

Augustine's Understanding of Marriage and Asceticism and Its Social-Ethical Implications

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• 국 문 초 록 •

어거스틴의 결혼과 금욕주의에 대한 이해와 사회윤리적 함의

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본 연구는 4세기 후반과 5세기 초의 금욕주의 논쟁 속에서 어거스틴이 결혼을 옹호한 신학적 근거를 밝히는 데 목적이 있다. 『결혼의 선』을 중심으로 『고백록』과 『재론고』, 그리고 후기 반펠라기우스 저작을 함께 읽어 그의 논증 구조를 분석한다.

어거스틴은 마니교와 제롬의 엄격한 금욕주의와 조비니안의 반금욕주의를 모두 거부하되, 창조된 것으로서 결혼과 그것이 구현하는 사랑은 선하다는 하나의 명제 위에서 그렇게 한다. 출산(*proles*), 신의(*fides*), 성례적 결합(*sacramentum*)이라는 세 가지 선은 이 창조적 선함의 증거이며, 후기 저작 역시 이 명제를 철회하지 않는다. 이 기준으로 볼 때 그의 결혼관은 비판적이지도 반사회적이지도 않은 중용적 금욕주의이며, 본 연구는 그것이 오늘의 교회에 대해 갖는 사회윤리적 함의를 제시한다.

주제어: 어거스틴, 제롬, 조비니안, 결혼, 금욕주의, 『결혼의 선』, 사회윤리

I. Introduction

In the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Roman and North African Christianity was divided between two extremes: a strict asceticism that treated marriage as, at best, a concession, and an anti-asceticism that denied any spiritual difference between the married and the celibate. Jerome was the representative voice of the first, arguing for the subordination of marriage on ascetic grounds; against him stood Jovinian, who rejected ascetic practice and was condemned by the Catholic Church for his teaching. Augustine, this study contends, refused both poles — and refused them for a reason more fundamental than mere mediation.

That reason is the single thesis this study argues. Against the Manichaean rejection of matter and generation, against Jerome's hierarchical subordination of marriage, against the Donatist ideal of separatist purity on its distinct ecclesiological plane, and against the anti-asceticism of Jovinian, Augustine defends marriage on one decisive theological ground: as created, both marriage and the love it embodies are good. This claim, which is also the point at which Augustine breaks most sharply with the Manichees, is the controlling principle of his teaching on marriage, and the analysis that follows is offered as evidence for it. From this principle Augustine derives a moderate asceticism: one that neither condemns marriage as a bondage to evil matter nor merely subordinates it to virginity, but affirms marriage as part of God's good order for human society.

The argument proceeds in steps subordinate to this central thesis.

The second section shows that the dominant forms of asceticism devalued marriage, or the created world in which it is lived, for different reasons, whether metaphysical, hierarchical, or separatist, so that the problem Augustine must answer is at once the denial of marriage's created goodness and the pride that attends ascetic renunciation. The third section demonstrates that he answers this denial in *The Good of Marriage* by grounding marriage in creation and marshaling its three goods — procreation (*proles*), faithfulness (*fides*), and the sacramental bond (*sacramentum*) — as proof that marriage is neither inferior nor unbiblical. The fourth section weighs three streams of contemporary scholarship by that criterion and shows that the anti-Pelagian works confirm rather than retract the principle; the fifth draws out the implications for Christian social ethics.

II. Forms of Asceticism and the Devaluation of Marriage and Creation

The asceticism of the late fourth and early fifth centuries was not a single phenomenon, and the first step in reconstructing Augustine's position is to see that its dominant forms devalued marriage, or the created world in which it is lived, for different reasons. However diverse their premises, these movements converged on a result Augustine sets out to answer: a diminished estimate of marriage or of the created order, attended by a pride in renunciation that he takes to be the deeper spiritual danger.¹⁾

1. Manichaeism and Donatism: Evil Matter and Separatist Purity

For the Manichees, marriage was degraded because matter itself was held to be evil; their hostility to marriage was metaphysical, not merely disciplinary. The Manichees considered marriage evil, “not only because it involved a joining of bodies, which according to them are evil, but also because through generation the empire of evil matter is extended .”²⁾ Sexual intercourse, particularly for the purpose of procreation, was thought to cooperate in expanding the kingdom of darkness rather than the kingdom of light. On this logic, procreation bound the soul to the body and counted as a greater sin than cohabitation itself.³⁾

As Augustine represents them in his anti-Manichaean polemic, they timed cohabitation to avoid conception, lest a soul be entangled in flesh.⁴⁾ This conviction — that generation itself extends the realm of evil — is the precise theological claim that Augustine will later have to overturn, and it is why those reckoned among the “Elect” pursued

1) On the Origenist and Egyptian roots of this monastic ideal, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 366–386, and Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 157–179.

2) John J. Hugo, *St. Augustine on Nature, Sex and Marriage* (Chicago: Scepter, 1969), 106–107.

3) On the Manichaean rationale linking procreation to the extension of evil matter, see Richard Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 139–144.

4) Augustine, *The Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, vol. 56, trans. Donald A. Gallagher and Idella J. Gallagher (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1966), II, 18, 65. As a polemical anti-Manichaean work, *De moribus* reports Manichaean practice as Augustine construed it rather than as an independent witness to it.

celibacy in order to administer their ritual functions.

The Donatists enter this argument not as interlocutors on marriage but as a comparative case of ecclesiological purism, and the limit must be stated plainly. Their asceticism was not directed against marriage as such (they did not, like the Manichees, hold matter or generation to be evil) but expressed itself as a separatist pursuit of purity. Identifying themselves as the purest and holiest community for having kept their faith under persecution, they separated from the Catholic Church. Petilian, a Donatist bishop, denigrated those in the Catholic Church “who, by doing violence to what is holy, cut away the bond of unity.”⁵⁾ Because they held that the unity of the church rested on the holiness of its priests and members, they sought to intensify ascetic purity, an impulse that, in Augustine’s eyes, hardened into pride. Richard Finn notes that for the “Fighters” or “circumcellions” of Donatism, “peregrinations around the martyrs’ shrines was one element of an ascetic preparation for the martyrdom they actively sought in conflict with pagans or Catholic authorities.”⁶⁾ Their significance here lies not in any rejection of marriage but in the pride that a separatist asceticism breeds.

2. Jerome: Marriage Subordinated to Virginity

Jerome represents the second way of degrading marriage: not by call-

5) Augustine, *Answer to Petilian the Donatist*, in *The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists*, ed. Philip Schaff, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 4 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), II, 106, 240.

6) Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, 144.

ing matter evil but by subordinating marriage to virginity within a fixed hierarchy of merit. He defended the necessity and significance of Christian celibacy and continence against Jovinian, whose own writings have not survived but whose position can be reconstructed from Jerome's works.⁷⁾ In his *Adversus Jovinianum*, Jerome reports Jovinian's four claims: that virgins, widows, and married women who have passed through the same baptism are of equal merit; that those born again in full faith cannot be overthrown by the devil; that abstinence from food and its reception with thanksgiving do not differ; and that one reward awaits all who have kept their baptismal vow.⁸⁾

Jovinian's point, as Jerome relays it, was that baptized Christians are equal in spiritual perfection whether or not they adopt an ascetic posture toward sexuality. Though himself unmarried, Jovinian regarded the claim that the single life is spiritually superior as itself a Manichaean residue, and he denounced both Manichaean dualism and strict Christian asceticism on the ground that it separates Christians from society. His appeal follows: "I do you no wrong, Virgin: you have chosen a life of chastity on account of the present distress: you determined on the course in order to be holy in body and spirit: be not proud:

7) Since Jovinian's own writings are lost, his position must be reconstructed from Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* and from Augustine's later notices; see David G. Hunter, "Reconstructing Jovinian," in *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15–50; cf. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 45.

8) Jerome, *Dialogue Against Jovinianus*, in *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 6, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), I, 3.

you and your married sisters are members of the same Church.”⁹⁾ For Jovinian, a direction of life is of chief significance, a direction inaugurated by baptism with full faith and sustained by the divine dwelling, so that division within the church based on ascetic merit cannot be the decisive measure of the Church’s holiness. Behind these propositions lies an anthropology: baptismal regeneration confers one undivided standing before God, so that grace does not admit of degrees earned by continence — a logic that would resurface, transformed, in the later Pelagian dispute over grace and the human will.¹⁰⁾

Jerome’s reply makes the hierarchical character of his asceticism explicit. He refutes Jovinian point by point in his *Adversus Jovinianum*, insisting that those who live a single life are superior and more perfect in spirituality than the married, who are correspondingly inferior in their religious lives. He does not condemn marriage outright but ranks it: “the Church, I say, does not condemn wedlock, but subordinates it. Whether you like it or not, marriage is subordinated to virginity and widowhood. Even when marriage continues to fulfil its function, the Church does not condemn it, but only subordinates it; it does not reject it, but only regulates it.”¹¹⁾

For Jerome, the married remain under the curse of the law and the pain of childbearing, while virginity frees one from this physical bondage and leads to a true marriage with Christ.¹²⁾ His strict asceticism,

9) Ibid., I, 5.

10) Robert Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), 29.

11) Jerome, *To Pammachius*, in *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, 48, 11.

itself shaped by his observation of contemporary marriages and by the patronage rivalries that would resurface in the later Pelagian controversy, set marriage in a negative light over against Jovinian's optimism.¹³⁾ Where the Manichees denied marriage's goodness metaphysically, Jerome left that goodness intact but denied its parity, subordinating marriage within a fixed hierarchy of merit.

However distinct their premises, these strict asceticisms issued in one shared outcome: a diminished estimate of marriage or of the created order, attended by religious pride. Augustine's writings on marriage are designed to reverse exactly that outcome, and his quarrel with these movements was not merely theoretical but grew out of his own experience.

3. Augustine: Rejecting Manichaean Asceticism from Within

Augustine's own break with strict asceticism was not theoretical but biographical: he came to reject Manichaean asceticism from the inside, having lived under it. These experiences are described in his *Confessions*. He was at first familiar with Manichaean asceticism but largely unacquainted with other Christian forms, becoming aware of them only through Ponticianus' account of St. Antony. He recalls the

12) Jerome, *Dialogue Against Jovinianus*, I, 16, 29.

13) On Jerome's asceticism within the Pelagian controversy and his later movement from strict toward a more moderate form, see Kyung-Soo Kim, "Hieronimuseuui Geumyokjuui: Pellagiuseu Nonjaeng-eul Jungsim-euro" [Hieronymus' Asceticism Related to the Pelagian Controversy], *Journal of Western Medieval History* 38 (2016): 121-156.

conversation in which Ponticianus spoke of Antony, and his own astonishment that works so recent and so great had been unknown to him.¹⁴⁾

As he confesses, he had wished for purity and chastity after reading Cicero's *Hortensius* at nineteen, yet hesitated because of the desires of his sinful nature, which is why he prayed, "Give me chastity and continency, only not yet."¹⁵⁾ He feared that God might answer at once, and at that point preferred to satisfy his sexual desire rather than refrain from it.

This lived tension is the soil from which Augustine's alternative grew. During his years among the Manichees he lived with a woman for some thirteen years and had a son with her; what he later saw as his lustful nature made him reluctant to enter deeply into Manichaeism. Through that relationship he gained direct knowledge of the reality of sexual life and marriage, learning, as he confessed, "what difference there is betwixt the self-restraint of the marriage-covenant, for the sake of issue, and the bargain of a lustful love, where children are born against their parents' will, although, once born, they constrain love."¹⁶⁾ His actual sexual life clashed with Manichaean asceticism, and for that reason he could not become one of the "Elect."

After his conversion he condemned Manichaean asceticism precisely because its strict view of marriage and celibacy was, he judged, far from God's will, denouncing it in *De moribus* (387-388) as false and mystify-

14) Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Edward B. Pusey (New York: Pocket Books, 1952), VIII, 6, 14. Hereafter cited as *Confessions*, followed by book, chapter, and section.

15) *Confessions*, VIII, 7, 17.

16) *Confessions*, IV, 2, 2.

ing, and as a sin full of pride and boasting. Out of these early experiences of sexual life, cohabitation, and the Manichaean ascetic regime he developed his own view of marriage, not as a rejection of asceticism as such but as a refusal of an asceticism that condemns the created good. It is to that positive view, and to its foundation in the created goodness of marriage, that the next section turns.¹⁷⁾

III. Augustine's Answer: The Created Goodness of Marriage

Augustine's answer to both asceticisms rests on one principle, and the whole of *The Good of Marriage* (*De bono coniugali*, 401) is its elaboration: the decisive point against the Manichees is that, as created, both marriage and the love it embodies are good. He wrote the work while completing the *Confessions* and alongside tracts against the Manichaeans and Donatists, a setting that pressed him to defend marriage by attending to its place within society and creation rather than merely conceding its legitimacy. The order of the book is itself part of its argument: Augustine begins not from sexuality but from human sociability, turns next to the three goods that specify what marriage is for, and only then takes up the comparison with virginity.¹⁸⁾

17) Augustine recounts his Manichaean years and his eventual rejection of their discipline in *Confessions*, IV, 1-3, and V, 7, 10. On the anti-Manichaean aim of *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*, composed shortly after his conversion, see Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The Retractions*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 60, trans. Sister Mary Inez Bogan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), I, 7 (7).

18) On the composition of *The Good of Marriage* alongside the *Confessions* and the

Augustine himself names the occasion of the book as a refutation of Jovinian, whose equation of consecrated virginity with conjugal continence had grown so influential in Rome that even the chastity of some nuns came into question.¹⁹⁾ Although Jovinian had been condemned by Siricius and Ambrose in the early 390s, his views had spread through the city, and Augustine reports, “For this reason, I published a book whose title is *The Good of Marriage*.”²⁰⁾

Yet the argument reaches further than its stated occasion, and several scholars — Philip Reynolds, Robert Markus, and Daryl Ellis among them — read it as also aimed against Jerome’s subordination of marriage.²¹⁾ Markus puts the point strongly, reading the rehabilitation of the married state as “a thinly veiled answer to Jerome’s denigration of it.”²²⁾ Whether or not the covert intention is granted, the structure of the book points the same way: Augustine occupies a deliberate middle ground between Jovinian and Jerome.

anti-Manichaean and anti-Donatist works (c. 401), see David G. Hunter, “General Introduction,” in *Marriage and Virginity, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* I/9, trans. Ray Kearney, ed. David G. Hunter (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 11–18, and Philip L. Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 241–242.

19) *The Retractations*, II, 22 (48).

20) *The Retractations*, II, 22 (48). On the disputed dating of Jovinian’s condemnation (390/391 or c. 393), cf. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity*, chap. 1.

21) Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 259; Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 45; Daryl Ellis, “Ambivalence and Lust of Marriage: With and Beyond Augustine Towards a Theology of Marriage as Consecrated Sacrifice,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66 (2013): 44.

22) Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 45.

That middle ground is not a compromise but a positive doctrine of created good. He neither praises marriage indiscriminately nor exalts celibacy blindly, holding that just “as the meals of the just are better than the fastings of the sacrilegious, so the marriage of the faithful is placed above the virginity of the unbeliever.”²³⁾ He refuses to treat marriage as immoral or evil, regarding both marriage and celibacy as good even while ranking celibacy higher, and he opens the work by anchoring marriage in the social nature of creation itself:

Since every man is a part of the human race, and human nature is something social and possesses the capacity for friendship as a great and natural good, for this reason God wished to create all men from one, so that they might be held together in their society, not only by the similarity of race, but also by the bond of blood relationship. And so it is that the first natural tie of human society is man and wife.²⁴⁾

Marriage, on this account, is good first because it is the original bond of a human nature God created to be social, the very point the Manichees denied, and it binds extended families together.²⁵⁾ It is to defend and specify this created goodness that he sets out the three

23) Augustine, *The Good of Marriage*, in *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 27, trans. Charles T. Wilcox et al. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955), VIII, 8. Hereafter cited as *The Good of Marriage*, followed by the appropriate chapter and section.

24) *The Good of Marriage*, I, 1.

25) On marriage as a social bond uniting families in Augustine's Roman context, see Brown, *The Body and Society*, 387-390; for Monica's example, see Augustine, *Confessions*, IX, 9, 19.

goods of marriage: procreation (*proles*), faithfulness to one's spouse (*fides*), and the sacramental solidity of the conjugal union (*sacramentum*). These are not three loosely associated benefits but three lines of evidence that marriage, as created, is good; each, drawn from Scripture and from the fabric of social life, answers one aspect of the ascetic indictment.

The first good, procreation (*proles*), answers the Manichaeian charge that generation extends the kingdom of evil. Citing Paul's exhortation in 1 Timothy 5:14, "I desire that the younger widows marry," Augustine argues that "the Apostle [Paul] is a witness to the fact that marriage exists for the sake of generation,"²⁶⁾ treating procreation as the natural and social fruit of conjugal fellowship²⁷⁾ and noting that the first union of Adam and Eve had the same end.²⁸⁾ Far from binding the soul to evil matter, marital intercourse, though it includes carnal pleasure, is "turned to the honorable task of begetting children, so that marital intercourse makes something good";²⁹⁾ as Reynolds observes, marriage can even be seen as a remedy for *libido*.³⁰⁾ Procreation is not contamination but a created good ordered to society.

The second good, faithfulness (*fides*), answers the charge that marriage is merely the concession of lust by showing it to be a bond of mutual obligation and self-gift. Faithfulness includes not betraying one's

26) *The Good of Marriage*, XXIV, 32.

27) *The Good of Marriage*, III, 3.

28) *The Good of Marriage*, VI, 6.

29) *The Good of Marriage*, III, 3.

30) Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 274.

spouse, but it bears more directly on the marital duties husband and wife owe each other, including the obligations of sexual life. Augustine grounds this in 1 Corinthians 7:4, “the wife has not authority over her body, but the husband; the husband likewise has not authority over his body, but the wife”³¹⁾, so that fidelity is a reciprocal duty rather than a grudging permission.

For Augustine, “*Fides* in marriage is not simply sexual; it also implies a self-sacrificial concern for the partner’s salvation as well,”³²⁾ a meaning that draws on Roman custom as well as Scripture. As David Hunter notes, Roman *fides* denoted not only sexual loyalty but the wider loyalty a couple promised each other.³³⁾ Faithfulness reveals marriage as a school of charity, not a refuge for incontinence.

The third good, the sacramental bond (*sacramentum*), answers the charge that marriage is spiritually inferior by locating it within the life of the people of God. Augustine appeals to 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 — “A wife is not to depart from her husband, and if she departs, that she is to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband and let not a husband put away his wife”³⁴⁾, and adds that “to such a degree is that nuptial pact which has been entered upon a kind of sacrament that it is not nullified by separation.”³⁵⁾ Marriage so understood anticipates the union of God’s people, and the weight Augustine places on

31) *The Good of Marriage*, VI, 6; cf. XXIV, 32.

32) Lisa Fullam, “Toward a Virtue Ethics of Marriage: Augustine and Aquinas on Friendship in Marriage,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 673.

33) Hunter, “General Introduction,” 17.

34) *The Good of Marriage*, VII, 7; cf. XXIV, 32.

35) *The Good of Marriage*, VII, 6.

its indissolubility reinforces that ecclesial significance.³⁶⁾ He concludes: “Once, however, marriage is entered upon in the City of our God, where also from the first union of the two human marriage bears a kind of sacred bond, it can be dissolved in no way except by the death of one of the parties.”³⁷⁾

Taken together, the three goods are not a catalogue but a proof, and they vindicate the controlling thesis against both adversaries at once: against the Manichees, who called the created order evil, and against Jerome, who subordinated marriage to virginity. As created, marriage and the love it embodies are good — and that, for Augustine, is decisive.

IV. Weighing Contemporary Scholarship by the Criterion of Created Goodness

The created goodness of marriage also supplies the criterion by which competing interpretations should be judged. Modern scholarship divides into three streams (pessimistic, optimistic, and ambivalent), and the decisive test for each is whether it can account for the positive, creation-grounded argument of *The Good of Marriage*. This criterion is not idiosyncratic to the present study: Korean scholarship has reached a closely parallel reading of Augustine as a moderate ascetic who warns that ascetic superiority breeds pride.³⁸⁾ The same scholarship locates

36) *The Good of Marriage*, XV, 17. See also, Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 280–282.

37) *The Good of Marriage*, XV, 17.

38) Kyung-Soo Kim, “Geumyokjuui-wa Augustinus-ui Seong-gwa Gyeolhon: 『

Jerome within the patronage politics of the Pelagian controversy.³⁹⁾

The pessimistic reading, represented by Elaine Pagels and Philip L. Reynolds, isolates a genuine theme but mistakes it for the whole. Pagels argues that Augustine was pessimistic about marriage because of his doctrine of original sin and human corruption, observing that he was deeply moved by the story of Antony and gave up a Christian marriage “that would have ensured him wealth and social status, along with a brilliantly promising career, to embrace the ascetic life,” and that his conviction of universal fallenness colored his estimate of marriage.⁴⁰⁾ Reynolds — whose account of the composition of *The Good of Marriage* was drawn on above, but who reads its theology in a darker key — likewise calls Augustine's view “dark and pessimistic,” holding that “[Augustine's] main contention is that while lust *per se* is evil (*malum*), it can be used well, and so without sin. But he also doubts that married persons ever use it well enough to avoid some element of sin.”⁴¹⁾

The lens of original sin is indeed indispensable for reading Augustine. But by the criterion of created goodness the reading falls short, and it is worth naming precisely where. Pagels reads the treatise through the conversion narrative of the Confessions, so that a book is interpreted by a biography rather than by its own argument, and the

Gyeolhon-ui Yuik-e Gwanhayeo』-reul Jungsim-euro” [Asceticism and Augustine's Sexuality and Marriage: On *The Good of Marriage*], *Journal of Western Medieval History* 35 (2015): 25–51, esp. 44–49.

39) Kim, “Hieronymus' Asceticism Related to the Pelagian Controversy,” 121–156; on the patronage rivalry with Pelagius, cf. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 367–368.

40) Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), 97. Pagels discusses this issue in chapters IV and V.

41) Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 278.

opening chapters — which ground marriage in human sociability before any mention of remedy — go unaccounted for. Reynolds's difficulty is a different one: his evidence concerns the evaluation of lust, not of marriage, and the judgment that lust is malum yet can be used well is a claim about disordered desire within a good institution, not about the institution itself. Neither critic explains why a treatise allegedly written in a pessimistic voice should be devoted, from its first chapter, to the spiritual benefits and social functions of marriage. *The Good of Marriage* is not framed as a reluctant concession to human weakness; whatever its acknowledgments of sin, it is plainly an argument for a good. The pessimistic reading accounts for one of Augustine's concerns while neglecting the claim the book is actually making.

A further objection must be met here, since it bears on the standing of the whole argument. If the optimistic reading rests chiefly on the early works, does it not repeat in reverse the very error Hunter attributes to his opponents — selecting the evidence that suits the verdict? The objection would be decisive if the later Augustine had abandoned the created goodness of marriage. He did not. When the Pelagians charged that his doctrine of original sin amounted to a condemnation of marriage, Augustine answered with a treatise addressed to Count Valerius whose whole burden is that marriage is good and that the concupiscence of the flesh is not a fault of marriage but a disorder of which conjugal chastity makes good use.⁴²⁾ Julian of Eclanum pressed the

42) Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, in *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 5, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature

charge further, alleging a relapse into Manichaeism, and Augustine's reply repeats under maximum polemical pressure the same three goods he had set out in 401.⁴³⁾ The point deserves emphasis: the created goodness of marriage is not a position Augustine held early and qualified late, but the one he was compelled to defend most explicitly at the end of his career, and against the accusation of Manichaeism itself. The later works darken his account of desire; they do not withdraw his account of marriage. Rightly read, they supply the optimistic reading with its strongest evidence rather than its embarrassment.

The optimistic reading, advanced by David Hunter, Peter Brown, and Elizabeth Clark, meets the criterion most directly because it takes the created goodness of marriage as Augustine's real position. Hunter argues that the pessimistic verdict is distorted by an over-reliance on Augustine's later, anti-Pelagian works, and that attention to the earlier writings discloses a markedly more positive estimate of marriage.⁴⁴⁾ Brown locates the same optimism in Augustine's social vision: "[Augustine] both defended marriage and found a place for virginity within Christianity. He did this by making them both magnificently social. He presented marriage and continence as no more than two successive stages of human concord."⁴⁵⁾ Clark states the point in creation

Publishing Co., 1887), I, 1. Hereafter cited as *On Marriage and Concupiscence*.

43) *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, I, 11, where the three nuptial goods — offspring, fidelity, and the sacramental bond — are named together; for Julian's four books against the treatise, see II, 1.

44) David G. Hunter, "Augustinian Pessimism? A New Look at Augustine's Teaching on Sex, Marriage, and Celibacy," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 153-177.

45) Brown, *The Body and Society*, 402.

terms that match Augustine's own: "Against the extreme ascetics, [Augustine] taught that marriage was part of God's good plan for humankind, not a result of the 'Fall' in Eden."⁴⁶⁾

This reading best fits the evidence assembled above, since the governing theme of *The Good of Marriage* is the goodness of marriage, defended from biblical, social, and sacramental angles alike. One qualification must be entered: Augustine remained a supporter of celibacy, and the optimistic reading holds only as it affirms marriage's created goodness without erasing that preference.

The ambivalent reading captures a real feature of Augustine's method but draws the wrong conclusion from it. In her NAPS Presidential Address, Virginia Burrus focuses on Augustine's habit of naming both the positive and negative aspects of marriage and sexuality,⁴⁷⁾ and infers that Augustinian marriage is finally "impossible" — that it succeeds, if at all, only by undoing the very privileging of procreative union on which it rests.⁴⁸⁾

John Hugo presses a similar point, holding that in Augustine's thought the two aspects of marriage, "negative and positive, are inseparable."⁴⁹⁾ That the two aspects coexist may be granted; the inference to incoherence does not follow. Burrus reads as aporia what

46) Elizabeth Clark, "Adam's Only Companion': Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 21 (1986): 140.

47) Virginia Burrus, "2010 NAPS Presidential Address 'Fleeing the Uxorious Kingdom': Augustine's Queer Theology of Marriage," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19 (2011): 1-20.

48) Burrus, "Fleeing the Uxorious Kingdom," 19-20.

49) Hugo, *St. Augustine on Nature, Sex and Marriage*, 80.

is in fact the ordinary form of an argument about an order of goods: to rank two goods is necessarily to say of the lesser both that it is good and that it is lesser, and a comparison is not a contradiction. Hugo's difficulty is the converse: he treats admonition as negation, though Augustine warns the married in the same register in which he warns virgins against pride. The co-presence of caution and affirmation is not incoherence but the structure of a moderate position.

Each reading rests on real evidence, but only the optimistic one explains the argument Augustine actually mounts in *The Good of Marriage*. The decisive point against the Manichees, that as created both marriage and the love it embodies are good, is also the decisive point among the interpreters: judged by it, Augustine's concept of marriage is not pessimistic.

V. Social-Ethical Implications

If correct, this reading carries consequences into Christian social ethics. Because Augustine grounds marriage in creation rather than concession, the three goods describe not a private arrangement but a basic form of social life:⁵⁰⁾ procreation orders the household toward the wider community, faithfulness binds the spouses in a trust that models the bonds of society,⁵¹⁾ and the sacramental bond gives the union a perma-

50) On the three goods as the basis of a social rather than private understanding of marriage, and on the later juristic reception of those goods, which is Reid's own subject, see Charles J. Reid, Jr., "The Augustinian Goods of Marriage: The Disappearing Cornerstone of the American Law of Marriage," *BYU Journal of Public Law* 18 (2003): 451-454.

nence resistant to dissolution.⁵²⁾ Beginning not from sexuality but from sociability, Augustine casts marriage as the “first natural tie of human society,” a friendship that the three goods serve,⁵³⁾ so that fidelity becomes a social good, a public trust rather than a merely interior virtue.⁵⁴⁾ The long juristic afterlife of these goods in Western marriage law confirms their social reach.⁵⁵⁾

Read in a contemporary key, this cuts against the grain of much that now passes for common sense about marriage. Where marriage is treated as a private contract for mutual satisfaction, terminable when the satisfaction fails, Augustine denies the premise rather than deploring the outcome: because marriage is the first form of human society and not an arrangement two individuals invent, its goods are owed to the wider community and not only to the partners. The same holds against a marriage market organized by security, class, and status — conditions that press with particular weight on Christian young adults in Korea today.

A second implication follows from the weight Augustine places on pride in renunciation, and it cuts in two directions at once. Against an

51) On *fides* as a form of Roman social trust rooted in patron-client bonds, see Kim, “Asceticism and Augustine’s Sexuality and Marriage,” 44–46; cf. Fullam, “Toward a Virtue Ethics of Marriage,” 672–673.

52) The sacramental bond may be read as resonant with Augustine’s wider concern for ecclesial unity rather than as a direct reply to the Donatist schism; see Kim, “Asceticism and Augustine’s Sexuality and Marriage,” 47–49; cf. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 398.

53) Fullam, “Toward a Virtue Ethics of Marriage,” 669–671; cf. *The Good of Marriage*, I, 1.

54) Brown, *The Body and Society*, 402; on fidelity as a social good, see Clark, “Adam’s Only Companion,” 140.

55) See Reid, “The Augustinian Goods of Marriage,” 449–478.

asceticism that ranks the celibate above the married, the argument insists that marriage is good as created. But the same principle forbids the opposite hierarchy, now the more common one in the churches: the assumption that the unmarried life is a deficiency and the household the normal form of Christian maturity. Where single-person households and those who do not marry are rapidly increasing, this is not an academic distinction. Augustine rejected Jerome's hierarchical disparagement of marriage while also rejecting Jovinian's denial of any special excellence in consecrated continence; a church that follows him will neither treat marriage as a concession to weakness nor treat singleness as a delay in becoming an adult believer.

Two limits should be stated. First, Augustine's account of the household remains hierarchical in ways his theology of *fides* does not require and that this study does not defend; it is the reciprocity he draws from 1 Corinthians 7:4 that bears repeating, not the domestic order in which he embedded it. Second, *proles*, understood as the ordering of a household toward the wider community, is not to be pressed into an argument about birth rates: his concern is the direction of a marriage outward, not its productivity. What remains for the contemporary church is a *fides* that is public rather than merely interior — a trust whose keeping or breaking carries social consequence — and a *sacramentum* whose permanence is intelligible not as an imposition but as the form love takes when it is received as a created good.

VI. Conclusion

Against the divided landscape of late-fourth- and early-fifth-century asceticism, Augustine develops a single, coherent position, affirming marriage on the ground of creation: as created, both marriage and the love it embodies are good. This study has argued that this principle is not one theme among others but the controlling thesis of his teaching, the point at which he breaks decisively with the Manichees and from which his moderate asceticism follows.

The argument has borne this out at each stage. The strict asceticisms of the age converged on a diminished marriage and a prideful renunciation, a pride visible on its own ecclesiological plane in Donatist separatism, and Augustine, formed by his own experience of Manichaean discipline, rejected that outcome from within. In *The Good of Marriage* he answered it positively, deploying the three goods as proof that marriage is neither inferior nor unbiblical but a created and social good, and that same criterion, sustained in his anti-Pelagian works, vindicates the optimistic reading of his thought. Occasioned by the refutation of Jovinian, the book functions equally as a rejoinder to Jerome's strict asceticism, supplying in its place a properly Christian and social understanding of marriage.

Two clarifications guard the thesis. Against the strict asceticism of his own day Augustine's target is spiritual as well as physical: he defends the goodness of matter and generation against the Manichees, and alongside that defense he identifies pride in renunciation as the deeper

spiritual danger. His positive reading likewise depends on receiving the Old Testament as Scripture, so that the patriarchs' marriages are read favorably rather than dismissed.⁵⁶⁾ Within these bounds his concern for moral laxity and the breakup of the family is admonitory, never a retraction of marriage's goodness.

Commentators on both sides have tended to read him through modern debates over original sin.⁵⁷⁾ Yet the evidence compels a firm conclusion: had Augustine held a pessimistic view of marriage, he would not have grounded it in creation and pressed its goodness and social necessity as he did. His position is a moderate asceticism that defends marriage as part of God's good order. Received as such, it remains a resource for the social ethics of the church that reads him.

56) On Augustine's reading of the Old Testament patriarchs' marriages as figural and favorable, see *The Good of Marriage*, XV, 17, and XXII, 27; cf. Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 270-274.

57) On the tendency of both liberal and conservative readers to interpret Augustine through later debates over original sin, see Hunter, "Augustinian Pessimism?," 153-155.

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• ABSTRACT •

Augustine's Understanding of Marriage and Asceticism and
Its Social-Ethical Implications

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This study asks on what theological ground Augustine defended marriage amid the ascetic controversies of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. It analyzes the structure of his argument in *The Good of Marriage*, read together with the *Confessions*, the *Retractions*, and his later anti-Pelagian works.

Augustine rejects both the strict asceticism of the Manichees and Jerome and the anti-asceticism of Jovinian, and he does so on a single ground: as created, both marriage and the love it embodies are good. The three goods — procreation (*proles*), faithfulness (*fides*), and the sacramental bond (*sacramentum*) — serve as evidence of that created goodness, and the later anti-Pelagian works do not retract the claim. By this criterion his view is neither pessimistic nor anti-social but a moderate asceticism, and the study draws out its social-ethical implications for the church today.

Key words: Augustine, Jerome, Jovinian, marriage, asceticism,
The Good of Marriage, social ethics
