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The Covenant of Husband and Wife

Edward A. Synan

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THE COVENANT OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

NO PAGE of St. Thérèse's Autobiography is more likely to distress a reader today than that which parodies her cousin's wedding invitation. In the rites and in the wedding journey, this Carmelite saw a parallel to her own religious profession made a few weeks before: Was she not bound by her vows as spouse of the Anointed? Is not the religious life a kind of wedding journey that endures until the Day of the Lord? Hence the lines that even an admiring biographer has been pained to read:

Almighty God,
The Creator of Heaven and Earth and Ruler of the World, 
and The Most Glorious Virgin Mary,
Queen of the Court of Heaven,
Invite you to the Spiritual Marriage
of Their August Son Jesus,
King of Kings and Lord of Lords, 
with Little Thérèse Martin, 
now Lady and Princess of the Kingdoms of the Childhood and Passion of Jesus. . . .

Surely this passage bears the features of the last century, of a convent in the provinces. Our reservations against its style do not necessarily spring from the fact that we are neither saints nor Carmelites; to realize this, we have but to mention the name of Edith Stein, Carmelite and martyr. Edith Stein could no more have written these words than could St. Thérèse have been the author of that philosophical work, Endliches und ewiges Sein. And these words of Thérèse are a far cry

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from the austere and outspoken prophets of Israel! What would Hosea
have made of her? What could Ezekiel have said to Lisieux?

THE BIBLE

Yet, for all the surface differences, St. Thérèse was expressing in her
fashion a theme dear to prophets. Nourished by the liturgy—daily she
chanted the psalms, daily she assisted at the eucharistic sacrifice—
fully convinced that the love of God demands the surrender of every-
thing to Him, how could she not see in a wedding the image of God’s
passionate love for us and the privilege of our access to Him?

This is a biblical insight: As husband is to wife, so is Yahweh to His
people. The Hebrew prophets did not find this equation too hard, too
daring. The love of a husband is protective and exclusive: Yahweh is
a jealous God (see Ex 20:5; Deut 4:24). The shattering anger of
husband betrayed, his raging violence against the faithless partner—
where could the prophets have found a better image of the disasters
that infidelity to the covenant would bring down upon the nation of
the Lord’s own choosing? Still, a deceived husband might well be moved
to chastise and to pardon a wife he has yearned to welcome back; thus
was the Lord accustomed to bear with His people. Chosen forever,
they remain beloved in spite of every rebellion. His grief and anger
are but the measure of His love (see Lev 26:44-45).

In human passion, the prophets found a vocabulary to express the
bond of the covenant: marriage, wife, husband, love. Reinforced, we
may suppose, by Israel’s encounter with the cultic sexuality on the
Canaanite high places, sites of alluring heathen worship, the prophets
found in the same image a whole range of related terms for dis-
obedience to the Lord’s commands, for apostasy, for idolatry. Where
the Code of Canon Law speaks soberly of heresy and schism, of
superstition and of communication in sacred things, the Bible thunders:
prostitute, fornication, adultery, lust.

Hosea has provided the classic place for this analogy (see 1:2-3; 5).
All the prophets speak to us of God’s mysterious ways and their teach-

2. See Is 61:10; 62:4-5; Ex 16:1-14; Os 1:2-3, 4; also Apoc 21:2, 9.
3. See Is 54:6-10; Jer 3:1-5; Ex 16:60-63; Os 3. For a biblical theology of
this, see Jdt 5:5-20.
4. See Lev 20:15; Is 1:21; Jer 2:20; Ex 16:15-63; Jg 2:17; Wis 14:12; also
Ex 23; Apoc 2:20-22.

ing is full of symbols. The prophet is described
he was husband to a daughter she had born
might teach fidelity and evoke the threat of destruction was a living symbol of the
return, condemned to receive the name of the nation by Yahweh of those changes;

Thus the mother of a woman given to prostitution, fidelity. Like her, the
good food and drink now and thought did they have, from which they fell back.

More than once the guilty wife: She was in the nation that has deceived, crops ravaged
(see Os 2:5; Ez 16:2). She will not find the happy bed when she
herself. With this return, it will be the repentance of the man:
strong pity, ransom, reconciliation. Not only
happier names. Jezreel need not connote the
faithful—on that day the Lord: “I am His people!” and to his

In this perspective, the human. Because
sanctity is a type of the reverse of the same
What would Hosea have liked Lisieux?

as expressing in her liturgy—daily she characteristic sacrifice—surrender of everything—the image of God's access to Him?

so is Yahweh to His nation too hard, too elusive: Yahweh is shattering anger of faithless partner—age of the disasters on the nation of the all will be moved to welcome back; thus le.

Thus the mother of these children, Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, "a woman given to prostitution," was a type of the people in their days of infidelity. Like her, they had forgotten the Giver of oil and wine, their food and drink now perverted to become the price of shame; not a thought did they have for Him who had made the silver and the gold from which they fabricated their deaf, unseeing idols.

More than once the prophets refer to the harsh punishment of a guilty wife: She was driven naked into the rocky wastes. So will the nation that has deceived the love of the Lord become a desert, vines devastated, crops ravaged, all her wicked rituals brought to naught (see Os 2:5; Ez 16:39; Mic 1:8). Then let her seek her paramours: She will not find them. And the day will come—such is the utterance of the Lord—when she will say: "I will return to my first husband, for happier was I then than I am today" (Os 2:9; see also Lk 15:17-20). With this return, it will be clear that God has not desired the death but the repentance of the sinner. Hosea, faithfully reflecting Yahweh's strong pity, ransomed Gomer for a time of testing and a time of reconciliation. Nor did holy Writ neglect to provide her children with happier names. Jezreel, the first-born, then content with a name that need not connote the dooms of infidelity—for a root may yet be faithful—on that day will hear Yahweh say to his brother: "My people!" and to his sister: "Beloved!"

In this perspective, marriage breaks through the frame of the merely human. Because wedlock is so sacred, the malice that violates its sanctity is a type of man's rebellion against the Holy One. And, the reverse of the same coin, that sacred Scripture has used marriage to

5. Those who heard the parable recounted in the Gospel according to St. Luke must have recalled the parallel in Hosea.
symbolize commitment to God is reason for men to see in the bond between husband and wife an ineffably holy tie.

This does not mean that the scriptural view of marriage is an exclusively solemn one. The Bible is never blind to human hopes and joys; within the imposing landmarks of God's reconquest of His children—smoking mountain and the sea receding—there is room for episodes and themes in a lighter vein. Revelation is conveyed as truly in the tale of Jacob's weary courting and in the melting images of Solomon's Song as in the account of Abraham's thrust into the land of promise. To the believer, nothing human is trivial: Our nature and its every aspiration are the works of His hands. One consequence of this is the place of honor given to the marriage feast in holy Scripture. When Jeremiah must proclaim dire penalties against those who have outraged the covenant, he places the silencing of wedding festivities on the same plane as death, sword, and famine. Samson's roistering career cries out for every extenuating circumstance that can be found, and none will serve him better than his disenchantment in the very week of nuptial feasting: Then it was that the groomsmen connived with his Philistine bride to wring from him the key to his riddle (see Jg 14:1-20; also 1 Mac 9:34-41).

Never is John the Baptist more clearly of the line of the Hebrew prophets than when he styles himself the friend for whom it is enough to hear the Bridegroom's voice (see Jn 3:29). Does not the sun serve the psalmist as a figure of Yahweh's benign majesty? Then, in the exultation of his song, the poet finds yet another image in the splendor of a wedding: The glory of the rising sun is like that of a bridegroom coming forth from his nuptial tent (see Ps 18:6; also Apoc 21:2).

THE TALMUD

The Bible comes to the Jewish believer in a setting of traditional commentary and exposition. Centuries of reflection and discussion have produced a formidable body of authoritative decisions on disputed points, a minute examination of the Law. Thus has meditation and conversational shrewd observation and deduction produced a formidable body of authoritative decisions on disputed points, a minute examination of the Law. Thus has meditation and conversational shrewd observation and deduction produced a formidable body of authoritative decisions on disputed

6. See Jer 7:34; 16:9; also Jl 2:16; 1 Mac 1:28; Mt 9:15; Mk 2:19; Lk 5:34; Apoc 18:23.
7. The "friends of the bridegroom," the *shabbub*, have a special status although the rabbis debated to what point this freed them from certain religious obligations difficult to perform during the wedding festivities. (See Suk. 25b; cf. *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein, London: Soncino, 1935-48, *Sukkah*, pp. 110-111.)
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points, a minute examination of what is implied by each least formula of the Law. Thus has marriage been the focus of a never-ending meditation and conversation: Here to be garnered is a wealth of shrewd observation and deep piety, of astringent realism and much wit.

But the wisdom of the Talmud is a treasure hopelessly alien to the reader for whom all reasoning must be in the form of syllogism. A talmudic anagram, for instance, proposes this cryptic insight: "Rabbi Akiba expounded: 'When husband and wife are worthy, the Shekinah, the divine Presence, abides with them; when they are not worthy, fire consumes them.' " The Hebrew word for "husband" is formed by the letters aleph, yod, and shin, that for "wife" by aleph, shin, and he, while the letters of the divine Name are yod and he. Thus Rabbi Akiba could assert the divine Presence wherever husband and wife are as they ought to be. But should those letters that form the divine Name be deleted, nothing will remain of the words "husband" and "wife" but the two letters that spell "fire," aleph and shin. So it is that, should the divine Presence depart from a marriage, nothing will remain but the fire of passion—the case of a woman being the more evil since, in her name, the letters of "fire" are consecutive, whereas, in that of man, they are separated by the smallest of all letters, yod.

Surely not "logical," this anagram conveys a truth, and a profound one. Without forgetting and still less denying our debt to Greek philosophers, we may be excused for making light of their conceptual logic in a world where Yahweh concerns Himself with our very loves. To be able to rejoice in God-with-us, Emmanuel, and in the sacred union that the heathen thinks no more than a convenience, such is the authentic Jewish way. And the penalty for transcending the manuals of Greek logic? Is it any more than to lose a glimpse of those distant "gods," self-bemused objects of cosmic desire, begetting (if Aristotle was right) a motion perfect because circular?

Another instance: If, as the Bible often affirms, the Lord is wedded to His people, it is Torah that binds them together. From of old, the Hebrews have known that Torah must be to them as beloved and as straitly guarded as is a chosen bride. This biblical likening of marriage to the Covenant of Sinai loses nothing at the hands of the talmudic masters. Thus Deuteronomy recounts that God gave Israel a law, making the community of Jacob His inheritance (see 33:4), and the
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Talmud insists that in these words, not only is one truth stated, but still another is concealed. The word for “inheritance,” morashah, reminds the rabbis of the word me’orasah, “betrothed,” and a new truth springs from the text: Torah is the betrothed of all Israel.9

THE RABBIS ON MARRIAGE

In Jewish tradition, marriage is inseparable from the divine intention in creating man. An unmarried man is considered incomplete. "Rabbi Eleazar said: Any man who has no wife is no proper man; for it is said, 'Male and female created He them and called their name Adam.'" 10 No wonder, then, that the life of the unmarried is joyless, lonely, open to desiquite: a truncated existence, it is a bootless attempt to ignore what God has made of man. "Rabbi Tanhum stated in the name of Rabbi Hanilai: 'Any man who has not a wife lives without joy, without blessing, and without goodness.'" 11 This terse pronouncement is the starting point of a discussion that weaves together fragments of Scripture with disconcerting virtuosité. The phrase "without joy" brings to mind the line of Deuteronomy: "And thou shalt rejoice, thou and thy house" (14:26) because, so these sages assure us, "house" refers to one's wife. From this it is an easy step to assert that the words "without blessing" invoke a line of Ezekiel: "To cause a blessing to rest on thy house" (44:30), and the words "without goodness" echo Genesis: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (2:18).

Nor is this the end. For scholars who lived in Babylon, Palestine counted as the west and there, we are told, the unmarried man was described by yet another architectural image: He is "without Torah and without a wall." For what is Torah but a man's help, and is it not as her husband's helpmeet that Genesis qualifies a wife? She is a wall because she protects: "A woman," said Jeremiah, "shall encompass a man" (31:22). This is enough for the rabbis to see in the man as yet unmarried a man defenseless: He lacks the protecting wall that only a good wife can be. Even Job, connoisseur of disaster, has made his contribution: "And thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace; and thou

10. Yeb. 63a; cf. B. Talmud, Yeshomat, p. 419. It is together that husband and wife merit the name Adam, i.e., man in the deepest sense: Alone, neither is quite human. The scriptural reference is Gen 5:2.
truth stated, but still morahab, reminds
a new truth springs
1.

The divine intention incomplete. "Rabbi
man; for it is
called their name
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wife lives without
This terse pro-
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worlds "without good-
should be alone"
Babylon, Palestine
married man was
is "without Torah
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wife? She is a wall
shall encompass a
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wall that only a
eter, has made his
in peace; and thou
that husband and
alone, neither is quite

shall visit thy habitation and shalt miss nothing" (5:24). He said
"tent" but, according to the Talmud, he meant "wife": The only
guarantee of peaceful possession is a faithful and valiant woman!

No Hebrew sage can doubt that marriage is heaven's concern, and
there were some who thought it right to maintain that every Jewish
marriage is truly "made in heaven." True enough, there were also some
to deny it; thus Rabbi ben Bar Hannah is reported to have said that
to effect a union between man and woman is as difficult as the
dividing of the Red Sea." But the Talmud can adduce another opinion
roundly denying that it is in any sense difficult. "Rabbi Judah said in
Rab's name that forty days before the embryo is formed, a heavenly
voice goes forth and says: "The daughter of so and so for so and so.'"
Thus is the predestined character of marriage proclaimed—the par-
tners are allotted to each other before they have been conceived; it is
heaven's work, "what is the difficulty?" 12

For all its heavenly aspect, marriage has many an earthly advan-
tage to recommend it. No wealth can be compared to a worthy wife. Rabbi
Meir held that the wealthy man is the one who has pleasure in his
wealth but Rabbi Akiba that it is the one who has "a wife comely in
deeds." 13 The death of such a wife is a crushing sorrow, and the
talmudic masters multiply their similes to convey the widower's desola-
tion: He is grieved as much "as if the destruction of the Temple had
taken place in his days"; "the world is darkened"; "his steps grow
short"; "his wits collapse." 14 Even her most humble household tasks
make a man's wife dear to him. He may fill his house with wheat, she
is the one who prepares it for the table; it is not raw flax, his growing,
but the fruit of her spinning and sewing that he wears. Truly she is the
"help" of Genesis, she brings "light to his eyes and puts
him on his
feet!" 15 Indeed, it is not too much to say that the man who lacks a
suitable wife lacks everything. When Scripture threatens impoveris-
ment and slavery as punishment for abandoning the Law, the rabbis
know how to gloss the text from just this point of view. Commenting
on the divine threat to a disobedient Israel: "And thou shalt serve
thine enemy . . . in want of all things" (Deut 28:48), Rabbi Ammi
said that to be "in want of all things" meant with neither lamp nor

15. See Yeb. 63a; cf. B. Talmud, Yebamoth, p. 420.
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table, but Rabbi Hisda declared that it meant to be without a wife. 16

It is with a view to marriage that a man labors in this world, lest it be the wasteland that the command of Genesis—to increase and multiply—was given to prevent (see 1:28). 17 From this destiny no disaster will dissuade the pious. The defeats of the Jews by the Romans in 70 and 135 might have made the task of survival seem a hopeless one. In spite of everything, a master of those times, who knew how disheartening the prospect was, ironically gave his approval to the unending, patient struggle:

Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha said: Since the day of the destruction of the Temple we should by rights bind ourselves not to eat meat nor drink wine, only we do not lay a hardship on the community unless the majority can endure it. And from the day that a government has come into power which issues cruel decrees against us and forbids us the observance of the Torah and the precepts and does not allow us to enter into the "week of the son," we ought by rights to bind ourselves not to marry and beget children, and the seed of Abraham our father would come to an end of itself. However, let Israel go their way: It is better that they should err in ignorance than presumptuously. 18

Thus each Jew is urged to the establishment of his house; planting and building and betrothing are a holy labor for, in the end, it is through these that Jewish living is made possible.

The greatest blessing in a Jewish marriage is the birth of children, and so it is in guarding and supporting wife and children the pious man assures his own peace. The biblical blessing: "And thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt miss nothing" (Job 5:24), is applied to such a man, one "who loves his wife as himself and honors her more than himself, and leads his children in the right path, and marries them off just before they attain puberty." Standard literature comments that this is the very first command given man and that it is thus obvious the Lord did not intend the earth to be a desert, empty of men. (See Meg. 27a; cf. B. Talmud, Megillah, p. 162; see also Is 45:18.)

16. See Ned. 41a; cf. B. Talmud, Nedarim, p. 129.
17. It is a commonplace of rabbinical literature that this is the very first command given man and that it is thus obvious the Lord did not intend the earth to be a desert, empty of men. (See Meg. 27a; cf. B. Talmud, Megillah, p. 162; see also Is 45:18.)
18. B.B. 60b; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 246. The destruction of the Temple was the overwhelming catastrophe of the year 70, whereas the government of the cruel decrees is that of the Hadrianic persecution associated with the revolt of Bar Kochba when neither the Sinaitic Law nor the traditional rabbinic legislation could be fulfilled.

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domestic house; planting and the end, it is through the birth of children, first pains and children the blessing: "And thou shalt visit thy habitation, shall it go to such a man, one more than himself, and take them off just before

The reality of the sages included a primitive eugenics in the counsels they gave to men looking for suitable wives. They recommended that the character of a woman's brothers be scrutinized, for, they think they have observed, children tend to resemble their maternal uncles. 21 Two abnormally tall persons ought not marry lest they beget a breed of giants, nor two abnormally short ones because their children may be tiny. A pale man is ill-advised to marry a pale woman, and a swarthy man one whose complexion is the same as his; their offspring might be of leprous pallor in the first case and in the second, excessively dark. 22 Even the motivation of the man seeking a wife is important; the Lord, searcher of hearts and reins, will hardly bless a union planned for self-seeking reasons. To marry for the sake of money, for example, will mean unworthy children. 23

MARRIAGE AND THE STUDY OF TORAH

The rabbis show a love of sacred study that reminds us of those Greek philosophers who located the perfection of man in the contemplation of:

22. See Bek. 45b; cf. B. Talmud, Bekoroth, pp. 310-311.
23. See Kid. 70a; cf. B. Talmud, Kiddushin, p. 354.
of truth, and also of Christian theologians who give the highest honor to prayerful contemplation. This love of study has meant that the masters of the Law must solve conflicts between the practical duties of the married man and his obligation to meditate on the sacred texts, for both marriage and study have real claims upon him. Both are so holy that to make either one possible would justify that last of all devices, the sale of a copy of the Torah. "Rabbi Johanan said in the name of Rabbi Meir: A man should not sell a sefer torah save in order to study the Torah and to marry a wife." Which holds the first place? Since both marriage and study are universally binding, only a chronological priority is at stake. There are some who give the first place to marriage because a fruitful study of the Law is one "in purity," which means that he ought first to marry a woman and afterwards study the Torah. For how else could the young scholar, victim of the passions that are the bane of the unmarried, come to his studies with the tranquillity they demand?

This opinion, however, is not a unanimous one, and here as elsewhere the Talmud makes it possible for us to witness the cut and parry of the duel. If it is generally true that one should first study and then marry, this order should be reversed for one who cannot live without a wife. Not so, rejoined Rabbi Johanan, speaking out roundly in a way hardly calculated to please wives: "With a millstone around the neck, shall one study the Torah?" What, then, of the rabbinical student from Babylon who travels to Palestine to make his studies? For him, a wife safely at home in Babylon will be no millstone, whereas his confreres, natives of Palestine, are in different case, "studying at home and bearing family responsibilities, they could make no progress if married, and so they are bound to study first." Still another correlation between marriage and the study of Torah is the consideration that a shrewd marriage can promote sacred learning. If a man marries the right woman he has every reason to hope that his children will carry on this duty: "Let a man always sell all he has and marry the daughter of a scholar, for if he dies or goes into exile, he is assured that his children will be scholars. But let him not marry the daughter of an am ha-arez, a man ignorant of the Law, for if he dies or goes into exile, his children of the Law." The same consideration that underlay the preference for a scholar's daughter in choosing a husband for a student of the Torah is not for women, but for scholars and thus they shall be given a student of Torah, or carries on a trade. Which holds the first place? Since both marriage and study are universally binding, only a chronological priority is at stake. There are some who give the first place to marriage because a fruitful study of the Law is one "in purity," which means that he ought first to marry a woman and afterwards study the Torah. For how else could the young scholar, victim of the passions that are the bane of the unmarried, come to his studies with the tranquillity they demand?

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or goes into exile, his children will be *ammei ba'areq*, people ignorant of the Law." 27

The same considerations should guide the father of a marriageable daughter in choosing a husband for her. It is true that the study of Torah is not for women, but women are the mothers and the wives of scholars and thus they share vicariously in the glory of erudition. 28 "Rabbi Ḥiyya ben Abba said in the name of Rabbi Johanan: All the prophets prophesied only on behalf of one who gives his daughter in marriage to a scholar and who conducts business on behalf of a scholar and who allows a scholar the use of his possessions." 29 Help given a student of Torah, especially in the form of a wife who will be his help and defense, brings the benefactor close to the Lord. "Is it possible for a human being to 'cleave' unto the divine Presence?" Yes, the rabbis answer: "Any man who marries his daughter to a scholar, or carries on a trade for scholars, or benefits scholars from his estate is regarded by Scripture as if he had cleaved to the divine Presence." 30

**HUMAN FRAILTY**

To think rabbinical esteem for marriage and for the ideal wife has masked the faults and limitations that men are fond of ascribing to women would be an error. On the contrary, the rabbis have some severe things to say about the whole sex, although the antifeminist bias is often enough expressed with a wry humor that blunts its edge. The unsympathetic wife has her place in the pages of Talmud:

Rab was constantly tormented by his wife. If he told her: "Prepare me lentils," she would prepare him small peas; if he asked for small peas, she prepared him lentils. When his son Ḥiyya grew up he gave her his father's instructions in the reverse order. "Your mother," Rab once remarked to him, "has improved!" "It was I," the other replied, "who reversed your orders to her." 31

28. Rabina, for instance, teaches that women, even though they have no obligation to study, may partake of the merit of the study of Torah: "... granted that women are not so commanded, still when they have their sons taught Scripture and Mihnah and wait for their husbands until they return from the Schools, should they not share the merit with them?" (Sot. 21a; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbath, p. 107.)
31. Yeb. 65a; cf. B. Talmud, Yebamoth, p. 422.
There then is the universal indictment: "Ten measures of gossip descended to the world: nine were taken by women." A man must be on his guard with women for many reasons, and one is that they so easily find a pretext for his attention. Those who are beautiful have this for their cry: "Set your eyes on beauty, for the quality most to be prized in women is beauty." Those of noble birth use another gambit: "Look for family, for woman has been created to bring up a family." Thus it is no surprise to read that the birth of a daughter is not necessarily greeted with joy. The father deserves what consolation his friends can contrive to give him and it is odd to find the Jewish sages clutching at what is no more than a straw: The world, after all, cannot do without women! This is indubitably true, and the philosophers of Greece have not failed to make the point, but it is disappointing to find rabbinic wisdom here no more profound than that of pagans:

A daughter was born to Rabbi Simeon the son of Rabbi Judah Hanasi, and he felt disappointed. His father said to him: Increase has come to the world. Bar Kappara said to him: Your father has given you an empty consolation. The world cannot do without either males or females. Yet happy is he whose children are males, and alas for him whose children are females. The world cannot do without either a spice-seller or a tanner. Yet happy is he whose occupation is that of a spice-seller, and alas for him whose occupation is that of a tanner.

This is the world in which the manual of daily prayers can provide men with a formula to express their gratitude each morning that they have been created "neither slaves nor heathens nor women." For women, the same source provides what Bar Kappara, I fear, would call "empty consolation"; they are biologically destined to be what they are.

If these be the values we shall be wise not to liken the benign influence of the rescuing power over demons to the name of Rab: A woman concludes a covenant on a male vessel, as it is written: 'This is His name.' And what her faults, is a constant heedful of wrongdoing her frequent she is quickly heard. It was also Rab who stated: "The world cannot descend into Gehenna" in the mill of their debates generally accepted saying: "What can she seeking? Two solutions said to bear on general matters, a male preserves, despite of a certain rigor it is yoked with a complete pattern of divine generosity:

A man should always eat himself in accordance with his means, for more than his means allow, for more is to be done upon "Him who is Is 54:5.

32. This sentence is part of a long passage in which the rabbis maintain that ten measures of wisdom descended to the world, and nine were taken by Palestine: likewise of the ten measures of beauty, nine were Jerusalem's endowment; and while of the ten measures of wealth, nine fell into the hands of the early Romans; of the ten measures of witchcraft, nine made their home in Egypt—and so on. (See Kid. 49b; cf. B. Talmud, Kiddushin, p. 249.)
33. Ta'an. 31a; cf. B. Talmud, Ta'anith, p. 16a.
34. See Plato, Laws, 6.781; Aristotle, Politics, 1.13; 1260b, 18.
35. B.B. 16b; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 83. So offensive were the materials of the tanner's trade that there were rabbis to assert a woman's right to require a bill of divorce from a husband unwilling to abandon it; its contrast, therefore, to that of spice-seller needs no commentary.
39. See ibid., p. 351.
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consolation”; they are bidden to thank the Creator who has made them to be what they are. 36

If these be the values, marriage must surely ennoble women. Still, we shall be wise not to press to the letter a text in which one master likens the benign influence of a husband on his wife to the Lord’s rescuing power over desolate Zion: “Rabbi Samuel ben Unya said in the name of Rab: A woman before marriage is a shapeless lump, and concludes a covenant only with him who transforms her into a useful vessel, as it is written: ‘For thy maker is thy husband; the Lord of hosts is His name.’” 37 And yet, kindliness towards one’s wife, no matter what her faults, is a constant theme of Talmud. “One should always be heedful of wronging his wife,” said Rab, “for since her tears are frequent she is quickly hurt.” 38 This is the more significant because it was also Rab who stated that “he who follows his wife’s counsel will descend into Gehenna” and thereby provided his fellows with grist for the mill of their debates. Rabbi Papa, for example, countered with the generally accepted saying: “If your wife is short, bend down and hear her whisper!” What can this mean if not that her counsel is worth seeking? Two solutions to the puzzle are offered. The first remark is said to bear on general matters, the other on household affairs; as to the former, she has no competence, but on the latter, she should be heard. The other solution is that the first opinion refers to religious matters, a male preserve, and the second to secular questions. 39 But in spite of a certain rigor in expression, the superiority attributed to men is yoked with a compensating responsibility. It is according to the pattern of divine generosity that a husband and father is shown his duty:

A man should always eat and drink less than his means allow, clothe himself in accordance with his means, and honor his wife and children more than his means allow, for they are dependent upon him and he is dependent upon “Him who spake and the world came into being.” 40

37. Sanh. 22b; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, pp. 124-125. The scriptural reference is to Is 54:5.
38. B.M. 59a; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Mezi’a, p. 350.
39. See ibid., p. 351.
40. Hus. 84b; cf. B. Talmud, Hullin, p. 473.
Can it be that these doctors of the Law who are so outspoken about the faults of women, have missed the faults of men? To pose the question thus bluntly is almost to give it an answer; in any case, the Talmud is not silent on male weakness. Indeed, if marriage is the perfection of a man, it is also a safeguard his frailty demands. Rabbi Johanan, we are told, listed three things as so exceptional that they merit a daily proclamation from the vault of heaven: "A bachelor who lives in a large town without sinning, a poor man who returns lost property to its owner, and a wealthy man who tithes his produce in secret." The mode of expression may be marked by oriental direction, but the appraisal of human weakness is realistic, not to say cynical.

DIVORCE

An instability, neither male nor female but simply human, raises the delicate question of divorce. No doubt, both Bible and Talmud present marital fidelity as an ideal within the reach of men and women. It is also true that the Hebrew Scriptures are willing to relax, on occasion, the irrevocable commitment this implies. Hence Jesus found it necessary to preface His own words on the subject with a candid acknowledgment of their radical character. Moses had indeed allowed a bill of divorce, but, in the new dispensation, this would count as a compromise (see Mt 19:9).

The question of divorce cannot be explored apart from the evidence Jewish marriage presents of a progressive purification. Idle to pretend that Abraham did not bring to the land promised him a domestic morality immeasurably superior to that of the Cities of the Plain. But it would be just as idle to pretend that the Jews of our day have not been faithful to the patriarchs, century by century, precisely by surpassing their standards. In any case, rabbinical wisdom treats divorce as a disaster, a disaster at times unavoidable to be sure, but a disaster for all that. "If a man divorces his first wife," Rabbi Eleazar said, "even the altar sheds tears." This tragic solution cannot be invoked in response to an unconfirmed rumor of evil-doing; only the corroborated testimony demanded by Scripture will justify the drawing up of a get, the bill of divorce. On the other hand, to divorce a truly bad wife might be a duty the Law document", says a talmud; to divorce her, the document stipulates the groom if she is a divorcée; it may be that the groom binds him and in effect to divorce her. The symbolic importance to accept in purity, as Hebrew, "There are mitzvot, divorce.

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MARRIAGE AND

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The Covenant of Husband and Wife

might be a duty. Even then it might be that the ketubah, the "marriage document," settles so large a sum on the wife that the husband cannot afford to raise it and dismiss her, or there may be children whose welfare takes precedence over the normal course of the law. 44

The mention of the "marriage document" introduces a rabbinical device to restrict the incidence of divorce. "The rabbis hold the view," says a talmudic text, "that the only reason why the rabbis instituted a ketubah for a wife was in order that the man might not find it easy to divorce her." 45 As maintained to this day in the rite of marriage, the document stipulates in archaic coinage a greater sum to be set aside for the bride if she be a maiden and a lesser one if she be widowed or a divorcee; it makes mention of the dowry she brings and of the fact that the groom must match it. His witnessed signature to the document binds him and his heirs to pay her that sum, should he find it necessary to divorce her. In our day, naturally, the ketubah has no more than a symbolic import, but the reality it symbolizes is the Jewish reluctance to accept in practice what is permitted in theory. That the sorry necessity, as Hebrew tradition sees it, does arise is witness to our baseness: "There are many unrestrained men." 46

This aspect of Jewish marriage is perhaps not so far from the spirit of Canon Law as might appear at first sight. Neither in theory nor in practice can the Church approve divorce, but the havoc wrought by "unrestrained men" is by no means beyond the ken of her legislation. The separation, without the right to remarry, and the legal disposition of common property sanctioned by a Church court, must be seen as one possible development of the ancient rabbis' effort to root so holy a growth in the rocky soil of human hearts. There were reasons, even where the Law of Moses ran, for the bill of divorce, but "it was not so from the beginning" (Mt 19:8).

MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY

In exalting the married state, the Talmud is certainly faithful to Scripture. Indeed, if we add the precision that marriage is the best way for nearly all believers to glorify God, the Christian Scriptures tell us nothing else. There marriage and celibacy are seen as two ways of holiness. The married, in the ecstasy of passion and in the gentle heal-
ing of their solitude, reflect the burgeoning fecundity of God. Freely do they call up new worlds in their children; through them does the Father work until now (see Jn 5:17). But celibates use their freedom to return undiminished this precious gift. The Bible can tell us that it is neither the poorest of the flock, nor all the flock, that is marked out for the altar! St. Paul extolls marriage (see Eph 5:22-23) and, although he fully esteemed celibacy in the apostolic life (see 1 Cor 7:25-40), he knew well that for the majority marriage is the way to God. St. Thomas More, whose head would fall for conscience' sake, twice chose to marry; in spite of his attraction to the priesthood, he could not give up his longing for a wife. In the crisp idiom of St. Paul: "Better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor 7:9). Proclaiming a new vision of life, where human love is made a holocaust for the interests of the kingdom, Jesus invites only those who can bear this burden to shoulder it (see Mt 19:12).

The dissent between Jews and Catholics on celibacy is a gap beyond bridging only if the talmudic esteem for marriage be given a scope so rigidly universal as to be redolent of hellenistic rationalism, rather than of the infinitely varying, delicately shaded, and always developing wisdom of the Jews. For how can Jewish thought and life be condemned to the immobility of the dead? No one knows better than rabbinical scholars that to solve moral problems is to cherish values, apparently in opposition, that cannot be preserved without understanding and patient ingenuity. They are unwilling to make their work easy by the brutal suppression of one alternative. Just because they know that the eternally valid revelation of God can daily be better understood by men, applied more creatively, more faithfully lived, Jewish masters never cease to find problems that demand the confrontation and adjustment of competing solutions.

With this goes the recognition that works of human intelligence are always susceptible of improvement. The Law of the Lord is divine, but we understand it as we can. Small reverence would sons pay their fathers' work should the fathers' achievements be judged incapable of bearing the weight of new and loftier structures! Although it sprang from an uncompromising desert ethic of punit moral science in our betraying David's sin expression of it in marriage that what the Bible does as children, but as adults out change into our venerate consecrates to the Lord the picture as the soldier who not stain his hands with words of praise for words to strike out. On the sights ought to be free never ceased to set sacrifice that springs.

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47. See Ex 12:5; Lev 1:2-4; Num 6:10-17; Deut 12:11-28.
48. It is his friend Erasmus who is our witness on the point: "Nor was there any obstacle to his enlisting in that state of life except that he could not shake off his longing for a wife." (Percy S. and Helen M. Allen, Opus Epistolarum Dei Sermonem Erasmi Roterodami, Oxford: Clarendon, 1922, IV, 18.)
from an uncompromising devotion to the covenant, King David’s
desert ethic of punitive raids would rightly horrify the professors of
moral science in our Jewish seminaries today. No Jew feels that he is
betraying David’s simple faith when he rejects David’s equally simple
expression of it in massacre and rapine. Does this not justify the view
that what the Bible counts as praiseworthy in men of that day—direct
as children, but as awkward too—need not always be transported with­
out change into our world? The man who so esteems marriage that he
consecrates to the Lord his right to human love is as faithful to Scrip­
ture as the soldier who faces an attack with David’s courage, but will
not stain his hands with a prisoner’s blood. The Bible is generous with
words of praise for wedded holiness, and not a syllable would we wish
to strike out. On the other hand, this cannot mean that our ethical in­
sights ought to be frozen in the state they reached with prophets who
never ceased to set new goals for God’s people. For celibacy is a
sacrifice that springs from a joyous surge towards God. 49

Asceticism is familiar to scholars who willingly devote the energies
of a lifetime to the loving meditation of sacred texts. More than sages,
or perhaps because they are truly wise, there are always masters of the
Law who cherish to the death their steadfast faith against Hellenizer
and Nazi. Without venturing to trespass on a family dispute, might we
not see the division of American Judaism into the Reform, Conser­
vative, and Orthodox branches as the result of soul searchings to deter­
mine what degree of abnegation, even of that which does not at all
defile, may be required or desirable to “strengthen the faith”? For it is
thus that the Church sees marriage and apostolic celibacy: not a choice
between weakness and strength, but a benediction offered by the hand
of the Creator, to be received with holy gratitude by the married or
sacrificed by the celibate with austere joy.

49. Lest my argument in favor of celibacy be misunderstood, I should like to
make clear that it does not equate marriage with massacre—God forbid! My poin­
t is simply the possibility of moral advance. As under the impact of the prophetic
message, and even more so under that of the gospel—without forgetting the in­
fluence of Western thinkers—we have developed, or rather begun to develop, a
morality of international relations, so under the impact of the same Gospel, we have
arrived at an appreciation of sex that sees its dignity not denied but affirmed, not
annulled but enhanced by its sacrifice upon the altar of God. It cannot be stressed
enough that, far from being an eclipse of the hallowed state of matrimony, celibacy
permits the sun to pour its full light upon it. On the problem of moral advance
see Raissa Maritain, “Abraham and the Ascent of Conscience,” The Bridge, I,
23-52.
THE PRAYER BOOK

Meals, marriage, sickness, death: These elemental events are the material of the Siddur, the manual of Jewish daily prayers. Thorou…

The opening chapters of Genesis have already made it clear that the food man wrests from resisting soil, his fruitful union with the companion God has been pleased to provide, his descent down the decades—so few!—to dust and tomb, all mysteries that exercise Hebrew wisdom, are human burdens profoundly related to creation and to the messianic hope. “You can tell from a man’s prayers,” said a talmudic master, “whether he be a man of religious culture, or a man of no spiritual breeding.”

The subtle spiritual formation offered in the Siddur may not disappoint us, but it does hold some surprises. One example of this is that at the solemn ceremony of circumcision, the bystanders respond to the father’s blessing of his son by reciting this threefold prayer: “Even as this child has entered into the Covenant, so may he enter into the Torah, the nuptial canopy, and into good deeds.” No casual formula this; a little later the mohel, “the circumcisor,” will echo the same three hopes. So too, on the occasion of the redemption of the first-born male, pidyon ha-ben, the desire of the community that these fruits might ennable the pilgrimage the child is beginning will be voiced in identical terms. That the infant grow up to perform good deeds and to be faithful to the Law, these are aspirations that might have been expected, but that the far-off nuptial canopy should already be in view is a first, unmistakable trace of the way Jewish wedlock dominates Jewish life.

52. Ibid., p. 1027.
53. See ibid., p. 1029.
54. In memory of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, when her first-born sons were spared, every first-born son, man or beast, was to be consecrated to the Lord—so the Law demanded (see Ex 13:12, 11–15). God, to whom all things belong, claimed them particularly as His own and demanded their special service. Yet since the divine service had become the function of the tribe of Levi, the Law afforded the opportunity of acknowledging God’s sovereignty and graciousness through an offering of five shekels, to be given to a priest. Today the gift varies according to the means of the parents or the custom of the congregation. (See Daily Prayer Book, ed. Hertz, p. 1037; also Shab. 137b; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbah, p. 692.)

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55. See Daily Prayer

56. See Sanh. 50b;

57. See Kid. 34b; cI

58. See William O.

59. Abraham, Jewish Li

177, 193, 200.
Our first impression of the statutory marriage service is its brevity. Expansions that certainly reflect the contact of Israel with other communities have become customary, but despite these expansions the rites remain sober and austere. The first of these is the chanting of a few verses chosen from Psalm 117 (118) and a medieval wedding hymn: "He who is mighty, blessed and great above all beings, may He bless the bridegroom and the bride." Here too the celebrant may pronounce a special prayer or deliver an address appropriate to the occasion and finally—for this, too, is an optional expansion of the essential rites—the contracting parties may express their consent in an explicit formula. Perhaps the best way to understand this state of affairs is to recognize that the very presence of the couple in these circumstances is sufficient evidence of their intention to undertake the obligations of wedlock.

The traditional "shape" of Jewish marriage liturgy is that of two steps. The first, erusin, is designated by the beautiful term kiddushin, "the hallowings," "the sanctifications"; to a point it corresponds to our Western notion of betrothal. But the parallel is not perfect. Even in ancient times, when months and even a year might separate the hallowings from the completion of the rites, Jewish law gave every effect of marriage, except that of the common roof, to this first stage. Since medieval times, it has been customary to join in one ceremony the first stage with the second. Nissu'in, the second step, receives the name, huppah, from the canopy under which the whole ceremony takes place. This is a ritual representation of the festive wedding booth, the sukkah of ancient days, built with joy as the first common dwelling of the newly wedded pair. It is generally an awning of white silk or satin, supported on four staffs and decorated with embroidery, leaves, and flowers; it may even be formed of the curtain of the Ark of the Law, thus "roofing with sanctity" the spot where groom and bride undertake the joys and the charges of this holy alliance.
The hallowings consist of a benediction pronounced over a cup of wine:

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine. Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who sanctified us by thy commandments, and has given us command concerning forbidden marriages; who has prohibited unto us those that are betrothed, but who has sanctioned unto us such as are wedded by the rite of the canopy and the sacred covenant of wedlock. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who sanctifiest thy people Israel by the rite of the canopy and the sacred covenant of wedlock.59

Two themes are enshrined in this blessing. The betrothed, because their state is holy, and the pagans, because their state is unholy, are both "forbidden" to the believer who seeks a wife. Second, far from being merely tolerated, a lawful marriage is a positive blessing. Thus it is right to call marriage a "sacred covenant." In drinking from one common cup of benediction, bridegroom and bride ritually signify their life henceforth to be shared.

The "rite of the canopy" is constituted today by the gesture and the words of the groom: As he puts a ring on the forefinger of his bride's right hand he recites in Hebrew: "Behold, thou art consecrated unto me by this ring, according to the Law of Moses and of Israel."

"Consecrated unto me" echoes the sanctifications of the betrothal blessing and evokes the Hebrew conception of the "holy" in its deepest meaning. Like the vessels sacred to the Temple service, separated as they were under pain of sacrilege from every profane use, the bride is now set apart by a religious ordinance. To all men but her husband, she is a garden walled off: Thus is she "holy" to them. Equally sacred is her dedication to her husband, and thus she becomes the focus of his religious concern. In a way parallel to Torah, in a way parallel to the works of the Law that are his life-long obligation, the woman who stands beneath the nuptial canopy with him is "holy" in his eyes.

"According to the Law of Moses and of Israel" evokes the ancient Covenant of Sinai: Both Moses, messenger of the Law, and Israel, the people into whose life fidelity to the Law is intimately woven, have a stake in each other's well-being. Their marriage, like any fruit of the vine, must survive as the guarantor of the commandments. The betrothal consecration assures the assurant hope of the messianic era.

It is not without significance that the betrothal ceremony immediately follows the ancient rite of marriage. It is the ancient rite of the faithful as the faith in the covenant.

Seventy years later, according to the rite of the canopy, the faithful marry. A fourth theme is the consecration of the bride and groom as a holy pair. A fifth blessing proclaims theiruerchildren and their seed as holy, a holy people. The rite of betrothal implores the Creator and Giver of peace, the Christian rite of betrothal, the rite of messianic expectation of the ancient rite of marriage, the rite of the Creator as the Giver of peace. May the song of your joy be heard, may your children be as the children of the north, may your house be as the house of the Lord, may your seed be as the seed of Aaron, may your name be known to rejoice and be glad.

Then a "holy" man, in whose hand is the ring, is the image of the Christ. His foot is pain, his foot is a foot of the north, his foot is the foot of the Lord. The ominous instruction of the ring is as true to the Lord as the words of the law are true to the law of the earth. May your name be known to rejoice and be glad.

stake in every Jewish union. To survive, not only as men, but to survive as sons of those who stood at Sinai is at once the fulfillment of the command to increase and multiply that accompanied creation and the assurance of the future which, for every believing Jew, must be a messianic future.

It is not the Jewish way to shrink from the harsh realities of life. Hence the ketubah, the marriage document, is appointed to be read immediately after this solemn commitment by the groom, an echo of the ancient rabbis’ hopes that Jewish marriage might be as stable and as faithful as the bond that ties God to His people.

Seven talmudic blessings follow to conclude the ceremony and, once more, to evoke the great themes of creation and the Jewish hope. The first of these is praise of God over a cup of wine: “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.” A second and a third blessing praise God as Creator, the beneficent Maker of all things, to be sure, but in particular the Creator of man. A fourth recalls that man has been created in the very image and likeness of the Lord, endowed with the assurance of future generations. A fifth blessing makes this more concrete: May this couple rejoice in children and so give joy to that Zion which, acquainted with the trials of the barren, might thus have reason to exult. A sixth benediction implores heaven for the happiness of Eden in the marriage; for the Christian reader, this inevitably connotes the primeval innocence, goal of messianic renewal. The seventh ecstatically hymns the glory of God, Creator as He is of every joy and of every pleasure, benign Source and Giver of peace, Creator of all beings, of this groom and of this bride: May the song and jubilation of bridegrooms beneath their canopies be heard, may the voices of young men resound at their banquets! In all things is the Lord to be praised: Has He not made the bridegroom to rejoice with the bride?

Then a dramatic shock: Suddenly the groom shatters a glass beneath his foot. In former times this gesture must have given an even more ominous impression: In the Middle Ages, the glass was dashed against the north wall, perhaps because it was from that direction the invader of the land of Israel so often came. This sign is interpreted now as a dolorous reminder, in the midst of all the wedding joy, of the destruction of Jerusalem or, another explanation, as a symbol of the
Edward A. Synan

fragility of domestic holiness. The home will no more endure even one infidelity than does the glass a crushing heel!

Jewish marriage is thus a crossroads where the believer must encounter God. The heavenly and the eternal give meaning to the passing and the earthly; each family, like Sinai, is a focus of covenanting. Profoundly concrete as it is, biblical Hebrew knows no abstract term for "marriage"; this tongue can but tell that Isaac led Rebekah into the tent and took her and she became his wife (see Gen 24:67). "Took," a verb that serves as well to recount the purchase of land, is not too mercantile: The bride is sanctified in that bargaining. Has the Church not called the very work of our redemption admirabile commercium, an astounding barter?

60. See remarks of the editor in Daily Prayer Book, ed. Hertz, p. 1014; Oesterley and Box, op. cit., p. 315; Abrahams, op. cit., p. 208. Rabbi Jakobovits, in the brochure just cited, admonishes his Jewish readers that the breaking of the glass "recalls the 'wreckage' of our past glory. When two individuals have been forged into a single unit, we should remember the values and the shrines that are still 'broken' and in ruins." Obviously annoyed by the frequent interpretation of this custom as a token of a happy future, he insists: "... the popular notion that this practice is meant to 'bring luck' offends against the rational character of Judaism which knows no superstitions. Good fortune, we believe, comes to those who work for, and deserve, it; it cannot be secured by breaking a glass!" (Op. cit., p. 9, n. 12.)