.).

However, Ramsey (1988, 56) contends that Augustine views libidinous pleasure as merely coincidental and not a necessary component of sexual activity. Augustine's theory of sexual pleasure aims to demonstrate that, following the fall, sexual pleasure developed an independent will and became stronger. This is known as *orgasm* or the ultimate pleasurable feeling that defies conscious control. For Augustine, this meant that every sexual encounter served as a somber reminder of Adam and Eve's fall, exposing the boundaries of the conscious self. Walsh (2001) brought attention to Augustine's statement that the problem with sexual pleasure is that it overrides our capacity for reason. In addition to its disintegrating and disordering tendency, sex is problematic for Augustine because it obscures our rationality during intense sexual experiences: "At that

moment of time when sexual pleasure reaches its extreme, nearly all our perception and alertness of mind is taken away" (Augustine. 2005, *De Civitate Dei*, 14, 20.). This means that sex "puts the whole man in disorder" (Augustine 2001, *De Bono Coniugali* 9.4.). Augustine interprets the flesh in St. Paul's letters not as the body but rather as everything that caused the ego to value its own will over God's. It should be underscored that Augustine does not see sexuality and sexual differentiation as sinful in themselves. Rather, he views sexuality and sexual union as coming from God and willed by him: "For God made male and female...but how could it possibly happen, that they who were to be united...were not to move their bodies? The question before us is about the shameful motion of the organs of generation, which certainly is absent... *If the organs of generation were not obedient to lust, but simply to the will*" (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 13, as cited in Mathisen 1997).

In Augustine's *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 2, 13, 18, as cited in Mathisen 1997) it was discussed that the difference between before and after the fall is the presence of concupiscence: "That concupiscence...had no existence in the body during its life in paradise before the entrance of sin...without this concupiscence; it was quite possible to affect the function of the wedded pair in the procreation of children" (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 2, 13, 18, as cited in Mathisen 1997). According to Augustine, the uncontrolled elements of sexual desire revealed the working of carnal concupiscence, a permanent flaw in the soul that tilted it irrevocably towards the flesh. Concupiscence is not an original sin; however, its inevitable effect is inherited by the descendants of Adam. A force continued to be present even after the original sin (Ramsey 1988, 62). Although every human action was affected by concupiscence, the incongruities associated with sexual feelings made it most explicit. Noonan (1965, 133-134) posits that Augustine also speaks about the disobedience of our first parents as the source of sexual shame. "Why is the special work of parents withdrawn and hidden even from the eyes of their children except that they cannot be occupied in laudable procreation without shameful lusts? Because of this, it was that even they were ashamed who first covered their nakedness when they felt their members disobedient to themselves" (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 2, 14, 19, as cited in Mathisen 1997). In Augustine's (1957) *Contra Julianum* (4, 14, 67), it is discussed that the procreative purpose makes sexual intercourse in which lust is present, good. The example of the animals, which have sexual intercourse to procreate rather than to satisfy the lust, is pointed out. The comparison with eating is repeated: food must be tasty, but beyond the necessity of eating for sustenance, there is lust and hence must be resisted. Even in marital intercourse, mortal sin may occur if one is intemperate in one's lust. "For he who is intemperate in marriage, what is he but the adulterer of his own wife" (Augustine 1957, *Contra Julianum*, 2, 7, 20).

With this, Fuchs (2017, 186-187) argues that the notion of concupiscence helped Augustine to maintain a balance between Manichaeism, which viewed all sexuality as sinful, and Pelagianism, which denied any kind of influence of sin in sexuality. Thus, in opposition to Manichaeism, Augustine maintains the goodness of procreative sexuality, and in opposition to the Pelagians, he maintains the force of concupiscence with sexuality with sin. In doing so, he systematized the intuitions of the previous traditions, which had effectively sought to avoid rejecting sexuality by focusing only on its bad aspects and to avoid misconstruing the tragic aspect of human existence, in which sexuality often plays a very important role.

CONCUPISCENCE IN MARRIAGE

Bonner (1962, 303-314) attempts to explain the meaning and difference of “concupiscence and libido” as understood by Augustine. While libido has a neutral sense of desire, concupiscence generally has a sexual connotation. Libido has a broader meaning than concupiscence. Concupiscence and libido, nevertheless, are practically equivalent words when used to describe sexual desire. However, Holmes (1956, 304) points out that it is crucial to remember that the word “concupiscence” is not always associated with bad sexual behavior. Bonner sees that, Augustine employs concupiscence in a constructive way. Augustine states in this book that “the spirit has a concupiscence, which craves wisdom” (*De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*, as cited in Mathisen 1997).

Kelly (1983, 81-116) also points out that Augustine spoke of a “good” concupiscence, and for Augustine, concupiscence is a far wider reality than sexual desire. In order to understand Augustine's sexual ethics, it is necessary to define exactly the meaning of concupiscence in his writings. For Burke (2006, 481-536), the meaning of concupiscence in Augustine's writings can be summed up in two arguments. First, sex and concupiscence are not evil in themselves, but carnal concupiscence, which came after the fall, is evil. According to Augustine, carnal concupiscence is the punishment for primordial sin. Augustine further countries concupiscence as the “disobedience of the flesh” of which the human will “has lost all proper command for itself over its own members” (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* I, 6, 7, as cited in Mathisen 1997) and “that carnal appetite which impels man to seek feelings because of the pleasure they give, whether the spirit opposes or consents to this” (Augustine 2015, *Contra Jul. Pel. IV, 14, 65*).

In *De bono Coniugali* 1, 25, 40, Augustine (2001) makes a clear distinction between the goods of marriage and concupiscence. This comes as a response to the heretics who had accused him of condemning marriage. Augustine argues that condemnation of carnal concupiscence is not equal to condemning marriage. The Pelagians considered concupiscence as a natural good; thus, the offspring of such a condition were immune to the original sin. In *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1, 7, 8. 35, 40 (as cited in Mathisen 1997), marriage is a natural good. It cannot eliminate the intrinsic disorder of concupiscence, and it does not constitute a constitutive element as the Pelagians claim. Augustine further illustrates that carnal concupiscence does not come from marriage but from original sin. For him, all those who blamed him for his stand against concupiscence were wrong. As suggested by Burke (2012, 380-382), the Pelagians continuously argued that by criticizing concupiscence, even marriage was condemned by the Bishop of Hippo. The first marriage was blessed by God. But, concupiscence is an external character as well as an intimate nature of disorder. This is evident by the shame that accompanies it after sin. The goodness of marriage could not be destroyed by the evil which occurred. It is, therefore, wrong for thoughtless people to think that concupiscence is not a bad thing but an essential part of marriage. In addition to the duty of mutual fidelity, Christian spouses are required to consider carnal concupiscence as an inevitable necessity only for the procreation of children. It is this intention, together with an urgent need to increase the population, that made the polygamy of the patriarchs acceptable. The concern of the sacrament of matrimony as the good of marriage is precisely to show the accidental nature of carnal concupiscence, even in

regard to this mysterious bond that unites the spouses for life. This reminds us of the spouses who, by mutual agreement, renounce sexual relations to live in continence, without lessening their conjugal bond. Indeed, Augustine exclaims that “the conjugal bond will be more stable since that agreement, which must be observed with more loving harmony, was reached not in the sensuous embracing of their bodies, but in the impulses of the souls” (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, 1, 11, 12. cited in Mathisen 1997).

On the other hand, Etzioni and Baris (2005, 219) posit that Christian couples who decide to live in this way rely on the example of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus. Augustine insists on the truth of this marriage, despite the absolute lack of sexual relations, as Christ willed to be born of a virgin. This observation is very important in the eyes of Augustine. In fact, from the virgin birth of Christ, we can draw two conclusions. Firstly, because of concupiscence, from the sexual union of humans, a human is born with original sin. Jesus resembles humanity except for sin. Secondly, we can also conclude that lust is not a proper good of marriage. It is dishonesty for those who sin, and a necessity for those who generate life (Hunter 1992, 22). The pre-eminent intent, however, is not to give practical norms for sexual behavior but to distinguish concupiscence from the goods of marriage, thereby denouncing some of the serious consequences of the greed for pleasure. Marcus, (1956, 271) pointed out that In the *City of God*, Augustine describes the state of Adam and Eve before the fall as follows: “Their love to God was unclouded, and their mutual affection was that of faithful and sincere marriage; and from this love flowed a wonderful delight, because they always enjoyed what was loved. Their avoidance of sin was tranquil; and, so long as it was maintained, no other ill at all could invade them and bring sorrow” (Augustine 2017, *The City of God XIV, 10*). Augustine believed that before the fall, the sexual organs operated under the control of the will as the other members do. In that state, love rather than concupiscence would have initiated sexual activity. Before the fall, “the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (*Gen. 2:25*).

CONJUGAL CHASTITY

Zincone (2005, 254) proposes that chastity is a virtue that can redeem the disorder of concupiscence that accompanies the goodness of marriage. The idea of Augustine can be summed up in one sentence: conjugal chastity in the married state is a gift from God. He distinguishes between “the goodness of marriage from the evil of carnal concupiscence, which is well used by conjugal chastity” (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, cited in Mathisen 1997). Notice that even though he places this gift below the gift of continence, St. Paul informs us that it is still from God when he speaks of it, saying, “I should still like everyone to be as I am myself, but everyone has his own gift from God, one this kind and the next something different” (*1Cor. 7:7.*). Clarke (1986, 139) posited that Augustine speaks about non-believers who practice the gift of chastity: Both believers and unbelievers have the talents of God embedded in their souls. Therefore, when non-believers exercise what appears to be marital chastity with faith, they either do it to appease men—whether it be themselves or others—or to avoid doing business with the devil. According to Augustine, married chastity emerges from the comments he made on the Genesis account of Adam and Eve’s behavior before and after the fall. Before the

fall, they were naked and yet felt no shame: “not because they could not see, but because they felt nothing in their members to make them ashamed of what they saw” (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1, 7, 17, cited in Mathisen 1997).

Finke (2013, 5) makes the argument that Adam and Eve felt nothing abnormal and that there was no selfishness in their couple's attraction. The timing of their marriage would not have been chosen by chance, but by their intellect and will, which perfectly and organically matched their own feeling of reciprocal contribution in the use of their reproductive capacity. Man would have been begotten by the means of generational organs if there had been no sin, and he would have obeyed a calm and normal will like all the other members of his species.

Burke (2006, 9) asserts, however, that it is critical to remember that the humiliation only extended to Adam and Eve, who were married. Shame had come perfectly into their mutual relationship. They were embarrassed by a new aspect that jeopardized the purity they had enjoyed in their first relationship, but they were not ashamed to be husband and wife or to show their marital passion. Burke (2006) proposes, however, that we observe both the result of concupiscence and the innate response to it. Its function is to prevent man and woman from reaching, “seeing,” and comprehending the inner significance, true substance, and value of sexual differences and complementarity. Instead, it causes them to get instantly engrossed with the outward physical features and attractiveness of sex.

John Paull II (1980, 11–15) urges that because our ancestors had a more profound and complete vision during the time of their original creation, they were able to stare at one another's nudity with unbroken delight and without experiencing any sexual attraction. Following their fall, they naturally reacted to protect their ability to view each other's sexuality in its whole as “spousal” and to avoid being blinded by its outward manifestation alone. This included covering up their nudity. Adam and Eve's deed serves as an example of how guilt is inherent in human nature in its current state and affects both men and women. However, according to John Paul II (1984, 1174–1175), their actions teach us that if married people do not uphold a certain level of humility in their conjugal relationships, this may compromise the respect for one another that should characterize their love as well as the genuine freedom with which their reciprocal spousal donation should be made. Love itself should motivate the partners to uphold and strengthen that freedom both before and during their marriage.

THE RELEVANCE OF AUGUSTINE’S TEACHING TODAY

Burke (2012, 377) confirms that the teachings of Augustine are important for the understanding of human sexuality and marriage. The influence of his thought can be recognized for establishing the guiding principles of Christian marriage and sexuality, many of which are still highly evident in the Church teachings today. Nowadays, marriage is not very popular. The public views it with scant respect and distrust. Numerous questions exist regarding the worth of marriage and its likelihood of success. There are so many surrogates (free unions, trial marriages) that the concept of marriage itself is becoming devoid of any objective meaning (marriage between the same sexes). While the majority of our contemporaries may not believe that marriage is inherently evil, it may be difficult for them to articulate the benefits of marriage.

Burke (2012) further adds that there is a correlation between the devaluation of marriage and the pervasiveness of sexuality in nearly every element of life. The majority of people in today's world do not adhere to the standards of sexual behavior, nor do they comprehend the boundaries that define what constitutes normal behavior and the full scope of its meaning. Indeed, having an "active" sexual life—regardless of the shape it takes—appears to be accepted as normal these days. Sexual activity is no longer seen as something precious and meaningful that is exclusive to married couples and defines one special kind of human relationship. Sexual activity does not require a profound commitment between two people. Today, it can merely be casual, transient, and immoral. Anyone can be a good and legal sexual partner—even someone who is the same sex as you—as long as two people consent to it. In response to the contemporary devaluing of marriage and sexuality, Pope Paul VI (1968) sought to inspire and draw in both Catholics and non-Catholics with a renewed vision of marriage's dignity, particularly imbued with a unique personalism. The Council Fathers' views on marriage are based on Sacred Scripture, Augustine's and St. Thomas' ideas, *Casti Connubii's* (Pius XI 1930) teachings, and two speeches given by Pope Pius XI, as stated in the *Gaudium et Spes*.

Asci (2002, 68-70) points out that the most debated teaching in *Gaudium et Spes* concerning marriage is the primacy of procreation at the ends of marriage. Some theologians argue against the idea of a hierarchy of ends because *Gaudium et Spes* does not explicitly address this concept. However, *Gaudium et Spes* references St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and *Casti Connubii*, all of which uphold a hierarchy of ends. The Council Fathers of *Gaudium et Spes* employ language that aligns with the notion of a hierarchy of ends when they state, "Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children." (*Gaudium et Spes*, no.50.). De Haro (1993, 198) posits that "children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents" (1993, 198). Similarly, they write, "By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children and find in them their ultimate crown" (1993, 198).

Harrison (2000, 162) emphasizes that the Council Fathers acknowledge that marriage serves a purpose beyond procreation. It is fundamentally a lifelong commitment between individuals who prioritize the well-being of children. It is essential for the mutual love between spouses to be expressed in a healthy and evolving manner. A description of offspring and faith similar to this is not contradictory to Augustine's description in *De Bono Coniugali* 3, 3 (Augustine 2001), where he emphasized the importance of offspring while acknowledging the value of faith. Lawler (1993, 58-59) proposes that Augustine's perspective on marriage is appealing due to the three distinct values (offspring, fidelity, and sacrament) that define it. These values continue to resonate with contemporary individuals, as demonstrated by the wide acceptance of the importance of fidelity in marriage. The mutual and exclusive commitment to fidelity between spouses is seen as a positive expression of the unique bond and appreciation they share. The value of fidelity is surely clear. You are *unique* to me, is the first personalized affirmation of conjugal love; and echoes the words God addresses to each one of us in Isaiah: "You are mine" (*Is. 43.1.*)

Burke (2012, 382) suggests that a heightened level of attention and dedication may be necessary in comprehending the importance of mutual fidelity as a lasting and

unbreakable value in a committed relationship. In today's society, individuals have embraced a sense of personal freedom that often leads to skepticism toward making long-term commitments. He always wants to be in a position to go back on his choices, even on a choice as natural as marriage. That is why indissolubility, which is an essential good for Augustine, has become a challenge for modern man. A temporary or breakable bond is better than an unbreakable one. Only soluble marriage is good and acceptable. An indissoluble bond is bad and unacceptable. Augustine is right, and it is the modern individual who is mistaken in his or her paralyzing diffidence and needs to correct his or her perspective about the positive needs and fulfilling tendencies of his or her nature. Kostik (1997, 82) suggests that according to the teachings of Augustine on indissolubility, couples must understand that living together requires sacrifice and acceptance. The importance of a lasting bond of love should be evident to those who remain connected to their own humanity. John Paul II (1982, 1344) emphasizes that it is innate for the human heart to embrace challenges, particularly in the pursuit of an ideal or out of love for another person.

Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*, (1981, 20) aligns with Augustine's vision, where the concept of indissolubility is presented as positive news.

To all those who, in our times, consider it too difficult to be bound to one person for their whole life and to those caught up in a culture that rejects the indissolubility of marriage and openly mocks the commitment of spouses to fidelity. It is necessary to reconfirm the good news of the definitive nature of that conjugal love that has in Christ its foundation and strength. The family achieves the good of being together. This is the good par excellence of marriage, hence its indissolubility and of the family community.

As Burke (2012, 382-383) indicates, Augustine considered procreativity to be a fundamental aspect of marriage, alongside fidelity and *sacramentum*. This is an area where modern individuals may struggle to comprehend Augustine's perspective, yet can also benefit from it. It prompts the question: do our contemporaries value procreativity? Do they recognize the importance of procreation? Are they convinced that contraception diminishes the personal and marital fulfillment of spouses? If few would confidently answer these questions with a "Yes," and many would respond with uncertainty or a negative, it is clear that modern thought diverges from Augustine's teachings. The question then arises: "Is procreativity considered a value by our current society?" According to Brown (2000, 50-52), the diminishing recognition of the beauty of human procreation and the unique miracle of each conception suggests a diminished reverence for life itself and the opportunity to collaborate with God. Despite the Manichean belief that procreation was negative, Augustine welcomed his unplanned and unwanted son during that period as a divine gift, naming him "Adeodatus," which means "given by God."

The idea on which all genuine Christian personalism is built is expressed in a familiar sentence of *Gaudium et Spes* (1965, 24): "Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself." Whoever does not give himself to another remains alone, yet "it is not good that man should be alone." In that way, he cannot fulfill himself. The dedication in marriage to another has to be an authentic donation made totally and without reserve. This dedication to another can be directed to God. For a large number of

our contemporaries, the primary purpose of a man-woman relationship is merely to provide some sort of sexual companionship, whether through marriage or otherwise. According to Langa (1980, 110), sexuality—rather than conjugality—has taken center stage. Many people assert that real love exists and that, from a moral standpoint, marital relationships and those that are not are nearly indistinguishable. Although both are "good" in the presence of such love, the conjugal good—which demonstrates complete mutual self-donation—no longer serves as the foundation for this goodness. In reaction to the present pessimism about matrimony, Augustine's theory on the benefits of marriage can serve as a lesson for modern Christian philosophy. All people should feel challenged to explore and expound the content of the three goods of marriage.

According to Burke (2012, pp. 385-386), Christians believe that marriage should be viewed as a divine institution, rather than a human creation. It is a reflection of God's plan for humanity and a central aspect of man's nature and development. Fidelity in marriage is a result of genuine affection between spouses. Love, being a virtue, requires effort, and may face moments of temptation. A faithful and chaste spouse demonstrates a higher level of love compared to one who engages in extramarital affairs. Burke (2012) argues that a wife's superior love is evident in her commitment to fidelity, marriage, and genuine affection toward her husband. This fidelity indicates a deeper and more authentic love. In his renowned catechesis, *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II (1997, 156-157) provides an examination of sexuality and marriage, characterizing them as ordained by God to alleviate an individual's "original solitude." It is noteworthy that Augustine, in his work *De bono Coniugali*, also highlights the companionship aspect of marriage as he commences his discussion. Augustine similarly recognizes the inherent goodness of marital unity as it satisfies the fundamental human desire for social connection.

Sapp (1977, 28) explains Augustine's view on the foundation of marriage, highlighting the importance of an individual's social nature and the value of friendship in establishing the goodness of marital relationships. Augustine emphasizes that human sociability naturally manifests itself in marital society and distinguishes marriage as a procreative partnership between a man and a woman, rather than an ordinary friendship. In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine (2005) also envisions marriage in Eden as a faithful covenant based on love and mutual respect between spouses. Faggioni (2010, 133) asserted that Augustine's influence on Catholic philosophy has always supported the idea that "sex is good." The Catholic Church, however, clarifies that while "sex is good," it does not follow that "there is nothing wrong with sex." Its overall stance on God's creation of the human being is that it is good. However, the Church believes that evil, particularly evil that a human freely chooses, threatens the good work of creation. The fall's reality rests between creation's goodness and the need for redemption. Augustine is aware of all three of St. John's warnings about the force of potentially deadly attraction: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." (1 Jn. 2:16.). But, he is particularly cognizant of the lust of the flesh, which is of great concern to us. Burke (2012, 389) cites him as saying that his views on this have had a significant impact on the Catholic understanding of sexuality, particularly on its demanding and strong realism. In a debate where his goal was to defend a Christian concept of sexual morality against a naturalistic exaltation of sex, he also rejected the too optimistic viewpoints of the Pelagians.

The Pelagian controversy, as elucidated by Jensen (1981, 17), prompted Augustine to address the shortcomings of human sexuality in its current state. Pelagius struggled to

accept that our contemporary experience of sexuality aligns with God's intended order, attributing the disorder of concupiscence to sin rather than divine design. The debate surrounding this issue and its impact on Catholic ethics relies on a clear grasp of the concept of concupiscence, revealing stark differences between the beliefs of the Pelagians and Augustine. While the Pelagians view concupiscence as a natural good marred only by excessive behavior, Augustine sees it as an inherent malady resulting from original sin. Concupiscence, according to Augustine, is not a sin in and of itself, but it can be considered evil because it results from and encourages transgression. His definition of concupiscence—which is a particular negative tendency or quality—makes this rather obvious. This is also seen in the several writings by Augustine, who states that although baptism absolves sins of all kinds, guilt endures even after baptism. Augustine's teachings still hold true today. Burke (2006, 481–537) expressed strong opinions about concupiscence. These opinions can be misinterpreted if taken out of context and, more importantly, if concupiscence is not properly understood in terms of what it is, why it is evil, and how it differs from a normal sexual and married instinct. Augustine defines concupiscence even now, as he did for Julian. As he denounces concupiscence, he claims that he has nothing against Julian's exaltation of God's handiwork, which includes human nature, human progeny, marriage, sexual relations, and the benefits of matrimony. Augustine emphasizes that sexual pleasure pursued in a moderate and reasonable manner is not and cannot be referred to as concupiscence, making it clear that what he views as the disorder of concupiscence is not the same as sexual pleasure either. In other places, he draws a comparison between the legal joy of a married embrace and the illicit joy of extramarital affairs. During their dispute, Samek (1976, 271) asserts that Julian fails to clarify that he is criticizing pleasure since it can also be honorable. He is satisfied with Julian's admission that pleasure can be both legal and illegal. Augustine also exhorts contemporary society to recognize the need to maintain virginity between spouses. We may put it another way by saying that the person who values sex over love will increasingly succumb to the control of the former and be less able to feel and communicate the former. We may, therefore, appreciate why Augustine's philosophy, as well as the account of his life in his confessions, continue to be a source of inspiration and hope for those who are perplexed by sensuality. Augustine's appeal, "Lord, make me chaste, though not yet" (*Confessions, VIII, 7, 17*), could also be our own.

In discussing Augustine's view of married intercourse, the consideration arises whether it is justified only if done for procreation, with a sense of imperfection if pursued solely for pleasure. Augustine derives his stance from 1 Cor. 7: 5-7, where St. Paul advises against prolonged abstinence for couples. However, some may question Augustine's interpretation of attributing sin to such acts, as Paul seems to permit married partners to engage in intimacy. Burke (2012) posits a distinction between Paul and Augustine, highlighting their shared belief that seeking intercourse without procreative intent may be self-serving (Paul) yet still considered self-indulgent (Augustine), albeit a minor transgression. In present times, if Augustine were still living, he would emphasize the essential message of *Humanae Vitae*—that the unity and procreation within marriage are interconnected. He would prompt us to contemplate whether it is possible to attribute a unitive significance to the act of intercourse without considering its role in procreation. The phrase "*You are my spouse*" carries a human significance of exclusivity, where the willingness to share procreative abilities with one partner signifies their uniqueness.

According to Burke (2012, 400), the unity within marital intercourse is found in the mutual sharing of procreative power, nothing else captures the true essence of the special bond between spouses. Marital chastity is founded on the understanding and appreciation of the procreative aspect of the marital act. Augustine highlights how desire is tempered by a sense of responsibility and significance that arises from the potential to become parents. It is clear that Augustine does not condemn pleasure, but emphasizes the importance of reflecting on the deeper meaning behind the enjoyment of the marital act (*De Bono Coniugali*). Burke suggests that Augustine would align with the teachings of the contemporary magisterium, emphasizing the necessity for spouses to uphold the fullness of the marital act in their pursuit of joyful physical union, in order to guard against the isolating impact of desire, without artificially altering its natural course through contraceptives. Following the teachings of the magisterium, Augustine emphasized the importance of a genuine marriage act in which spouses become one flesh, a bond that can only be achieved when the procreative and unitive aspects of the act are not artificially separated. As explained by Burke (2012, 403), Augustine believed that maintaining conjugal chastity is crucial for staying within the boundaries of morality and avoiding moral fault. According to Augustine, the goodwill of the spouses should guide and elevate the pleasure that follows, rather than the pleasure dominating their goodwill. A revisit to Augustine's examination of the benefits of marriage offers a strong foundation for reevaluating the value and appeal of matrimony. His analysis highlights the aspects of marriage that are most appealing on a human and personal level. People now acknowledge having a basic understanding of sex. Although it seems optimistic, its true nature is pessimistic, having a Pelagian heritage. The reality of sexuality is far more complicated and, depending on how it is interpreted, can have a positive or negative impact on a person's life.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of contemporary marital relationships reveals a clear evolution in the concept of marriage over the last few decades. The shifts are influenced by a range of social, cultural, economic, and technological elements that together redefine the essence and workings of marriage in today's society. St. Augustine's ethical philosophy provides some profound inspiration and insights. By utilizing Augustine's teachings, specifically his perspectives on pleasure and concupiscence in marriage, we can discover moral solutions to contemporary societal dilemmas. It has been observed that Augustine's teachings remain pertinent and essential for contemplating the philosophy of marriage in the present day. Augustine delineated the sequence in which faithfulness, offspring, and sacrament are considered the three essential goods of marriage in "*Genesi ad litteram*". This concept put forth by Augustine can prompt our society to delve deeper into the significance of these three goods in marriage. The unbreakable bond formed by these goods is vital in every marriage, ensuring steadfastness and dedication. John Paul II (1994, 12) emphasized that love stems from a shared objective common good, fostering a selfless and enduring union between individuals. Marriage, fundamentally, should prioritize the perpetuation of life, provide a fulfilling partnership for a man and woman, and offer a legitimate channel for desires. Hence, marriage, when comprehended

correctly, is a lifelong commitment between a man and woman, characterized by exclusive and mutual fidelity, with the purpose of procreation and child-rearing. As Augustine articulates, the essential elements of marriage are offspring, fidelity, and an unbreakable bond, which distinguish this covenant from any other relationship between two individuals. The essence is the lifelong and unbreakable bond between them with the primary purpose of procreation. The effect is the establishment of a shared life in family affairs, which necessitates adherence to both divine and human laws. Hence, surely St. Augustine's ethical philosophy can provide some profound inspiration and insight in examining the significance of his teachings in contemporary marital relationships. We can apply his ideas to discover some moral solutions to some of the current problems in our society. Augustine's views on sexuality, concupiscence, and conjugal chastity, together with his viewpoint on marriage, can be used to highlight the importance of marriage, responsible reproduction, and ethical love and marriage in sexual education. A long-term commitment to creating family stability has also been emphasized by this investigation.

Hence, the narrative of authentic love commences with an initial attraction to a person's qualities, eventually evolving into a deep connection with the individual. However, in order for love to thrive, it must be reciprocated. Mutual love encompasses enduring qualities such as reliability, and fostering trust between individuals. Those embarking on a journey towards love demonstrate empathy towards one another, understanding and sharing in each other's emotions. In addition, it is important for individuals to develop a friendship based on mutual care and concern for each other's welfare. Ultimately, the factors mentioned lead to the decision to participate in a committed form of love known as "*the act of giving oneself to another.*" This choice is made voluntarily by both parties, stemming from a shared connection of affection, longing, benevolence, empathy, and friendship. By wholeheartedly offering themselves to one another without seeking to control or exploit, the two individuals can come together as a unified being. With this, marriage serves as a formal acknowledgment and protection of this mutual exchange of self. Together, the couple works towards a common goal of nurturing children and supporting each other, thereby solidifying their union.

NOTE

1. The translation of this source from Italian to English is mine.

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