

SPIRITUALITY AND HUMAN SEXUALITY: A THEOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The purpose of this paper is to probe into the theological and anthropological foundations of spirituality in relation to human sexuality. In the biblical context the humanness and spirituality of human sexuality are closely interlinked and firmly rooted in the creation purposes of the human within the covenantal bounds of marriage. The study will show that human sexuality resides in the ongoing workings of the Holy Spirit in the union and oneness of human beings (Gen 5:1-2) as male and a female in their covenantal relationship (Gen 2:24).

Key words: Spirituality, sexuality, image of God

1. Introduction: Definition of the Concept of “Spirituality”

In the postmodern intellectual context the concept of spirituality is associated with a wide range of notions such as culture, art, religion, and ethnicity.¹ Above all, the term has been employed to denote those practices that are rooted in the doctrines of Eastern philosophies. Tai Chi, Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age, tantra yoga² are but a few of the wide

¹ See Akintunde Dorcas Olu. (*sic*) and Ayantayo J. K., “Sexuality and Spirituality: Possible Bedmates in the Religious Terrain in Contemporary Nigeria” (Unpublished paper, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 2005), available from <http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhsss/akintunde.pdf>, accessed 7 February 2012.

² Tantra yoga, adapted to the *couleur locale* engendered by the sexual emancipation within Western societies and also in European post-communist societies, is mainly a spiritualist *medium* that promotes sexual super-performance on the basis of “spiritual” exercises specific to the type of yoga, about which the yoga guides of tantra say that it “combines yoga and meditation in order to integrate sensuality with spirituality,” available from <http://www.eternity-yoga.com/sex-and-yoga.html>, accessed 29 January 2012.

spectrum of oriental modes of spirituality present in European and American cultures.³

The impact of the above-mentioned Eastern ideologies has led to the emergence of a new global "religion" of postmodernism. Its nature and essence are comprised in the term "spirituality." At a fundamental level, spirituality has been understood and practiced as a way to facilitate what has been coined a "pilgrimage" inside the human soul. The pilgrimage occurs when postmodernists, both secular and religious, embark on spirituality through various spiritual exercises such as meditation, contemplation, yoga, hesychast prayer and mantric incantation. The result is expected to be bidirectional: (1) reinvigoration of the human psyche by counteracting tiredness and exhaustion caused by job- or career-related stress; and (2) self-transcendence by charging up the soul with the energies of the Universe. It is obvious that this definition of spirituality, very much en vogue today, is one that is most general and relative. It is so broad, ambiguous and neutral as to allow a dialogue between Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age, Islam, secularism and any other religion. However, in the current study I will apply a radically different instrument of research, a definition of spirituality much more specific to the biblical understanding as the topic of investigation.

In the biblical concept "spirituality"⁴ is a term that designates a certain way of life both personal and collective that is brought about by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:12-15; Gal 6:1). This means that the Holy Spirit unites human beings with Jesus Christ (1 John 4:13; Rom 8:9-11; Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:3) by faith in the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures (Rom 10:17; 1 Pet 1:23). It is in then in a progressive manner that the Holy Spirit transforms the moral character of the believer to emulate the moral character of Jesus Christ. As a result of the aforementioned inner working of the third person of the Godhead human deeds, plans and intentions will be motivated by love, hope, and faith in the triune God (1 John 4:8-16). Such motivation will prove its authenticity through the believer's determination to promote the glory (honour) of God the Father (John 15:8; 1 Cor 10:31) while serving both the eternal and transient welfare of fellow

³ Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 6-13. Downey has surveyed the postmodern semantic spectrum and varied manifestations of what he calls "spirituality" in its generic use, and has concluded that from the mass fascination with apparitions of Virgin Mary to Voodoo, from New Age to feminism, everything falls under the umbrella concept of "spirituality."

⁴ For a more detailed exposition of what spirituality is in relation to lived experience and certain academic disciplines such as systematic theology and ethics, see Zoltán Szalós-Farkas, *A Search for God: Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality* (București: Editura Universitară, 2010), 18-58.

human beings (Matt 22:39), of whom one's marriage partner is by far the most important.

This definition of spirituality is the methodological tool of this research. It transcends the semantics and applied aspects of ethics. This means that it is interested not only in the morality of acts, practices and behaviours, but equally and especially in the trinitarian motivation of acts, practices and behaviour of Christians in their sexual existence.⁵ Therefore, what this study attempts to achieve is to identify and analyse the concepts that define both the theological and anthropological basis of human sexuality.

2. The Origin, Nature and Purpose of Human Sexuality

This study will approach the topic of human sexuality by using the term "human" in its qualitative and attributive sense without the connotations of a Freudian anthropo-psychological perspective. The adjective human implies the idea that human sexuality is – in its non-physiological aspect – radically different from the sexuality of other animated beings capable of sexual intercourse such as animals (mammals), for example. The radical difference between human sexuality and animal sexuality will be clarified by means of exegetical and theological analysis of pertinent biblical data.

According to Gen 1 and 2, humans were created with social skills of both general and special nature. The special nature of human social aptitudes is absolutely novel in all of God's Creation. As social beings humans are unique in the nature and specificity of their sexual partnership in that such is tied to a creational given, their sexual distinction and differentiation into "male" and "female" (Gen 1:26-27). Moreover, Gen 1:26-27 allows one to postulate an apparent relational uniqueness in that the Edenic male and female's marital partnership has an explicit paradigmatic dimension. Paradigmatic is a concept that has been derived from the root meaning of a *koine* Greek verb: *paradeiknymi*. The root meaning of the term is: "to point beyond." Utilizing this root meaning of the verb, I argue for the paradigmatic nature of the Edenic

⁵ The current study differs from Helmut Thielicke's, *Theological Ethics* (vol. 3; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), which has looked into the biblical view of spirituality, but has not approached human sexuality from the perspective of ethical studies with their socio-cultural, contextual or even theological methodology. This is not to say that Thielicke's work has had no impact on the current study; on the contrary, I have made full use of Thielicke's insights and have included them into the methodological approach, in which the concept of spirituality is one that integrates, but also transcends, the ethical and ethics.

marital relationship. This means that the Edenic marriage points by itself beyond itself. In other words, Adam and Eve's marital partnership illustrates in a sense that is more than mere metaphoric representation the divine reality. In other words, the paradisiacal marriage of a male and a female points by itself to the mystery of the spiritual relationship within the inner life of the Godhead constituted of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Further, the Edenic marital partnership receives its fascination and mystery from the dynamics of human life marked by gender differentiation into male and female, a distinction that is divinely assessed as being "good" (Gen 1:31). The term "good" is used by God when referring to all the elements of Creation in the complexity of their mutual relationships. But it has to be noticed that after the creation of Adam, biblical protology records that there is one non-existent element, a state that is divinely ascertained as "it is not good" (Gen 2:18). Here the text records a paradox of an absolutely perfect Creation that has not been completed yet. The social concept of "human" (אָדָם) (Gen 5:1-2) was missing. The absence manifested itself in the missing sexual complementarity (duality) within Creation as a constitutive element of the very existence of "human" as a collective entity (Gen 5:1-2). God's conclusion regarding human monosexuality is לֹא טוֹב, that is, "not good" (Gen 2:18). What does this "not good" mean?

2.1. How Is This Paradox Solved?

The problem contained in the "not-good" is solved the moment the woman is created with all her feminine psycho-physical endowments. She is the result of a divine act of creation (Gen 2:21-23). The woman as a complex universe of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, social and sexual features is the divine solution for the "not-good" of monosexuality, unfulfillment and aloneness. Stated differently, the woman and femininity represent "the good" that complements the man and masculine, thus fully achieving the collective idea of "human being" (Gen 5:1-2).

Fashioning ("building")⁶ the woman (Gen 2:22) and the feminine is an act whereby God completed the Creation, whose crown is "the human being" created "in God's own image and likeness" (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1). It is obvious that the human being, according to biblical anthropology, is a collective, social entity, differentiated as "male and female" (Gen 5:2a). The two complementary parts in their socio-conjugal unity were given the collective name of "human" (Gen 5:2b), a binitarian entity (Gen 5:1).

⁶ In the Hebrew text of Gen 2:22 the term to denote the woman's creation is "build," an artistic procedure specific to the constitution of architectural masterpieces.

2.2. The Image of God in the Binitarian Man

It is this very social aspect of the collective man made up of a male and a female that represents the image of God in the human being (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-2).⁷ The biblical evidence compels one to assert the reality of a God who is not "alone." This is one of the reasons why he did not create man to be "alone" either. The idea of a plurality of persons within the Godhead is clearly stated in the Scriptures (Gen 1:26-27; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8 [cf. John 10:30]; 1 John 4:8, 16). God reveals himself in the unity of mutual love of three distinct persons (1 John 4:8, 16 [cf. Isa 42:1]; Isa 48:16; 61:1-2; 63:7-14 [cf. Matt 28:19]; Luke 4:17-18; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 4:4-6; Rev 1:4-6). The trinitarian unity and distinction is reflected in the marital love relationship of the binitarian man made up of two distinct persons meant to be "one" (Gen 2:24; cf. 5:1-2).⁸

The biblical basis of a socio-relational understanding of God is grounded in the eternally mutual and dynamic love of the divine persons within the Godhead (1 John 4:8, 16). The unity and distinction of the divine persons were to be reflected in the creation of humans. And indeed, the unity of and distinction between Adam and Eve constitute the very "image" of God in the human being. Moreover, the unity and distinction of the divine persons within the Godhead are revealed in the dynamic love relationship between one man and one woman within their marriage partnership meant to last a lifetime (Gen 2:24, Song 7:10; 8:6-7; cf. Matt 19:4-6).⁹

2.3. Why is Human Sexuality Good?

By a divine act of creation, the man and the woman become capable of an exclusive creative togetherness. It must be exclusive, because it is

⁷ The way in which Moses uses the two terms "image" and "likeness" in the book of Genesis (1:26-27; cf. 5:1-2) allows one to consider them interchangeable from the point of view of their basic meaning.

⁸ For further study on the theological issue of the "binitarian man" as the "image" of the "Trinitarian God," see Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* (Nashville, TN: Review & Herald, 1980), 23-26.

⁹ The thesis that runs through and structures the systematic thinking about God of Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 28-29, 43-53, is the "eternal relationship" of love within the trinitarian life of the Godhead, the mystery of which is revealed in the ongoing relationship of love between Adam and Eve, husband and wife, in their marital unity rooted in the "flame [love] of Yahweh" (Song 8:6-7). See also Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendricson Publishers, 2007), 630-631.

sexual in its essential nature. If the human being were asexual, they could cohabit with multiple partners without the indictment of adultery. But, since the human being is a binitarian entity made up of two persons who are sexually differentiated into male and female their togetherness must take place in the framework of an exclusive covenantal relationship (Mal 2:14; Prov 2:16-17) called marriage. If their sexual intimacy takes place within the framework of a covenant, and if it functions on the basis of the principle of mutuality, God characterises it as being “very good” (Gen 1:31). What does this divine qualification mean?

The divine qualification expressed by the adjective “good,” interpreted with respect to the sexual differentiation and the sexual relationship between a man and a woman means two things, functional good and ethical and moral good.

2.3.1. Functional good

From God’s perspective, “good” is any entity or thing that functions according to the purpose assigned to human beings within the divine plan of creation. Therefore, the concept of the functional good refers to the full realisation of the purpose for which a being, an institution or a thing within the Universe has been created. The marital-sexual partnership of a woman and a man is good as long as their sexual intimacy functions according to the laws of biology and physiology so as to achieve the purpose and the reason why God created sex and endowed us with a sexual nature differentiated into male and female.

2.3.2. Ethical and moral good

Besides the above-mentioned functional aspect, there is also the ethical and moral goodness. Our sexuality is good when it meets the divine expectations not merely functionally but also relationally; that is, when it meets the requirements expressed in God’s moral law and in the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles (Exod 20:1-17; Lev 18:1-24; 20:10-22; Matt 5:28, 31-32; 19:3-9; 1 Cor 5:15; 6:12-20; 7:1-40).

The two fundamental aspects, the functional and the moral, of human sexuality differentiated as male and female are complementary. What does this complementarity mean? It means that sex can be pleasant because the partners function well physiologically and biologically. But from a moral point of view, it is not permissible if practiced before marriage¹⁰ or outside of it.

¹⁰ On presenting the current paper in a seminar setting, in front of about one hundred students, I came across an interesting idea, popular in postmodern Adventism.

2.4. The Purpose of Human Sexuality

In what follows, I will probe into the question of whether the purpose of human sexuality is the same in both the order of creation and the order of salvation.

2.4.1. *The Order of Creation*

From the perspective of Gen 1 and 2,¹¹ the purpose of human sexuality is clearly defined in a creationist thought-culmination in Gen 2:24. It is clear from v. 24 that the purpose of human sexuality is to be found in the oneness of the two marriage partners, male and female. Such oneness of two sexually differentiated human beings is an outworking of their marital spirituality specific to the order of creation. Within this order, the permanence and depth of their marital relationship are grounded in the selfless (as opposed to selfish) love of the two Edenic partners. Their ever-growing relational unity is conveyed by the fact that the two were naked (v. 25). That is, they are totally transparent, having nothing to hide from

Some argued that premarital sex is not prohibited by God in the seventh commandment (Exod 20:14), provided the unmarried couple are motivated by genuine love for one another, grounded in a deep mutual respect of the *I-Thou* type. One easily realizes that such is a postmodernist ethical idea which is founded on two arguments, one of which is lexical-biblical and the other one relational-philosophical. The former capitalizes on an alleged semantic difference, unjustifiable linguistically and exegetically, between two Greek verbs: *μοιχεύειν* and *πορνεύειν*. It has been argued that the first verb has been translated into both the Hungarian and Romanian language to mean an act of illicit sexual intimacy of spouses outside the marriage bond, whereas the second verb merely denotes promiscuity and lasciviousness, which, in our opinion, is based on a interpretation that goes clearly against its meaning in Matt 5:27, 28, 32. The second argument, the relational-philosophical, is founded on the lexical one, to which there has been added an ethicist interpretation of Martin Buber's existentialist philosophy presented in his book entitled, *I and Thou* (trans. Walter Kaufmann; New York: Touchstone, 1970), 53-86. Without being contentious, we must point out that such an idea, which is incongruent with biblical ethics and biblical spirituality, is undermined by the fact that Joseph knew – on the basis of Old Testament Scriptures (Exod 20:14) – that he and his fiancée, Mary, could not engage in premarital sexual intimacy without the indictment of adultery, not even during the period of their engagement (Matt 1:18-20). If premarital sex had been accepted as ethically blameless in first-century Judaism, Joseph would have had no reason to worry about Mary's pregnancy. However, biblical data prove the opposite (Matt 1:18-19).

¹¹ Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26.1 (1988): 5-21, upholds the idea that a fundamental theology of human sexuality must be based on the normative, biblical material of Gen 1 and 2.

God and from each other under the circumstances of paradisiacal moral innocence. So, in the order of creation, the Edenic partners have sex¹² to deepen their dynamic relationship of marital oneness. Their conjugal relationship, by virtue of its paradigmatic nature, points beyond itself, to the unity and oneness of the divine persons of the trinity, who are reciprocally communing with each other within their immanent fellowship that is rooted in their perfect love (1 John 4:8,16). In this context, "immanent" means the trinitarian relational life within the Godhead.

2.4.2. The Order of Salvation

The order of salvation of interest for this study is within the post-Fall context starting in Gen 3. It is a domain tainted by the sin of the Edenic spouses. In spite of radical changes caused by the Fall, Jesus Christ has reaffirmed the paradisiacal purpose of human marital sexuality in Matt 19:3-6. Even in the context of sin and salvation from sin, the primary purpose of marital sexuality, from God's perspective, is the deepening of the oneness and communion of the spouses. At the same time, one could argue based on Jesus' statement (Matt 19:3-6) that the coital act itself comes as an evidence of an already existing spiritual communion between the covenantal partners. Quoting Gen 1:27 and 2:24, Christ has firmly established the continuing validity of the paradisiacal purpose of marital sexuality: husband and wife become "one," though they are "two" distinct entities (Matt 19:6).

Therefore, one can conclude that both within the order of creation and the order of salvation, the purpose of human sexuality is one and the same. It is the realisation of the qualitative mystery of the unity between two human partners in marital covenant distinct in their sexual ontology (man and woman). Their continually renewed commitment to God amidst sexual temptations will be played out in their continued faithfulness to each other in the framework of a permanent marital covenant. Such faithfulness, when motivated by their determination to promote the glory of God, will give their sexual encounters the sort of

¹² The biblical material in Gen 1 and 2 does not offer us a description of the sex life of the Edenic couple, Adam and Eve, before the Fall. However, a considerable number of theologians (Richard Davidson, Nicholas Ayo, Francis Landy, Jill M. Munro, David Blumenthal) agree with the thesis that the detailed description of marital love in the *Song of Songs* represents an inspired disclosure of sexuality in Eden before the Fall, with subtle textual allusions to the postlapsarian context within which the *Songs*, a Hebrew lyrical poem of marital sexual love, was composed. See the theology of paradisiacal sexuality in Davidson's seminal work, *Flame of Yahweh*, 552-632.

spiritual quality that is specific to acts of devotion (1 Cor 10:31).¹³ This is why their conjugal vow makes their sexual intimacy to be not a mere union of two bodies of flesh, but this union involves them completely, wholistically, serving God's glory. It is only in this way that one can assert that their union points beyond itself, being a revelation of the spiritual unity and oneness of reciprocal love within the trinitarian Godhead.

Consequently, from a biblical perspective the demographic purpose of producing children (reproduction) may be understood as a secondary purpose of human sexuality. Procreation is not necessarily included in the concept of the image of God. This is evident in the statements about animals who are to be "fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:22) but are not created in the image of God. Nevertheless, they were blessed with the same ability to procreate as Adam and Eve (vv. 22, 28).¹⁴

The biblical concept of the secondary nature of the demographic purpose of human sexuality leads one to be aware of and apply to the married life what in today's world is understood as family planning. Ellen G. White stresses the God-given responsibility of husband and wife to procreate only as many children as they are able to bring up in their family so that the children will be useful members of society while also rendering spiritual service to the faith community. This means that the husband and wife are to make decisions as to the size of their family by taking into account the socio-economic, psychological, medical, educational, and spiritual condition in which they live. If conditions are adverse, White unambiguously stresses the need for married couples to consider the consequences of those conditions on their future offspring, and refrain from growing the size of their families.¹⁵

¹³ Within the biblical worldview the ethical value of marital faithfulness among non-Christians and unbelievers is to be recognized as the result of the cooperating of such people, although unawares, with the Holy Spirit's workings through good parental or even formal education, community values and cultural givens. However, we need to point out, based on our definition of biblical spirituality, that the spiritual quality of marital sexual encounters is not by the sheer morality of acts and deeds, but by the willful determination to act in a way that ordinary activities such as eating and drinking turn into devotional acts to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31).

¹⁴ On the basis of biblical evidence, Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex*, 16, 20, clearly affirms the "primary" purpose of marital sex to be "the relationship" between the two, not "procreation."

¹⁵ It appears from Ellen G. White's writings that she held family planning to be a personal marital responsibility of every adult man and woman, in general, and of every member of the Adventist Church, in particular; see Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home: Counsels to Seventh-day Adventist Families As Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1993), 162-166. White justifies

2.5. The Humanness of Human Sexuality

The human being is a psychophysical indivisible unity of body and soul (Gen 2:7). This anthropological given requires to study the human being under the following two aspects of existence in order to define how the above-discussed primary purpose of human sexuality is achieved: (1) the human being in his/her immanent existence as one who in his/her respective ontological self is known as a person; and (2) the human being considered in his/her ability to function sexually, that is, viewed in his/her dynamic existence as a sexual person.

2.5.1. Human Identity and Personhood

The human being, as a personal being, is aware of himself or herself. In other words, the human being possesses a sense of self-consciousness and self-identity. But human self-consciousness in order to bring a clear sense of self-identity necessitates another distinct personal entity with whom to be in relationship. This other one functions as a mirror. That is, by looking in the "mirror"—at another personal entity—the individual human being comes to know self as male or female, man or woman. Adam could not recognise his own identity while looking in the "mirror" of impersonal beings such as the animals that passed in front of him (Gen 2:19-20). He came to a full realisation of his true identity, that is, of his male humanness, when he stood facing Eve, another self-aware being, possessing the status of a person endowed with female human sexuality (Gen 2:22-23).

2.5.2. The Human Value of Singles

However, the human being, in his or her own personal and ontological self, does not receive the dignity of human being—man and woman—from being married. That is, human dignity does not reside in the one standing vis-à-vis (the spouse), to whom one relates as to the one complementing oneself. Both the man and the woman in their singleness acquire individual human dignity from the One who has created them; moreover, who has created them for a relationship with Himself. However, singleness, while perfectly justifiable within the post-Fall conditions of life (1 Cor 7:25-40), did not serve God's paradisiacal purposes (Gen 2:18). So, He created humans also for their mutual relationship of love as man and woman within a marital partnership that was meant to point beyond itself. But again, the source of the each one's

the relevance of family planning by the adverse circumstances of life after the Fall into sin.

individual human dignity was to be the trinitarian God. Therefore, human dignity of singles, believers as well as unbelievers, is first the result of divine creation. Second, individual human dignity is the consequence of the relationship between the Creator and the creature. Within a marital relationship of a man and a woman human dignity is only derivative, as personal entities possess differentiated and distinct sexual identities.

The relationship with God, the Creator of sexual persons, effects not only the dignity of the human being, but also the capacity of the male and the female to bear multiple responsibilities and to be the recipient of infinite values in their own ontological self as personal beings, singles or married. It is in this way that one can understand why the dignity of a woman and of a man, namely their dignity as personal beings with differentiated sexuality, can become an end in itself.¹⁶

2.6. The Human Being in the Exercise of Sexual Function

In the dynamics of their sexual function human beings do not undermine their human dignity. This is to say that the dignity of being human is not harmed by the sexual intimacy between spouses (1 Cor 7:3-5; cf. Heb. 13:4). On the contrary, their sexuality, differentiated as masculine and feminine, serves this ultimate purpose. In other words, personal dignity is upheld and deepened by sexual intimacy. Consequently, the functional perspective cannot be detached from the human ontological aspect, according to which human beings are meant to function sexually in their conjugal relationship, which is rooted in the divine love of their Creator. This creative fact constitutes the reason of being responsible for and bearing responsibilities in one's sexual relationship. This statement requires further clarification.

The exercise of our sexual functions places an enormous moral responsibility upon us precisely because we, in our immanent human self, own personhood. This explains why one can speak of sexual spirituality and sexual ethics with particular regard to human beings. However, this further raises the following question: In what sense does our capacity to

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (trans. by Mary Gregor; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4:435, claims that the human being is an end in itself due to their rational, autonomous capacity of being moral by themselves. We may go along with Kant's idea in the sense that human beings in the post-Fall situation can not claim dignity in and by themselves. Yet, as creational realities human beings can possess dignity even when they are damaged or may be considered as "lost" because of their rejection of the saving relationship with the trinitarian God.

function sexually place a major moral accountability over us? The answer to this question may be given in terms of the earlier reference to the functional and moral goodness of sex. "Good" sex excludes the use of the woman as man's means for self-satisfaction. Likewise, the man should not be exploited as a means for the woman's self-achievement. It can reasonably be argued that self-promotion or the achievement of personal gain is not the duty or the task of human sexuality. However, within post-Fall contexts, self-promotion and personal gain do seem to have become a task of sexual activity (Gen 38:12-26). But, in attending to personal ends, sex unavoidably becomes depersonalised, a commodity to make the individual happy (2 Sam 11 and 13).

Sex as a biological function and sex as an essential aspect of humanness cannot be separated without damaging personal dignity. It is from this interconnectivity between sex as a biological function and sex as a dimension of human personhood that the responsibility of choosing one's marriage partner originates. And it is also from this interconnectivity that the responsibility of proper behavior before, during, and after the act of marital sexual intimacy towards one's spouse can be argued for.

If the aforementioned interconnectivity is so overwhelmingly important, one should wonder: What does it mean? It means that when I choose my marriage partner I must be aware that I am obliged to be involved not only as a sexually functioning being, but most importantly as a being with personhood, who has been endowed not with any kind of sexuality, but with human sexuality. If sexuality involved merely the functional, that is, the biological and physical aspects without the total involvement of one's personhood, then partners would be interchangeable. We would be like the spare parts of a car engine. The part once broken or worn out everybody expects to be exchanged with a new one. The only important thing would be to keep the engine functioning. The practice of changing partners, with rare exceptions,¹⁷ is specific to the animal kingdom, because animal sexuality, on account of its sole purpose of reproduction, only has functional, physical and biological aspects. It is precisely because of the impossibility to separate the functional aspect of sex from the personal one that the sexuality of human beings becomes "human."

¹⁷ Only three percent of mammals are monogamous; see Patricia Beattie Young and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *God, Science, Sex, Gender: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Christian Ethics* (Chicago, IL: The University of Illinois, 2010), 156; also Michelle De Haan and Morgan R. Gunnar, eds., *Handbook of Developmental Social Neuroscience* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2009), 272.

What made this study venture into the research of the spirituality of human sexuality has been the current deconstructionist phenomenon that is obvious from the general depersonalisation of sex within both liberal-secular and religious-conservative cultures, albeit in different ways. Sex has become an industry, an efficient marketing means, and a source of entertainment via the mass-media.¹⁸ When it comes to sexuality, deconstructionism results in the dehumanisation of the human being. Dehumanisation comes to the fore, among other things, by changing sexual partners and the industrialisation of sex. Polygamy and the objectification of women in certain religious cultures are also forms of dehumanisation. But it is beyond the scope of this study to deal with the latter forms of dehumanisation.

It is the widespread secular depersonalisation of sex, which has met only a feeble social and governmental resistance, that turns Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) and Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798) into representative figures of the human race on its way to dehumanisation. And indeed, the super-sexualisation and the excessive eroticisation of the mundane have become, not an aspect of a subculture, but the generalised cultural *Zeitgeist* in postmodernism. This fact may be the reason for not being taken seriously as a researcher interested in looking into sexuality as an essential aspect of genuine biblical spirituality. However, the very need to counteract social deconstructionism compelled this study with regard to the "magic" ingredient causing the depersonalisation of sexuality.

3. *Eros* in the Context of Human Sexuality

It is truly surprising to see the accuracy with which the Bible describes in Prov 5, 6, and 7, the nature and the implications of the sexual impulse in the human being, which it calls *erōs* (7:18).¹⁹ A careful analysis of the whole narrative will reveal the destructive psycho-behavioral manifestations induced by *erōs*. From the very beginning of chapters 5, 7,

¹⁸ The three terms are placed in inverted commas because we intended to underline the contexts in which sexuality has become radically depersonalised. These are the porn industry, the advertisement industry and the mass-media: the press, movies, and the erotic-pornographic Internet sites.

¹⁹ In preclassical Greek (800-500 B.C.), *erōs* appears as a "spiritual," not "carnal," element. In other words, the term expresses the human attitude towards Greek deities. In this study, the term is used with the meaning of "sexual impulse," a meaning already present in Plato, see Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: SPCK, 1954), 49-52. In the *koine* Greek (300 B.C. to A.D. 600) of the Septuagint (LXX, approximately 200 B.C.) the term *erōs* already appears with its full sexual semantic load (Prov 7:18; 30:16).

and 8, we are presented with a type of wisdom (5:1-2; 7:1-5; 8:1 ff.) which a sexually mature male, vulnerable to the destructive force of erotic instinct, desperately needs. The narrative is extremely outspoken: the solution to male (and female) erotic vulnerability is Yahweh's personified "wisdom" (chapters 5 and 7, but especially chapter 8).

Scholars have come to a remarkable consensus regarding the interpretation of the idea of wisdom in Prov 8. In light of Ps 2:6-7, Prov 8:22-31 is a clear metaphorical allusion to the second person of the trinity.²⁰ Solomon's concept of "wisdom" has been inter-textually employed by Paul to mean Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:23-24; 2:6-8). In Paul's theology, Christ is God's wisdom (1 Cor 1:23-24). It is him who makes one wise to successfully tackle issues emerging from the sexual relationship of males and females (1 Cor 1:23-24; 2:6-8; cf. 6:12-20; 7:1-40). Both Solomon and Paul argue that God's wisdom is capable to "protect" a man from "somebody else's wife" or from the "stranger" engaged in the art of erotic seduction (Prov 7:4-21; 1 Cor 2:6-8). The highly erotic language of the book of Proverbs creates an atmosphere full of lustful drama: "Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning; let us solace ourselves with loves [*erōs*] (Prov. 7:18; cf. 6:32, KJV).²¹

It is obvious that without God's wisdom *erōs* is characterized by the writer of the book of Proverbs as being the main motivation that defines a way of life within which sexual intimacy has been totally depersonalised and, thus, deprived of spirituality. Unstoppable and limitless lust and licentiousness dominate the scene described in chapter 7. This fact seriously questions the nature and usefulness of human sexual impulse.

²⁰ It might be helpful to notice that Yahweh's "wisdom" is a personification behind which one can identify, on the basis of a rigorous exegesis of Prov 8, the second person of the trinity, Jesus Christ; see Richard M. Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17.1 (2006): 33-54.

²¹ We want to underline the radical incompatibility between the Christological concept of "wisdom" in the Hebrew thinking of the book of Proverbs and of Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians and the discursive, speculative and erotic "wisdom" in the philosophical and social thinking of ancient Greece. The Greek "lovers of wisdom" (*philo+sophoi*, the philosophers or the men of letters) such as Theocritus, Achilles Tatius, Solon, Aristophanes, but especially Socrates and Plato, *Symposium* (trans. by R. E., Allen; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 248b5-c2; 252e1-5; 254a2,a5-7,b1,b2-3,b5-7,b7-c3,e5-7; 255e5-7; 257b6, were promoting the art of homosexual erotic seduction (pederasty) as a "philosophical" act of reaching the pure aesthetics of ideas by means of *erōs* (sexual relations) with a youthful disciple and partner in philosophical disputations, usually an unmarried young man or a boy; in the social practices of 5th century BC, pederasty in Athens could involve a boy who had not yet reached puberty.

We wonder whether *erōs* could possibly have any positive, constructive aspects to it, too. The answer seems to be affirmative if we think of the kind of love that permeates another book by the same author, the *Song of Songs*.

3.1. Human and Animal Sexual Impulse

By human sexual (erotic)²² impulse we mean the kind of inward desire, the onset of which is linked to puberty; and thus it is related to the hormonal-physiological processes of our bodies. However, sexual impulse can instantaneously be generated by the action of the human faculty of imagination. So, fantasy-driven sexual impulse motivates us into wishing a somatic (bodily) involvement (union) with another human being of the opposite (or same) sex and, consequently, it is usually associated with *erōs*, that is, lustful, sensuous love (Prov 7:18).

Sheer erotic "appetite," known as *libido* by its Latin name, kindles in the one experiencing it a sort of inward unrest. This, in turn, motivates the human being to initiate sexual activity, the purpose of which is sexual satisfaction. If satisfaction is sought for by involving another partner, and if the one experiencing heightened *libido* focuses on satisfying "one's own need," then it is likely that personal attention will be directed towards the physical components of the partner's being. In this case, human sexual impulse is not different from the copulative instincts of animals. This further means that the onset of heightened libidinal states urging one to look for purely physical release with or without the involvement of a partner cannot be explained on the basis of the definition of spirituality used in the current study. In other words, the copulative instinct, whose only motivation is *erōs*, is insufficient to differentiate between human and animal sex. Judged from the perspective of the sexual impulse human eroticism and animal sexual activity present the same characteristics, and this is the reason why it is used in the Scriptures to describe human moral decadence (Ezek 23:19-20; "animalism").

Anthropologically speaking, there is, however, a significant difference between human and animal sexual functioning. Animals are not capable of sexual self-stimulation by the use of fantasy, whereas humans are able to trigger sexual arousal by stimulating hormonal activity through imagination. Lacking imagination, animals depend on external stimuli²³

²² Besides the relevant biblical material, Thielicke's work, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 3, 35-44, has constituted the basis of our analysis of the nature and role of *erōs*.

²³ A rigorous quantitative study done in the United States on Hereford bulls has shown that a bull which had been exposed to visual sexual stimuli for 30 minutes, having the role of a spectator of the mating activity of other bulls, presented higher quantifiable parameters of sexual excitation and copulative performances than the

("images"), while human imagination provides men with internal stimuli in the form of images. This is to say that fantasy is able to create mental images of sexual scenes that are empirically inaccessible at a certain moment in time. But, in spite of being empirically inaccessible, these mental images intensify human libido. Unlike humans, animals depend for sexual arousal on internal instincts and external images, which are seasonal and hormone-bound (mating season, Gen 30:41). However, human imagination, imbibed in sex, leads to the rule of basic instincts. And there where only instincts are at work, we cannot speak of spirituality and romantic capacity, but merely of raw "carnality."

The imaginative capacity of human beings, being deliberate and readily available, significantly increases their vulnerability and, at the same time, their responsibility regarding the exercise of this particular mental capacity. Thus, sexual impulse triggered by imagination or by other methods, for that matter, does not make humans any different from animals, because under the impact of the impulse men and women are prone to looking for a sexual partner, and in their quest for such a partner they may fail to appreciate the human dignity of the other person. In other words, the personhood of the partner may be irrelevant. But the question comes with the force of necessity: why is personhood going to be irrelevant? The answer should not be one that is simplistic. To avoid this, in the next section of the study I will try to highlight the anthropological framework within which the answer is hoped to make sense. But, before turning to the next section, I need to include a brief subsection dealing with the question: what to do if tempted by "animal passion/propensity"?

3.2. Sexual Impulse Management

Postmodern social ethos tends to expose one, even encourage to expose oneself, to varied sexual temptations. And thus, it facilitates the immense blurring, within social and individual consciousness of the distinction between licit marital sexual love and illicit "animal passion" or lust.²⁴ Under such circumstances, sincere Christians might wrestle with the question: how can one cope with sexual temptations and propensities triggered by exposure to socially sanctioned eroticism? The answer is

bulls that engaged into copulative acts without any previous exposure to visual stimuli. See D. R. Mader and E. O. Price, "The Effects of Sexual Stimulation on the Sexual Performance of Hereford Bulls", *Journal of Animal Science* 59.2 (1984): 294-300.

²⁴ "Animal passion/propensities" is used by Ellen G. White, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery and Divorce* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1980), 110, 111, 113, 115, to denote sexual impulse which is incompatible with humans.

almost culturally conditioned and resides in what we call the socially, morally and even religiously widely accepted and recommended “quick fix.” This is male and female masturbation, a readily available sexual arousal management technic that has been morally and medically accepted by religionists and secularists alike as being innocuous.²⁵

However, this study holds that the trinitarian view of God and the binitarian understanding of the human being, from which the paradigmatic nature of the believers’ marital sexual spirituality issues, precludes one from theoretically, let alone applicatively, accepting the solitary management of sexual impulse. This is to say that the binitarian concept of the human being is radically incompatible with the solitary practice of human sexuality.

It is the one overarching characteristic of “animal passion,” as opposed to marital sexual attraction, that it easily settles for sexual self-relief via masturbation or the “use” of a partner. Neither of these is compatible with biblical theology and biblical anthropology. And this is so because the trinitarian love relationship within the Godhead is not going to be illustrated by such an act. Furthermore, one’s own personhood and personal dignity as well as the personhood and dignity of the partner will be irrelevant to someone motivated by “animal passion.” In other words, from the perspective of lustful *erōs*, neither the one needing sexual relief nor the one giving it, will be able to avoid depersonalisation of sexuality. Irrespective of whether the relieved and the reliever is one and the same individual, or whether they are two different people, one could reasonably view their act as being depersonalised. As has been said earlier, depersonalisation has metaphorically been described as animal sex in the book of Proverbs because lust behaves and also treats others as one of the “members of the herd” (Prov 7:22).

Managing our sexual urges requires, first of all, a committed pursuit of biblical spirituality. This involves a consistent maintenance of mental hygiene (Phil 4:8; cf. Matt 5:27-31) via a biblically sustainable practice of meditation and contemplation, the object of which are ideas gleaned from a well-structured and methodologically sound study of Scriptures. The Scriptures do recognise the divine gift of marital sexual attraction and love being approved of (Eph 5:28; cf. 1 Cor 7:4-5; cf. Heb 13:4) and even kindled by the trinitarian God (Songs 8:6; ASV, ESV). Such sexual love and libidinal state is called *agapē* in the Song of Songs (2:7; 3:5; 8:4-6; LXX), whereas in the book of Proverbs the seemingly same state is called *erōs* (7:18; LXX). Why is there such an outstanding distinction between what

²⁵ Robert Crooks and Karla Baur, *Our Sexuality* (eleventh ed.; Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2011), 231-235.

could be viewed as one and the same human emotion? This question leads us to the next section of the paper.

3.3. Anthropology and *erōs*-based Human Sexuality

Raw sexual impulse, experienced by humans (2 Sam 11), does not lead one to seek a psycho-physical union involving a soul-body holism of the parties engaged in sex. It is apparent from 2 Sam 11 and Prov 5, 6, and 7 that raw sexual impulse resulted in a purely somatic encounter. However, while sexual physicality is natural when it comes to animals, it is unacceptable with regard to humans because it lacks sexual spirituality. Biblical anthropology backs up the aforementioned. Scriptural data supports the idea that God considered David's sexual encounter with Bathsheba immoral on account of its lack of spirituality on David's part.²⁶ What this means needs further clarification.

Sex based solely on *erōs* does not take into account the binitarian concept of man defined in Gen 1:26-27; 2:24; 5:1-2; cf. Matt 19:3-6. As argued earlier in this paper, man's binitarian existence is grounded in God's creative act whereby the '*echad*' ("the two become one") nature of marital sexuality is established. This is why marital sexuality is meant to point beyond (paradigmatic) to the mystery of the asexual trinitarian '*echad*' within the Godhead. Whenever this pointing beyond does not occur in human sexual encounters, sexual spirituality is absent. Therefore, sex—even between spouses—without spirituality is "animalism,"²⁷ the involvement of bodies to the detriment of the soul. This begs the question: what do we mean by the phrase "to the detriment of the soul"? In order to answer this question, we need to take some further steps towards the crystallisation of a certain understanding of the human being that is biblically sound. In other words, we need to expound an anthropology that would faithfully reflect the biblical doctrine of man.

The Hebrew concept of man, unlike the Greek-Hellenistic one,²⁸ upholds a wholistic (integrative) view of the human being. That is, the

²⁶ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 523-532, has convincingly argued for Bathsheba's innocence based on exegetical-narrative facts present in the text of 2 Sam 11; these exegetical and narrative givens point to "The [biblical] narrator's indictment of David, not Bathsheba (v. 27)" (p. 530).

²⁷ It is interesting to note that Ellen White's thoughts on human sexuality frequently refer to the rule of "animal passion" both within and outside marriage; see White, *The Adventist Home*, 121-128.

²⁸ Socrates and Plato's anthropological dualism, disseminated in Christianity by Origen and Augustine, views the human being as a bipartite entity, possessing an immortal soul and a disintegrable matter/body; see Plato, *Phaedo*, in Robert M. Hutchins, ed., *Great Books of the Western World* (vol. 7; London: Encyclopedia

human being subsists as an indivisible composite of matter and breath of life, called a "living soul" (Gen 2:7). In this Biblical context, the word "soul" has the clear connotation of "person" (see Gen 2:7; cf. 1 Pet 3:20). From this, one may conclude that for our sexuality to be human in its essential nature, sexual fellowship implies the involvement of the whole person. This further means that in order for sex to be human it needs to be personal requiring the investment of the whole "soul" in the marital sexual partnership. But, *erōs* is not interested in the "soul." It does not have any regard for the entirety of the human self of which personhood is an essential aspect. Such attitude goes against the scriptural understanding of man as person. Its implications are wide-ranging.

As an example of its implications, we may refer to how a *erōs*-driven choice of a sexual partner occurs. *Erōs* is an intense inner motivation stemming from a heightened emotional state that, first of all, urges one to satisfy the sexual need by means of a sexual partner, who may well be one's spouse. On account of its satisfaction-seeking nature *erōs* impacts significantly upon our comprehension and appreciation of one's personhood, limiting us to a dangerously reductionist concept of the human being. This is perceived only in functional terms. He or she is the one we deem functionally (not morally) "good" for an enjoyable erotic experience due to the biological and physical parameters they possess.

Consequently, the danger of *erōs* is that it makes us interpret and treat the person without seeing him or her from the perspective of a relational understanding of the human self. A relational view of the human self states that one's real identity is constituted by being in relationship with the Creator and Redeemer of mankind. Denying the alien self,²⁹ with which we are born, in favour of the genuine self, involves a personal decision to accept a redemptive relationship with Christ (Matt 16:24-25). Thus, being in a redemptive relationship with God gives humans a real sense and appreciation of personal value and dignity.

However, even if someone is not yet in a redemptive relationship with God, this does not mean that he or she lacks value and dignity. In such cases, dignity still resides in God's creating each human being in his own image and likeness, which the Fall has not altogether obliterated. Image and likeness have been transmitted to Adam's post-Fall descendants (Gen 5:1-3). So, divine image and likeness are the foundation of a creation- and

Britannica, 1952), 220-251; Origen, *On First Principles*, II 8.1-5 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936); Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.19; 7.26 (trans. Henry Chadwick; Oxford: University Press, 1992).

²⁹ "Alien self" refers to the human identity that is rooted in self-consciousness which is marked and dominated by the general ontological proneness of post-Fall humans to self-centredness, selfishness and self-sufficiency (Rom 8:8; cf. 7:18; NIV).

salvation-grounded understanding of human dignity. But *erōs* may cause one to be insensitive to this creative and/or redemptive dignity residing in all human beings. If this is the case, one still might allow for the potential sexual partner or spouse some dignity that, however, is going to be proportional to his or her "importance to me."³⁰

It is true that the "importance to me" may turn out to be a little bit greater than the exclusively functional benefits residing in the sexual services rendered by the spouse (partner). But even so, the erotic narrowness of my perspective and horizon makes me unable to see a human being's importance to God (Isa 43:4; cf. 1 Pet 1:18,19; John 3:16). This personal incapacity, in turn, is going to shape my attitude and behaviour towards people, in general, and my spouse, in particular. Why? The reason is that the erotically defined "importance to me" is most likely to decrease proportionally to the partial or total loss of the physical and biological functions of the spouse, a loss caused by various personal circumstances such as sickness, accident or age. And the loss of the "importance to me" of the spouse is not merely a physiological issue, nor is it entirely ethical, either. It is mainly a spiritual issue because it has to be interpreted and explained motivationally. This means that the decrease of the spouse's importance to me must be judged from the perspective of its motivation. Any motivation invoked would turn out to be very different from the one we have identified as one of the essential components of the definition of spirituality we have been using in the current study.

Therefore, at this concluding point of our search for an anthropological and theological understanding of the spirituality of human sexuality we need to remind ourselves of the definition of biblical spirituality, especially its motivational specificity. Biblical spirituality is nothing else than a certain way of life, which is the result of the inner working of the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. Due to his inward working, our deeds, plans and intentions will be motivated by the love of, hope for, and faith in the triune God (1 John 4:8-16). Such motivation will prove its authenticity through the believer's earnest determination to promote the glory (honour) of God the Father (John 15:8; 1 Cor 10:31), while selflessly serving both the eternal and transient welfare of fellow human beings (Mat 22:39), of whom the believer's spouse is by far the most important.

In light of the above definition of spirituality, one may conclude that there is only one alternative for having a "very good" (Gen 1:31) marriage partnership throughout life, namely, the trinitarian love of God (*agapē*;

³⁰ In discussing the idea of "importance to me," I have relied heavily on Thielicke's research, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 3, 26-27.

Gal 5:22; cf. 1 John 4:8,16). And indeed, the anthropological and theological evidence that has been considered in this study shows that the consistency of one's faithfulness to the fiancé/e or the spouse is rooted in *agapē* and not in *erōs*.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study has been to probe into the theological and anthropological foundations of the spirituality of human sexuality. To secure the reliability of the outcome, the research needed a definition of the concept of spirituality which would avoid, as much as possible, the many ambiguities of current understandings of the concept. This is why the main perspective for a definition of spirituality has been the one offered by the Scriptures' doctrine of God and doctrine of the human being. In other words, biblical theology and biblical anthropology have aided us in limiting the semantic field within which the definition of the fundamental meaning of "spirituality" has been given.

By applying the abovementioned methodological tool in the current research, we have reached the conclusion that the humanness and spirituality of human sexuality are closely interlinked, and are firmly rooted in the first and foremost of the two creationist purposes of human sexuality within the covenantal bounds of marriage. This is to say that the spirituality of human sexuality resides in the ongoing achievement and deepening wrought by the Holy Spirit on behalf of the trinitarian God of Scripture, of the oneness and union of the binitarian man (Gen 5:1-2) made up of a male and a female in their covenantal relationship (Gen 2:24). But, the source of their individual human dignity is always the trinitarian God. Therefore, we need to stress the idea that the intrinsic value of the individual human being and, hence, the human dignity, is the result, first of all of God's divine act of creation. Then, the deepening of one's sense of personal value is the consequence of the redemptive relationship between the Creator and the creature. And it is only derivatively the result of the marital relationship between him and her, as personal entities possessing differentiated and distinct sexual identities.