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To Reproduce or Not to Reproduce?
Re-Contextualizing Pronatalism in Light of Climate Change

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An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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Climate change is potentially the greatest public health concern of our modern age. People living in upper socioeconomic classes produce more greenhouse gas emissions per capita than the majority of the rest of the world. However, people living in poverty disproportionally face the challenges and health risks associated with climate change. First world families contributing to climate change, therefore, can help alleviate the global burden of greenhouse gas emissions by choosing not to have children. Though reducing greenhouse gas emissions by choosing not to reproduce can be scientifically demonstrated, Christians living in first world contexts must also reckon with religious convictions that promote reproduction. For Christians, pronatalism is deeply embedded in scripture and theology. While it is unethical to force people to limit reproduction in an attempt to address climate change, it is possible to loosen the grip that scripture and tradition seem to have on Christians' decisions to procreate.

In the Hebrew Bible, pronatalism is deeply entrenched in the socio-economic-environmental contexts of the ancient Israelites. Issues of economic stability for agricultural families, social standing for women, and inheritance and transcending death for men are at the heart of pronatal sentiments in ancient Israelite society. Additionally, pronatal sentiments in Christian tradition and theology have developed in response to changing social, economic, and environmental conditions, in turn shaping conceptions of marriage, sex, and reproduction. By contextualizing the development of pronatalism in scripture and in Christian tradition, it is then possible to re-contextualize pronatalism today in light of current socio-economic – and particularly environmental – contexts.

Christians living in upper socio-economic classes around the world should not procreate just because scripture tells them to do so. Rather, these Christians should contextualize procreation by reflecting on the implications of reproduction within their own socio-economic-environmental contexts, paying particular attention to creation care as part of their deliberations on family and faith. In choosing not to have children, Christians participate in God's kenotic act of love by attending to climate change out of concern for the ecological integrity of the created order and people all around the world affected by climate change.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> *"Faced as we are with the progressive industrial exploitation of nature and its irreparable destruction, what does it mean to say that we believe in God the Creator, and in this world as his [sic] creation? What we call the environmental crisis is not merely a crisis in the natural environment of human beings. It is nothing less than a crisis in human beings themselves… It is not a temporary crisis. As far as we can judge, it is the beginning of a life and death struggle for creation on this earth"*
>
> – *Jürgen Moltmann, God in Creation*[1]

Climate change is potentially the greatest public health concern of our modern age. Human consumption of fossil fuels is increasing the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which in turn gradually warms the planet. As the earth warms, extreme weather events become more frequent and more intense. Additionally, other climate related phenomena, such as sea level rise, become aggravated. These climate alterations put millions of people at risk for death and disease due to issues of draught, flooding, heat-waves, extreme cold, and more. Climate change is anthropogenic; humans are largely at fault for destabilizing the climatic conditions of the earth that have been present for the last 11,700 years by unsustainably releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Anthropogenic climate change, therefore, can succinctly be described as too many people consuming too many of earth's non-renewable resources that emit greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Climate change is also a justice issue. People living in upper socioeconomic classes in the world produce more greenhouse gas emissions per capita than the majority of the rest of the world. However, people living in poverty disproportionally face the challenges and health risks associated with climate change. Those people who contribute

[1] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), xi.

most to greenhouse gas emissions should bear the brunt of the climate change related burden. However, the reality is far from this ethical assertion. Rather, people living in developing countries around the world are most at risk for death and disease due to climate change related activity. As such, people living in upper socioeconomic classes around the world have an ethical imperative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Numerous attempts have been made in the preceding decades to limit greenhouse gas emissions globally. The Paris Climate Accord is a recent attempt at worldwide collaboration to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the causes of global climate change. Most efforts to address global climate change attempt to a) create more efficient technology, b) develop new ways of harvesting energy, or c) adapt to the changing climatic conditions on earth. Although progress is being made, global greenhouse gas emissions are still problematically high, particularly from people living in first world contexts worldwide.

Population growth in the upper socioeconomic classes of people around the world contributes significantly to climate change. People living in these first world contexts produce the most greenhouse gas emissions per capita. Therefore, one way of addressing climate change would be to reduce the number of people living in first-world contexts. There are many methods of achieving this end that are ethically fraught. Setting legal limits on family size, eugenics, increased access to birth control, and abortion are just a few approaches to limit population growth that each come with different ethical considerations. Forced population control cannot be mandated, yet climate science indicates that such a measure might be effective for significantly reducing greenhouse gas

emissions. First world families contributing to climate change, therefore, can help alleviate the global burden of greenhouse gas emissions by choosing not to have children.

Though reducing greenhouse gas emissions by choosing not to reproduce can be scientifically demonstrated, Christians living in first world contexts must also reckon with religious convictions that promote reproduction. For Christians, pronatalism is deeply embedded in scripture and theology. Children are seen as a blessing from God, therefore efforts to limit reproductive capacity have historically been deemed suspicious, if not sacrilegious. The Roman Catholic Church has been unwavering on this front. Though the Catholic Church has acknowledged the ecological crisis and called Christians to attend to climate change, they nevertheless refute limiting population growth as a viable solution. Protestant Christians are more diverse in thought about limiting population growth. While some Protestant Christians might affirm limiting reproduction out of concern for the ecological integrity of the earth, most Protestant Christians still maintain strong pronatal sentiments rooted deeply in scripture and tradition.

While it is unethical to force people to limit reproduction in an attempt to address climate change, it is possible to loosen the grip that scripture and tradition seem to have on Christians' decisions to procreate. In the Hebrew Bible, pronatalism is deeply entrenched in the socio-economic-environmental contexts of the ancient Israelites. Issues of economic stability for agricultural families, social standing for women, and inheritance and transcending death for men are at the heart of pronatal sentiments in ancient Israelite society. By contextualizing pronatalism within the text, it is possible to see how social, economic, and environmental contexts drove people to articulate childbirth as a blessing from God and the purpose for which God created humanity. As social, economic, and

environmental contexts of early Christians shifted, understandings of marriage, sex, and reproduction also changed. Pronatal sentiments in Christian tradition and theology have continued to develop in response to changing conditions. By contextualizing the development of pronatalism in scripture and in Christian tradition, it is then possible to re-contextualize pronatalism today in light of current socio-economic – and particularly environmental – contexts.

Christians living in upper socio-economic classes around the world should not procreate just because scripture tells them to do so. Rather, these Christians should contextualize procreation by reflecting on the implications of reproduction within their own socio-economic-environmental contexts, paying particular attention to creation care as part of their deliberations on family and faith. In choosing not to have children, Christians participate in God's love by attending to climate change out of concern for the ecological integrity of the created order and people all around the world affected by climate change. This act of self-sacrificial Christ-like love cannot be legislated nor forced upon anyone. Feminist critiques of *agape* provide parameters in which this ethical action can or should be encouraged. In deciding not to biologically reproduce, Christians can express Christ-like love of the neighbor in light of the climate change crisis

PRONATALISM IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Pronatal sentiments are clearly articulated in the Hebrew Bible. First, pronatalism can be identified in God's blessing on the first humans in Genesis 1, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). From there, the second story of creation in Genesis 2, combined with the story of the first sin and its punishment in Genesis 3, provide an insightful view into humanity's role as part of creation. The role of

pronatalism in the story of humanity continues with God's promise of progeny to Abram in Genesis 12. The subsequent narratives that focus on the problem of barrenness occupy much of the rest of the book of Genesis. Each of these stories illumines how the ancient Israelites understood childbearing in relation to identity, the role of the human in the created order, and societal concerns of property rights and inheritance.

Genesis 1

The creation accounts in Genesis reflect the agricultural context of ancient Israelite society. In the Priestly account of Genesis 1, God creates humankind "in his image," male and female, and blesses them to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion… over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen 1:27-28). Nuanced interpretation of this passage requires understanding the sociocultural context of ancient Israelite society. The ancient Israelites were largely an agrarian society. Family structures, daily life, and societal constructs were all organized around agrarian activities.[2] This agrarian lens encompassed all of life. Ellen Davis describes agrarianism as a "comprehensive philosophy and practice… a culture of preservation."[3] In this vein it is fruitful, so to speak, to read Genesis 1 through this agrarian lens to grasp how the ancient Israelites understood their role as humans within the greater context of God's created order.

The creation account in Genesis 1 provides two key characteristics related to the role of humans in the created order. First, God creates humankind, blesses them, and immediately commands them to "be fruitful and multiply." Terrence E. Fretheim writes

[2] Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 4.

[3] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 66.

that in this command to "be fruitful and multiply" God invites humans to "[share in] the divine creative capacities" by giving them the powers to reproduce themselves.[4] The blessing prior to the command to multiply is significant because it a) positions procreation in a positive light, and b) connects the fulfillment of God's blessing with fruitfulness (an important connection for the ancient Israelites who depended on the land for sustenance).[5] Fertility of the land was integrally connected to fertility of the people, which is evident by the way that Genesis 1 celebrates seed that produces more fruit.[6] The agricultural Israelite society understood themselves as stewards of the land of Israel, a land that inherently belonged to God.[7] Thus God's blessing was often articulated through fertile soil that gave life to the Israelite people. This connection between God's blessing and fertility will prove to be a prominent theme in later texts related to procreative potential and barrenness.

Understanding the Israelite people as stewards of God's land helps illumine the second key characteristic of humans in the created order according to Genesis 1. God creates humans not only to share in the divine capacities to reproduce, but also to occupy a specific niche related to the rest of the created order. The Priestly author of Genesis articulates a vision for the world that is intricately ordered and balanced. In this account of creation, God orders all of life between the poles of heaven and earth. Gordon

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[4] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 346.

[5] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 33.

[6] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 50.

[7] King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 85.

Wenham uses the narrative structure of

Genesis 1 to connect the days of creation as follows:[8]

- Day 1: Light, corresponding with Day 4: Luminaries in the sky
- Day 2: Sky and waters, corresponding with Day 5: Birds and fish
- Day 3: Land and plants, corresponding with Day 6: Animals and Man

This diagrammatic structure of Genesis 1 articulates contexts (days 1, 2, and 3) that provide for the subjects (days 4, 5 and 6). This ordered view of creation ensures that everything exists within its proper place articulated by God. Furthermore, near the end of the narrative God ensures that all living beings have food to eat; to the humans God gives "every plant yielding seed" (an important gift for an agricultural society), and to every animal "that has the breath of life" God gives "green plants" to eat (Gen 1:29-30). In ancient agricultural society, scarcity remained a vivid and genuine concern. Yet in Genesis 1 God provides food for all people and animals. The heart of Genesis 1, therefore, imagines an ordered world of abundant production, a holistic ecosystem that provides food for all, and a specific role for each part of the created order.

The ancient Israelites understood their role as stewards of God's earth, working to maintain and further the vision of Genesis 1 for the flourishing of the whole created order. In the narrative, humans are told to multiply and to "have dominion" over every living thing. Yet this command to multiply and exert dominion is granted in the context of an ecologically balanced whole. Fretheim writes, "this process [of dominion] offers to the human being the task of intra-creational development, of bringing the world along to

[8] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 1:6–7.

its fullest possible creational potential."[9] As such, humans have a real responsibility to consider the "good" of all of creation, not just the parts of creation that are sentient, think rationally, or exhibit personhood. This "good" of creation should extend to all of creation throughout all of time, indicating that changing physical conditions should change humanity's relationship with the created order in a highly dynamic and ever changing dance.[10]

One can conceptualize a situation in which the ecological whole is unbalanced, requiring a shift in appropriate human action in order to further the good of all creation. The author of Genesis 1 wrote from a position of scarcity and articulated a vision for the flourishing of all of creation. A context of over-abundance, over-indulgence, and over-consumption (like we live in today) could hardly be imagined. It is therefore conceivable that the blessing and command God invoked on humankind to "be fruitful and multiply" might also have contained a divine limit on humankind's reproductive capacity if humans should reproduce or live in a manner that harms or inhibits the flourishing of the rest of the created order. Should the earth fill with so many humans that the ecological integrity of the whole be compromised, then unchecked reproduction might be called into question. As Terrance Fretheim concludes his commentary on Genesis 1, "New situations will teach new duties regarding the created order."[11]

Genesis 2 & 3

The Yahwist's creation account in Genesis 2 reflects on the role of humanity within the created order by connecting humans to the land from which they were formed.

[9] Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," 346.

[10] Fretheim, 346.

[11] Fretheim, 346.

This second creation account takes place in the garden of Eden, where God "[forms] man from the dust of the ground, and [breathes] into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man [becomes] a living being" (Gen 2:7). In this account, the human (*'adam*) is formed from the arable land (*'adama*) and placed as a gardener in God's creation to "till [the garden of Eden] and keep it" (Gen 2:15). From the viewpoint of an agricultural society, this relationship is significant because not only does the human cultivate the soil (the *'adam* cultivates the *'adama*), but God also forms the human out of the land that is cultivated (the *'adam* comes from the *'adama*).[12] The tight connection between *'adam* and *'adama* accentuates the great concern for the land harbored by agricultural societies. Similarly to the narrative in Genesis 1, the human cannot be conceived of as an entity that is separate from the rest of the created order, particularly the land.

While Genesis 1 furthers an account of creation that focused on ecological balance and fertility, Genesis 2 articulates an account of creation that is centered on companionship. It is notable that in the Genesis 2 narrative no distinction is made between humans and the rest of the created order.[13] Indeed, after God creates the *'adam,* God recognizes that the *'adam* is lonely and thus creates other animals as potential partners (cf. Gen 2:19). Claus Westermann writes that the creation of animals "may offer the man the help which is suited to him."[14] In the narrative, the man (*'adam*) "gave names to all cattle… birds… and to every animal… but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner" (Gen. 2:20). Although none of the animals meet the need of

[12] Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 35.

[13] Cf. Gen 7:22, which indicates that God breathes the breath of life into all created beings, providing them with life. God's breath into the '*adam* does not seem to be exclusive to the humans species.

[14] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg PubHouse, 1990), 228.

companionship for the *'adam*, the animals are still depicted positively and seen as suitable potential partners with humanity. When none of the living creatures are found to be a suitable partner for the *'adam*, God causes the *'adam* to sleep and takes his rib, creates new flesh, and makes a woman. Contrary to the narrative in Genesis 1, this narrative deemphasizes the procreative role of humanity in the creation story because the creation of the suitable partner is not linked to reproduction and instead linked to companionship with the *'adam*.[15] God creates the animals and subsequently woman for the purpose of meeting the need of companionship and rectifying the negative condition of loneliness of the *'adam*. In the creation of woman, the *'adam* proclaims, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23), indicating a covenantal statement of companionship with each other and commitment to each other regardless of circumstances.[16] Furthermore, the author of Genesis 2 summarizes the companionship between the '*adam* and the woman with the words, "they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24).

This latter phrase can be understood in two ways. Gerhard von Rad writes that these closing verses seek to show that "by destiny [man and woman] belong to each other," since they were originally one flesh from which God took woman, they must come together again and become "one flesh in the child."[17] Von Rad's understanding of this phrase is premised on an etiological purpose of the Genesis 2 narrative, which is to explain the "powerful drive of the sexes to each other."[18] He understands Genesis 2 to exist for the purpose of explaining the existence of the drive for sex and companionship

[15] Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," 352.

[16] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 180.

[17] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 85.

[18] von Rad, 85.

between men and women, to produce children of "one flesh." However, this is not the only way to conceptualize this phrase. Hermann Gunkel also supposes an etiological purpose of the narrative. Like von Rad, Gunkel understands that "man desires to become one flesh with woman because he was originally one flesh with her."[19] However, Gunkel departs from von Rad by asserting that the purpose of the union of flesh between man and woman is sexual union, rather than a child.[20] In the act of sexual union, wholeness between two is restored to one regardless of the production of offspring. Gunkel recognizes parallels between the passage in Genesis 2 and Plato's *Symposium*, which articulates that love is "the craving and pursuit of [our original form]."[21] In Plato's *Symposium*, that original form was a man-woman hybrid, a being composed of both sexes and powerful like the gods.[22] Love, then, was the desire to return to the entirety, the whole being. Gunkel articulates a similar sentiment in his commentary on Genesis, writing, "in love that which was originally one is reunited."[23] The focus of this verse in Genesis 2, "they become one flesh," therefore, refers to sexual intimacy, a return to the original form of the '*adam*, before woman was created.

Claus Westermann rejects both of these interpretations of the phrase "one flesh" by placing the phrase in the context of the Genesis 2 concern for companionship. Although he recognizes the etiological framework of the narrative, Westermann argues that Genesis 2 does not seek to explain the creation of woman or the origin of sexual

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[19] Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 13.

[20] Gunkel, 13.

[21] Plato, *Lysis; Symposium; Gorgias*, vol. 166, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 145.

[22] Plato, 166:135–37.

[23] Gunkel, *Genesis*, 13.

attraction.[24] Rather, the narrative is concerned with describing the "personal community of man and woman in the broadest sense – bodily and spiritual community, mutual help and understanding, joy and contentment in each other."[25] Within the context of an agrarian society, the narrative of Genesis 2 seeks to celebrate the companionship between men and women and their roles in everyday life. Indeed, neither the notion of children nor the institution of marriage appears anywhere in the narrative. Therefore the text is concerned not only with sexual intimacy (for procreation or pleasure) but more generally with the community formed between man and woman.[26]

Westermann's emphasis on companionship and community between man and woman depicted in Genesis 2 is furthered in Genesis 3, where the consequences of the man and woman's actions of disobeying God are centered on their primary roles of life in an agrarian society. In the Yahwist's creation account, God gives humanity significant freedom and autonomy to "freely eat of every tree of the garden" with the only limitation to not eat "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:16-17). When the man and woman eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, consequences ensue because they acted against the will of God.[27] These consequences serve to disrupt the personal community achieved between men and women in Genesis 2. For example, labor becomes divided as women take on roles of wives and mothers (in bearing children) and men assume roles of manual workers and breadwinners (cf. Gen 3:16-18).[28] However, these divisive roles are only enacted once God banishes humanity from the Garden of

[24] Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 232.

[25] Westermann, 232.

[26] Westermann, 233.

[27] Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," 365.

[28] Fretheim, 362.

Eden and sends them to cultivate the *'adama* from which the *'adam* came (cf. Gen 3:23). Outside the garden men and women are separated by the roles of fieldwork and bearing children, respectively. Within the garden, conversely, the theme of companionship is realized by the two "[becoming] one flesh" beyond the expectations of childbirth or the institution of marriage.

Sociocultural Context of Genesis 1-3

Conceptions of sex, marriage, roles of men and women, and childbirth in scripture are integrally related to the cultures in which those scriptures emerged. Carol Meyers describes the sociocultural roles of men and women during the Iron Age in her article, "Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male-Female Balance in Early Israel."[29] Meyers bases her analysis on the premise that "the prosperity of any group [of people] is dependent upon three major activities: (1) procreation (reproduction), (2) production (subsistence), and (3) protection (defense)."[30] Meyers continues to say that the asymmetry of gender roles in societies arises from an unequal share of energy expended by men and women in these activities. Women bear the biological burden of reproduction, while men primarily take up activities of defense. Meyers argues that in the agrarian context of the ancient Israelites, women likely contributed 40% of the energy required for subsistence agriculture, with men contributing the other 60% of the required energy.[31] Meyers asserts that mutual participation of men and women in the agricultural sphere of life corresponds to a relatively flat power distribution between men and

[29] Carol L Meyers, "Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male-Female Balance in Early Israel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51, no. 4 (December 1983): 569–93.

[30] Meyers, 573.

[31] Meyers, 582.

women.[32] Although the above analysis hardly indicates equality for women in ancient Israel, it does indicate a "near mutual dependence which affords women considerable power in domestic matters and which also gives men the experience of accepting female power when it is exercised in other capacities, including in extra-domestic situations."[33] In essence, women and men were interdependent on each other for specific roles within the household, and women could still maintain significant status depending on her position in society.[34]

In addition to participation in domestic economic affairs, women also bore the responsibilities of procreation. Childbearing, childbirth, and child rearing were essential to maintaining family lineage. Wives were expected to be mothers, and thus much weight fell on a women's ability to conceive and bear children.[35] Large families were also desirable for economic reasons. Meyers writes that raising children was a "fundamental issue of family survival."[36] Large families were economically necessary because of the agricultural requirements for maintaining family land and producing enough food to live.[37] As such, married women were under considerable social pressure to have children. High rates of infant mortality also contributed to this issue. As many as one in every two pregnancies resulted in the death of the infant or child before the age of

[32] Meyers, 575–76.

[33] Meyers, 587.

[34] Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 64.

[35] Bird, 58.

[36] Carol Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," in *Families in Ancient Israel*, ed. Leo G. Perdue et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 27.

[37] King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 42.

five.[38] High infant mortality rates thus necessitated high birth rates in order to maintain societal stability. Pronatalism, therefore, was not just a matter of God's blessing, but a matter of survival.

Familial relationships and interests (and those interests of society) were weighed above the interest of individuals in ancient Israel. This emphasis on the collective is paramount to understanding pronatalism in scripture. For example, marriage was primarily a social and economic arrangement. The heads of the household (usually the fathers) arranged most marriages between families.[39] Marriage was patrilineal, patriarchal, and partilocal, meaning that the lineage was determined by the father's line, the father was head of the household, and marriage brought women into the household of the man and the man's father.[40] Furthermore, inheritance rights of property and possessions of a family were determined by male blood relations, usually the firstborn male son, and then all other sons.[41] These aspects of familial relationships that highlight the economic conditions of marriage are key to understanding how fecundity and barrenness operated within the ancient Israel society and within scripture.

Barrenness Texts in Genesis

Women's roles in society, family economic stability, infant mortality rates, issues of family lineage, and inheritance concerns all operated to shape expectations around childbearing in ancient Israel, and thus in pronatalism in scripture. These issues are

[38] J. Lawrence Angel, "Ecology and Population in the Eastern Mediterranean," *World Archaeology* 4, no. 1 (1972): 95.

[39] Hennie J Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 50.

[40] Raphael Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), 20.

[41] Brian B. Schmidt, "Inheritance in the OT," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: I-Ma*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 43.

exemplified in the barrenness texts of Genesis. Abraham and Sarah struggle to conceive a child (cf. Gen. 16: 1), and Jacob and Rachel struggle with infertility and rivalry between their children and the children of Jacob's other wives (cf. Gen 30:1-24). It can be insightful to examine these cases of barrenness and fertility within the context of barrenness type-scenes. Type-scenes, developed by Robert Alter, are sets of recurring narratives with certain stock features.[42] The biblical type-scene of the "agon of the barren wife" is critical for the theme of procreation.[43] In the cases of Abraham and Jacob, the "agon of the barren wife" type-scene has the following features:

1) The favored wife (Sarah/Rachel) is barren
2) There is a rival woman (Hagar/Leah)
3) The rival woman is fertile, bears a son for the barren woman's husband (Ishmael/Ruben)
4) Conflict and contest ensue between the barren wife and the rival woman
5) The barren wife is eventually heard by God and has a son (Isaac/Joseph)[44]

This type-scene raises issues about each of the women's social standings, the role of God in procreative activity, and expectations surrounding family lineage and inheritance.

Foremost, this type-scene highlights the issue of women's social standing in relation to childbirth. As discussed above, women were pressured to have children out of concern for the economic stability of the family. When Sarah and Rachel are barren, they face shame for not being able to provide for their families through procreation. This shame is heightened when the rival woman (Hagar and Leah) have children. Sarah

[42] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 60.

[43] James G Williams, "The Beautiful and the Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type-Scenes," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 5, no. 17 (August 1980): 108.

[44] Williams, 109.

responds by harassing Hagar (cf. Gen. 16:6), and Rachel envies Leah (cf. Gen. 30:1). In order for Sarah and Rachel to achieve the social status they feel is due, they must have children. These rivalries, therefore, highlight the social expectations surrounding women and childbirth because the rival women have fulfilled their expectations to reproduce and thus support the family livelihood.

This type-scene also highlights the role of God in procreative activity. Despite the women's intentions and prayers to have children, God ultimately controls conception.[45] Placing procreation in the context of God's favor or lack of favor calls into question the procreative powers that God gives to humans in the Genesis 1 narrative, indicating that in some ways this procreative power to "be fruitful and multiply" is contingent on God. In other words, the barrenness texts in Genesis indicate that God has the power to revoke the blessing and gift of procreation, just as God acts in providing humans with procreative power in the first place. The chosen wife is often the barren one. She is unable to produce offspring so desperately needed to maintain status, family inheritance, and the family's livelihood. When Rachel finds herself in this predicament, she exclaims to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (Gen. 30:1). Jacob responds by appealing to the mystery of God's role in conception, saying, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (Gen 30:2). These narratives in serve to demonstrate God's power over procreative capacity, and therefore over the life of Israel as God's people.[46]

[45] Timothy Willis, "Barren, Barrenness," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: A-C*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 400.

[46] Willis, 400–401.

Issues of family lineage and inheritance are also raised in these barrenness texts. Before Abraham has any children, he cries out to God, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" (Gen. 15:2). Although the name "Eliezer of Damascus" is uncertain, it is thought that Abraham refers to his servant, Eliezer, who will inherit Abraham's land in lieu of a son.[47] This lament to God regarding his lack of offspring is insightful because it depicts the pressure on families to reproduce in order to maintain a family lineage. Abraham is clearly distressed by the fact that he has no offspring, and thus no heir to inherit his property, however an even greater issue is at stake. In ancient Israel, children were often understood as a means of transcending death. Not only do sons inherit the family land, they also continue the life of the father. As Westermann writes, "To have no son does not mean to have no heir, but to have no future."[48] This sentiment is reflected in the custom of Levirate marriage, in which a brother marries the widow of his deceased brother "so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel" (Deut. 25:6). This custom of Levirate marriage provides a way for a man without a child to carry the name, and thus carry the self, beyond death.[49] Transcending death through one's lineage is also clearly exhibited in the story of Absalom, where he erects a pillar because he has "no son to keep my name alive" (2 Sam. 18:18). Erecting a pillar for one's self was considered a method of remembrance, and thus a manner of transcending death for one who did not have a

[47] von Rad, *Genesis*, 178.

[48] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg PubHouse, 1985), 220.

[49] Millar Burrows, "Levirate Marriage in Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 59, no. 1 (1940): 31.

child to fill that need.[50] Procreation, therefore, served not just social and economic needs, but also existential needs pertaining to transcending death.

Inheritance issues related to sons from multiple wives are also important in these barrenness texts. In the case of Jacob and his wives, Jacob loves Rachel more (cf. Gen. 29:30) but Leah bears the first four sons (cf. Gen 29:32-35). Traditionally, Leah's oldest son, Reuben, should receive the first inheritance; however Rachel's son, Joseph, is Jacob's favorite (cf. Gen 37:3). Eventually, all twelve of Jacob's sons (through Leah and her concubine, Zilpah, and Rachel and her concubine, Bilhah) become the twelve of the tribes of Israel, but it is Joseph who ultimately receives the most promising blessing from his father (cf. Gen. 49). The Deuteronomist addresses cases such as Jacob's, where an unloved wife bears the first son who should be due his father's inheritance. In such cases, the Deuteronomic law requires that the father "is not permitted to treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the disliked, who is the firstborn" (Deut. 21:16). This legal provision acknowledges the problems of inheritance in families where emotional relationships seem threaten recognition of biological birth orders.[51] This legislation is insightful to pronatalism because it highlights how emotional attachment was at the center of Israelite marriage. Companionship in marriage mattered, and often was in tension with societal customs and practices such as inheritance. This is paramount for women in ancient Israelite society because their social status was integrally tied to their ability to reproduce. Even if a woman was loved, she still needed to bear children for the vitality of the family and for her status in society.

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[50] P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, vol. 9, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984), 407–8.

[51] Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 138.

These themes of social standing, God's control over procreative activity, and maintaining family lineage and inheritance remain active and important themes throughout the Hebrew Bible, thereby forwarding positive associations between procreation and God's blessing. Psalm 127 and Psalm 128 illustrate this point well. Highlighting the connection between God's blessing and childbirth, these psalms read "Sons are indeed a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward… happy is the man who has a quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:3, 5), and "your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table" (Psalm 128: 3). Both of these pronatal sentiments are expressed within the context of God's blessing. J. Clinton McCann writes that these psalms articulate a "theology of blessing as [the psalms celebrate] the daily realms of work and family as gifts of God."[52] Just as a large family was celebrated in order to maintain economic stability in the ancient Israel agricultural society, these psalms also further procreation as celebrated and desired.

Exceptions to Pronatalism in the Hebrew Bible: Hannah

Finally, it must be noted that stories in the Hebrew Bible indicate that scripture is not monolithic in its treatment of pronatalism. Hannah's story of barrenness offers a diversion from the typical emphasis on procreation in the Hebrew Bible, highlighting the societal pressures to have children. Hannah's story in 1 Samuel 1 mirrors the "agon of the barren wife" type-scene described above. Hannah is barren. Her rival wife, Peninnah, uses her own fertility to shame and provoke Hannah, taunting Hannah for her inability to have children. In the narrative, Hannah's barrenness is described as the work

[52] J. Clinton McCann, "The Book of Psalms," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 1201.

of the Lord, highlighting the ways that people in society often construed barrenness as lack of favor with God (cf. 1 Sam. 1:5-6).[53] Hannah even cries out to God in response to Peninnah's taunting, asking God to "look on the misery of your servant" and asking God to remember her and "give to your servant a male child" (1 Sam. 1:11).

Hannah's story is insightful to pronatalism in the Hebrew Bible because she is driven by Peninnah's taunting to ask God for a child (cf. 1 Sam. 1:6,10). In essence, the social conditions surrounding Hannah's barrenness drive her to beg God for a son. In the barrenness texts of Genesis described above, Sarah and Rachel each desire a child to maintain or achieve some level of social status as well. Since family lineage and inheritance passed through the father, it should not have mattered for the family that their rival wives bore children. However, Sarah and Rachel's conflicts with their rival wives and their own agony in barrenness indicate that childbearing bore more significance than just family wellbeing; their social statuses depended on them having children. Hannah's story accentuates this claim. When she is barren, she calls on God to remember her and provide her with a child because she is miserable.

Elkanah and Hannah's treatment of barrenness in this text downplays the role of inheritance in ancient Israelite society. Although Hannah experiences social pressures to have children, her husband, Elkanah stresses his love for her regardless of her infertility. Elkanah appeals to Hannah to accept her barrenness, and asks if he is "not more to [her] than ten sons?" (1 Sam. 1:8). In his insistence, Elkanah clearly places himself at the center of the problem, rather than recognizing Hannah's agony in her barrenness.[54] In

[53] Bruce C. Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 975.

[54] Birch, 975.

this move, it seems that Elkanah views companionship as more important than the issue of inheritance from direct procreative activity.[55] Hannah's actions also downplay the role of inheritance. She rejects Elkanah's appeals for companionship and instead pleads to God for a child. It is striking that in Hannah's pleading to God, she promises to dedicate her son as a Nazarite (cf. 1 Sam. 1:11). Nazarites were consecrated to be of service to God.[56] In dedicating her son as a Nazarite, Hannah effectively removes her son from family issues by sending him to the temple, therefore nullifying any concerns of inheritance or family lineage. It is clear, therefore, that for Hannah, her social standing related to her barrenness is more important than any concern for inheritance or maintaining a family lineage.

Exceptions to Pronatalism in the Hebrew Bible: Eunuchs

Eunuchs provide another diversion from the typical portrayal of pronatalism in the Hebrew Bible. Eunuchs are generally men who are sterile through physical emasculation of the penis or testes.[57] The pentateuchal law in Leviticus 21:16-23 prohibits eunuchs from participating in priestly duties related to offering sacrifices to God. The law in Deuteronomy 23:2 seems to go further, prohibiting eunuchs from being "admitted to the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:2). Given the heavy weight of procreative potential in ancient Israelite society, discussed above, it is not surprising that eunuchs were generally alienated from participation in social and cultic assemblies. However, some eunuchs nevertheless achieved positions of honor within the Lord's

[55] Frederick J. Gaiser, "Sarah, Hagar, Abraham--Hannah, Peninnah, Elkanah: Case Studies in Conflict," *Word & World* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 280–81.

[56] Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 2nd edition, vol. 10, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2008), 8.

[57] F. Scott Spencer, "Eunuch," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: D-H*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 355.

house and the courts. Isaiah 56 documents promises given to eunuchs who "hold fast [to God's] covenant" to receive "in [God's] house… a monument and a name better than sons and daughters" (Isaiah 56:4-5).

Isaiah 56 provides an alternate way for eunuchs to participate in the assembly of the Lord, despite their lack of reproductive potential. Some scholars suggest that eunuchs often served and advanced in royal settings because of their lack of procreative potential (and thus diminished competition in the royal courts).[58] However, the focus of Isaiah 56 seems to be concerned with the inclusion of eunuchs and foreigners, formerly outcast people, into the fold of God and into participation of cultic temple life.[59] Joachim Schaper argues that the passage in Isaiah is in direct contradiction to the law of Deuteronomy and exhibits a case where God abolishes a previous law or custom and institutes a new rule, thereby declaring the law of Deuteronomy 23 void.[60] The passage ends, "Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcast of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered" (Isaiah 56:8). In a time following the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, access to and participation in temple activities was paramount for maintaining civil status.[61] God's affirmation of access to the temple for eunuchs indicates that eunuchs can indeed uphold the covenant of God and therefore should be included in the social life of the Israelites, despite the law in Deuteronomy. Although it is not clear if this was ever implemented in practice, it nonetheless remains an important

[58] Christopher R. Seitz, "The Book of Isaiah 40-66," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 484.

[59] Seitz, 485.

[60] Joachim Schaper, "Rereading the Law: Inner-Biblical Exegesis of Divine Oracles in Ezekiel 44 and Isaiah 56," in *Recht Und Ethik Im Alten Testament: Beiträge Des Symposiums "Das Alte Testament Und Die Kultur Der Moderne" Anlässlich Des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901-1971), Heidelberg, 18.-21. Oktober 2001*, ed. Bernard M. Levinson and Eckart Otto (Münster: Lit, 2004), 133–34.

[61] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 162.

perspective of the relationship between social standing and procreation in ancient Israelite society.

In additions to issues of social standing, this treatment of eunuchs in Isaiah also sheds light on the importance of procreation for transcending death in ancient Israelite society. The text reads that if eunuchs 1) observe the Sabbath, 2) choose what is pleasing to God, and 3) hold fast to the covenant, then God will give them "a monument and a name better than sons and daughters." Notably, this insinuates that means other than procreation exist to transcend death. Jacob Wright and Michael Chan posit that the concerns of the eunuchs in this passage mirror Absalom's concern with his lack of progeny in 2 Samuel 18:18.[62] Since no children exist, a monument, or pillar, is erected so that the names of the eunuchs and Absalom will be remembered after death. Wright and Chan note that the monument God erects for the eunuch "functions as a child would, insofar as it outlives the eunuch and keeps his name alive."[63] Furthermore, the monument that God erects is described as *better* than children for providing the eunuchs with an everlasting name that transcends death. Wright and Chan articulate that these monuments are "superior to a child insofar as the deity himself guarantees its permanence."[64] In the perspective of Isaiah 56, therefore, the need to be remembered after death seems to outweigh even the social pressure to procreate.

The case of the eunuchs in Isaiah 56 highlights the tight degree to which God's covenant and participation in social and cultic life were intimately related to fecundity in Israelite society. This in turn yielded significant social pressure to procreate resulting in

[62] Jacob L. Wright and Michael J. Chan, "King and Eunuch: Isaiah 56:1—8 in Light of Honorific Royal Burial Practices," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 1 (2012): 102.

[63] Wright and Chan, 103.

[64] Wright and Chan, 103.

stigmatization of those who were unable to have children, such as eunuchs. Furthermore, concerns around transcending death were integrally related to procreation since children were viewed as the primary means of maintaining one's family name and being remembered after death. These concerns provide the foundation from which pronatalism later spread in Christianity, even though the nature of God's covenant, modes of participation in religious life, and avenues of transcending death shift dramatically as Christianity develops. As understandings of God's covenant, participation in social and cultic life, and means of transcending death shift, it is reasonable to reexamine pronatal sentiments derived from these facets of Israelite society.

Kinship and Pronatalism in the Hebrew Bible

Underlying this thread of pronatalism throughout the Hebrew Bible are different ways of thinking about how to constitute community. Kinship models are integral to this discussion because they are the basic unit in which the command in Genesis 1, to "be fruitful and multiply," is carried out. As kinship models change, conceptualizations of pronatalism within society are also likely to change. In ancient Israel, households made up the basic unit of society.[65] These households were multigenerational, and generally included two or three families who were related by blood and marriage and who lived together in joined houses.[66] These household units provided the structure through which land was inherited and social, economic, and religious life was carried out. Notably, households were not limited to nuclear biological families, but rather rooted in ancestral

[65] King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 39.

[66] Leo G. Perdue, *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 166.

households bound together by the male patriarch.[67] These households collectively owned land. Therefore agricultural practices, labor, and commerce all funneled through this basic kinship unit.

Women played a significant role in the household through childbearing and contribution to the home economy. Women, before marriage, remained under the care of their fathers and once married, joined the family of their husbands.[68] Although women rarely participated in issues of inheritance, economics, politics, or religious life outside of the family, they nonetheless exerted significant authority within the household.[69] Roles related to childbearing and motherhood were highly valued and women's statuses were closely connected to their ability to bear and raise children, particularly in times of war, famine, and disease. In addition to raising children, women were also often responsible for maintaining the household economy by providing food and other provisions.[70] This latter responsibility indicates that women could also achieve a certain level of status by providing economic means for the household to thrive.[71] Children often furthered the economic activity within households because they eventually labored for the family, thereby contributing to the survival of the whole.[72] Children's roles in the economic productivity of the household accentuate the strong pronatal sentiments of early Israelite society and the social pressure placed on women to bear children because the survival of the households depended on successful childbearing.

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[67] King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 36.

[68] King and Stager, 50.

[69] King and Stager, 49.

[70] King and Stager, 50.

[71] Christine Elizabeth Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31* (Berlin: Wde Gruyter, 2001), 78.

[72] Perdue, *Families in Ancient Israel*, 170.

These kinship dynamics in ancient Israelite society are operative in the texts discussed above insofar as procreation was primarily a social and economic concern for families. Families in the Israelite agricultural society needed children to survive, both in the physical and existential sense. As such, children were often construed as a sign of God's blessing, even if conception remained largely enigmatic. For women, children were signs of honor and blessing. In their barrenness, Sarah and Rachel cry out to God for children largely because of their social statuses within their households and the larger clan context. For men, children were integral to the survival of the family. Abraham needed a son not only to inherit the family property, but also to keep the family name alive and thereby transcend death. Children (and in particular sons), therefore served both present and future needs of the family insofar as they a) contributed to the immediate economic needs of the family and b) ensured the survival of the family in the future as means of transcending death. Furthermore, children were so integral to life in ancient Israelite society that participation in the cult was limited to males who had procreative capacity intact, as indicated by the pentatuchal laws of Leviticus 21 and Deuteronomy 23. The Priestly writer of Genesis 1 interprets these economic and societal practices of pronatalism as integral to God's creation of humanity. In positing pronatalism within the story of the creation of humans with the divine command to "be fruitful and multiply," procreation is furthered as integrally related to the purpose for which God created humanity.

Over and against this dominant discourse of pronatalism are occasional voices that suggest alternative values. First, Hannah is barren and ridiculed by Penninah so she cries out to God for a child. Though Elkanah doesn't comprehend Hannah's grief, he

does love her despite her childlessness. Elkanah's actions highlight the central place of emotional attachment in Israelite marriage. Though children were important, marital concerns of companionship were also at play. Indeed, the Deuteronomic law prohibiting a man from favoring the son of the loved wife over the firstborn son of the unloved wife actually legislates companionship as secondary to the customs of inheritance based on biological birth orders, thereby accentuating the role of companionship in marriage. Furthermore, Hannah dedicates her son as a Nazarite, thus removing him from consideration for the family inheritance and therefore highlighting the significant social customs pressuring her to bear a child. Second, Third Isaiah's championing of inclusion of eunuchs in the community based on religious criteria rather than physical criteria challenges the procreative requirement for participation in cultic activities. Additionally, in the Isaiah 56 passage, God provides the faithful eunuchs with a means of transcending death other than through procreative activity, indicating that lack of procreation is not equivalent to lack of life after death.

Together, these examples show that the Hebrew Bible is not monolithic in regards to sentiments of pronatalism. The differing accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 and their subsequent differing emphases on the roles of humanity, the socio-cultural analysis of ancient Israelite society, and the narratives of barrenness recorded in the Hebrew Bible all work to indicate a complex and contextualized understanding of pronatalism. By contextualizing pronatalism in scripture within its historical context, it is then possible to reconceptualize pronatalism today in light of our current socio-economic-environmental contexts.

RECEPTION OF PRONATALISM IN CHRISTIANITY

The role of humanity in the created order ultimately underlies much of this discussion on pronatalism. At varying times, society has emphasized the roles of procreation and companionship present in Genesis 1 and 2 differently. Although it is clear that social status and maintaining a clear family lineage were of utmost importance for procreation in ancient Israelite society, other features of procreation were emphasized for later Christian societies.[73] For example, Augustine viewed sexual lust as the vehicle through which the guilt of sin was transferred to all people.[74] Despite his abhorrence of sex, however, he upheld marriage because it provided an avenue for the production of children. In Augustine's words, marriage "makes something good out of the evil of lust" because it produces children within the confines of a sacramental covenant.[75] As such, concerns about procreation shifted from issues of social standing and inheritance to issues of transmission of sin in the early Christian church. Later, Catholic and Protestant emphases on marriage for companionship and procreation diverged dramatically. Furthermore, socioeconomic, political, and biological contexts greatly influenced conceptions of family, sex, and procreation even within developed societies. A full sociocultural and theological analysis of family, marriage, and kinship throughout Christian tradition is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the following excurses into the kinship models of the early church and the theological developments of Martin

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[73] The value of pronatalism develops in Judaism as well. Though beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the ethnic component of Jewish identity influences the development of pronatalism in different ways in Judaism than in the covenant community of Christianity.

[74] Saint Augustine, *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Clark (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 90.

[75] Saint Augustine, *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, vol. 15, Writings of Saint Augustine (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc, 1955), 13.

Luther will shed light on the ways in which social realities and theological development influence pronatalism and peoples' understanding of God's ordained intention for the role of humanity within the created order.

Kinship in the Patristic Period

Kinship models in the Mediterranean world near the time of Patristic theological developments influenced conceptions of procreation for the early Christian church. Foremost, the Greco-Roman social context of the early Christian church is marked by substantial emphasis on the order of domestic life as a model for public life.[76] The household, therefore, served as a basis for not only the community of the church in Christian contexts, but also for civic responsibility and order in the larger Greco-Roman society. Achieving and maintaining status through birth, wealth, character, personal power, and social connections, both in one's family and in larger society, was of utmost importance.[77] Not surprisingly, people organized themselves according to status. Most early Christians were located socially between the two extremes of status, though some members of the early Christian community likely had some distinction in status, and others were effectively status-less.[78] Christian emphasis on community across levels of social status likely challenged and undermined the existing social structures of the day.

In addition to expectations surrounding status in the public sphere, family dynamics and economic activity within the Greco-Roman world also influenced how Christian communities were organized. Mediterranean family systems were arranged in

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[76] Carolyn Osiek, "The Family in Early Christianity: 'Family Values' Revisited," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (January 1996): 2.

[77] Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 92.

[78] Osiek and Balch, 97.

terms of consanguinity, or blood connection with a common ancestor.[79] Household or family units were composed of blood-related parents and children, as well as slaves and unmarried relatives. The house itself was a place of conducting business just as it was a place to live. This tight connection between family and economic activity meant that people who participated in business with the family or rented space in the family's house would also be included in household unit distinctions.[80] This is important for understanding how early Christians expanded customary family lines to articulate kinship with other people who voluntarily associated with Christianity, rather than just with people who were blood-related or economically involved with households. The interrelatedness between work and the rest of family life made the household the basic unit of production and consumption in the ancient Greco-Roman world.[81] While the father of the family held the highest status, women and children contributed significantly to household production and thus economic success.[82] In terms of pronatalism, children were thus significantly valued for their contribution to the family economy. Christian families exhibited much of these dynamics and were not different from their neighbors in this social organization. In this regard, Christian families exerted significant influence and participation in the economic sphere of life.

Early Christian communities upset the traditional ordering of Greco-Roman society by mixing across customary status lines and across household units. Since family

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[79] Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 29.

[80] Osiek, "The Family in Early Christianity," 11.

[81] Richard Saller, "Women, Slaves, and the Economy of the Roman Household," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 189.

[82] Lynn H. Cohick, "Women, Children, and Families in the Greco-Roman World," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 183.

life modeled the correct ordering of the public sphere, changes in order at the family level no doubt had ramifications at the public level as well. This is most clearly seen in how Christian churches accepted new members. In the Greco-Roman world, voluntary religious associations were understood as integral to all of the human experience.[83] Religion was not an isolated component of life but rather permeated all of daily life and social interactions. Furthermore, all members of the household were expected to participate in domestic religion (in whatever forms and to whatever gods that might be).[84] Thus, conversions to Christianity were significant not only for an individual but also for entire households. When a household accepted baptism, the family leader (presumably the father), also became the leadership for the self-contained "house church," composed of members of the family.[85] However, individuals could also be baptized apart from their families. In these cases, the individuals likely gathered for worship with existing house church communities, challenging the Greco-Roman conception of the household as the basic unit of society.[86] In welcoming new individuals to participate in worship at house churches, Christians effectively began to reject social associations based solely on status or household relation.

This early reordering of social relationships within the household in early Christian churches highlights the way that the early church began to see itself as a surrogate family. This early Christian "surrogate family" transcended traditional ethnic, generational (patrilineal), and geographic boundaries in favor of kinship according to

[83] Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 7.

[84] Osiek, "The Family in Early Christianity," 15.

[85] Osiek, 14.

[86] Osiek, 16.

religious affiliation as disciples of Christ.[87] In essence, Christianity became grafted onto the traditional pattern of family life resulting in strong connections between the church and family, providing the foundation to understand the church itself as the 'household of God (cf. 1 Tim 3:15).[88] These house churches, or surrogate families, were organized around common belief and provided a platform for communal life and a model of the universal church.[89] One can conceive of kinship in Christ, rather than through blood or relationships, because kinship in Christ is marked by similar characteristics as traditional family systems in antiquity.[90] Based on Jesus' teachings, members who voluntarily associated with Christian groups were held similarly to brothers and sisters in ancient Mediterranean family systems. Members of these kinship groups were expected to behave as family. Most notably, when loyalty to God and loyalty to one's blood family were in conflict, members of Christian kinship groups were expected to choose the former.[91] Communal life in Christ, therefore, provided an alternative kinship structure to the traditional Greco-Roman conception of household units.[92] It is important to recognize that Jesus employed kinship language that resulted in a fundamental shift in the understanding of who is kin. In this shift, pronatalism is maintained, though muted, as

[87] Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 59.

[88] John M. G. Barclay, "The Family as the Bearer of Religion in Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Moxnes, Halvor (London: Routledge, 1997), 77.

[89] Osiek, "The Family in Early Christianity," 21.

[90] Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 68.

[91] Hellerman, 66.

[92] Halvor Moxnes, "What Is Family? Problems in Constructing Early Christian Families," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London: Routledge, 1997), 37.

kinship is reconceptualized from economic associations and intimate blood relations to religious affiliation.

Catholicism

Early church theologians understood pronatalism in light of the kinship patterns reflected in the Mediterranean world in antiquity. Issues of blood relations and economic activity no doubt remained significant driving points of theological reflections on pronatalism. In the Greco-Roman world, marriage was understood as a social contract between families driven primarily by economic and political interests.[93] Issues of companionship in marriage, therefore, were of secondary importance. In his treatises written after 410AD, Augustine conceptualized marriage for the three purposes of fidelity, progeny, and sacrament, thereby downplaying the role of companionship in marriage.[94] Children in the Greco-Roman world furthered household economic interests and were therefore necessary. Although Augustine equated the lust of sex with the transmission of sin, he still recognized that children were good. Essentially, Augustine maintained that marriage was good because it repaired the "evil of concupiscence and [made] it excusable," even going so far as to assert that even sex within marriage was only righteous if for the sake of producing children alone.[95] Some later sects of Christianity took Augustine's abhorrence of sex even further, banning it completely and refraining from procreation as a practice of asceticism.[96] In general, however, pronatal

[93] Moxnes, 30.

[94] Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 259.

[95] Reynolds, 274–75.

[96] Everett Ferguson, *Church History: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 231.

sentiments were the foundation of marriage and family life and therefore integral to the Patristic understanding of God's intention for humanity.

In Medieval times, Thomas Aquinas upheld Augustine's correlation between sex and sin; however he also emphasized the role of companionship in marriage based on the fact that that an ongoing relationship between man and woman contributed to properly raising children.[97] In accordance with Greco-Roman thought, both Augustine and Aquinas understood women as inherently secondary to men, with women's primary function to harbor reproductive capabilities.[98] In medieval thought, the man was the "*exemplum* of humanity," the head of the family, and the wife was subordinate and primarily functioned to bear and raise children in society.[99] In terms of pronatalism, the tension between negative connotations of sex and yet positive reproductive activity, therefore, remained at play despite Aquinas' emphasis on companionship.

The Catholic Church has maintained a decidedly pronatal stance over the last 2000 years by strongly articulating the essential qualities of sexual relations within the confines of marriage as 1) unitive, and 2) procreative. In essence, sex must both unite the husband and wife in intimacy (1) and have the potential to generate new life (2). According to Pope John Paul II, this fundamental nature of the marriage act, "written into the actual nature of man and of woman," must be preserved so that marriage "retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to

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[97] Angela McKay, "Aquinas on the End of Marriage," in *Human Fertility: Where Faith and Science Meet : Proceedings of an Interdisciplinary Conference, August 11 & 12, 2006, Washington, DC* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), 65.

[98] Michael Parsons, *Reformation Marriage: The Husband and Wife Relationship in the Theology of Luther and Calvin* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2005), 95.

[99] Parsons, 100.

which man is called."[100] Essentially, any sexual act that removes the procreative potential of sex (such as birth control), or that occurs outside of the confines of marriage between a man and woman, is fundamentally against the natural ontology of sex as God has created it to be. This conception of sex is strongly rooted in the narratives of Genesis 1 and 2, combined to present a holistic representation of sex as God intended. As such, the Catholic Church is unwavering in its support of procreation. Catholic bioethicist William E. May writes that "married couples are called upon to be givers of life; they must recognize that procreation is 'a unique event which clearly reveals that human life is a gift received in order to be given as a gift.'"[101] Procreation, therefore, exists as a fundamental tenet in the Catholic understanding of God's intention and purpose for human life. To question pronatalism is to questions God's intention for humanity itself.

Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther

Catholic conceptions of marriage, sex, and reproduction provide the backdrop for examining pronatalism in the Protestant traditions. Martin Luther built on Aquinas' emphasis of companionship in marriage, even though he maintained many similar beliefs surrounding marriage, sex, and reproduction described above. Foremost, Luther rejected the Catholic notion of marriage as a sacrament and instead predicated his theology of marriage on his understanding of two kingdoms, one of spiritual rule and one of temporal (worldly) rule, where God arranges society by his Word.[102] According to Luther, the origin of marriage is found in the will of God as God has ordained the relationship

[100] John Paul VI, "Humanae Vitae," July 25, 1968, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.

[101] William E. May, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 31. Quoting from Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Evangelium Vitae (no. 92).

[102] Parsons, *Reformation Marriage*, 109–10.

between husband and wife to be in the temporal realm.[103] Marriage then, is vocational, a call to live into relationship as God ordered it to be. In this argument, Luther effectively opens the theological (and practical) door for divorce. If marriage occurs in the temporal realm, then it can only reflect the perfection of love between the spouses in the spiritual realm, yet never realize that perfection. As such, marriage in the spiritual realm would be the indissolvable ideal. Marriage in the temporal realm, however, would be subject to actions that destroy the marital bond. Although Luther never advocated for divorce (except in extreme cases such as infidelity) his conception of marriage as a vocational call to live into relationship as God ordered it to be, rather than as a sacrament and thus indissoluble, paved the way for John Milton and other theologians to draw the rational conclusions that legitimized divorce. [104]

Luther's reframing of marriage in the temporal realm rather than as a sacrament highlights the importance of companionship between the spouses in the Protestant tradition. Luther draws primarily on Genesis 2 to inform his understanding of marriage and the relationship between the spouses.[105] In his commentary on Genesis 2:22 Luther writes that God divinely ordered the union between man and woman. He elaborates the scene of God presenting the woman to the '*adam* writing, "'Behold, this is your bride… with whom you shall beget children.' Without a doubt Adam received her with great joy, just as even now in this corrupt nature the mutual love of bridegroom and bride is

[103] Parsons, 142–43.

[104] James Turner Johnson, "Marriage as Covenant in Early Protestant Thought: Its Development and Implications," in *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective*, ed. John Witte and Eliza Ellison (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 127.

[105] Mickey L Mattox, "Order in the House?: The Reception of Luther's Orders Teaching in Early Lutheran Genesis Commentaries," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 14, no. 2 (August 2012): 112.

extraordinary."[106] Luther then uses this passage to describe how his views of marriage, sex, and celibacy differ dramatically from those of the Catholic Church. Luther rejects celibacy on the grounds that the union between a man and woman is inherently good and not sinful.[107] He upholds sexual activity as both a means of procreation and also a means of increasing love and companionship between husband and wife, a companionship that is inherently aligned with the order of the world as God created it.[108] Practically, this theological grounding serves to shift the understanding of marriage from a means of procreation and a remedy for concupiscence to a "covenant of fidelity."[109]

Luther's conception of marriage and procreation were fundamentally rooted in his concern for the social and political structure of society as it reflected God's intended order for all of creation. Therefore, companionship in marriage was more heavily weighted than procreative potential. In his treatise on the *Estate of Marriage*, Luther writes that in marriage, "husband and wife cherish one another, become one, serve one another."[110] This theme of mutual companionship not only precedes procreation but also is manifest in procreation. In contemplating his role as father to his own children, Luther recognized "how husbands and wives were able to do together what God commanded of them because God had created them in his image."[111] This emphasis on companionship is indicative of Luther's concern that family relationships reflect the social and political

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[106] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, American edition, vol. 1 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 134.

[107] Luther, 1:135.

[108] Parsons, *Reformation Marriage*, 171.

[109] Parsons, 172.

[110] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: The Christian in Society II*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Walther I. Brandt, American edition, vol. 45 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 43.

[111] Carter Lindberg, "Martin Luther on Marriage and the Family," *Perichoresis*, 2004, 38.

structure of society.[112] He understood marriage within the framework of God's order in the social world; therefore the bonds of marriage were themselves indicative of the integrity of the larger society. The Reformation time period was marked by increasing attention to the nuclear family as the primary unit of society, discussed below. As larger household units were replaced with smaller nuclear family units, relationships between husbands and wives took on increased importance as marriage shifted from an economic institution to a more relational bond.

Although Luther's conception of marriage is decidedly more focused on companionship than Augustine or Aquinas', he still strongly articulates the procreative purpose of marriage. Luther conceives of procreation as co-operation with God, taking the command of Genesis 1:28, to "be fruitful and multiply" as a "continually active and creative word of God."[113] Indeed, Luther's theology is decidedly pronatal. Though he never breaks with Augustine's conflation of sex and sin, he does argue that in marriage one can express sexuality without guilt or sin.[114] In part, this pronatalism and pro-marriage stance stems from his understanding of 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul writes, "the husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband" (1 Cor. 7:3). Luther understands marriage to provide the proper context for sex wherein God "[forgives] of what otherwise [God] punishes and condemns."[115] In this

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[112] Johnson, "Marriage as Covenant in Early Protestant Thought: Its Development and Implications," 129.

[113] Parsons, *Reformation Marriage*, 170.

[114] Trevor O'Reggio, "Martin Luther: Marriage and the Family as a Remedy for Sin," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 51, no. 1 (2013): 50.

[115] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Commentaries on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15; Lectures on 1 Timothy*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, American edition, vol. 28 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 13.

manner, marriage itself is a remedy against lust and unchastity.[116] Citing Genesis 1:28, Luther writes that Christians are to "firmly believe that God himself instituted [marriage], brought husband and wife together, and ordained that they should beget children and care for them."[117] His emphasis on procreation combined with a relatively positive view of sex within the confines of marriage furthers pronatalism just as strongly as both the Patristic and medieval theologians.

In terms of pronatalism, Luther opened a theological door to reproductive freedom by emphasizing companionship as a primary purpose of marriage alongside the twofold purpose of marriage for procreation and a remedy for lust. Much of Luther's thought emphasizing marriage for the purpose of companionship can be linked to socio-economic changes in society during his time, discussed below. As socio-economic shifts continue in society through our modern age, positions on the role of family (and sex, marriage, and reproduction) are also likely to change. Though Luther never drew these paths, companionship in marriage provides a logical avenue for 1) equality between men and women (because women no longer are strictly tied to reproductive potential), 2) proliferation of birth control methods (because procreation is no longer the primary purpose of marriage), and 3) gay and lesbian marriage (again, because the purpose of marriage can be articulated as companionship rather than reproductive potential). These conclusions are made possible, though not inevitable, by Luther's developments on the role of companionship in marriage. Many other social, economic, and political shifts

[116] Jane E. Strohl, "Luther on Marriage, Sexuality, and the Family," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 375.

[117] Luther, *Luther's Works: The Christian in Society II*, 45:38.

must occur before these positions might be culturally acceptable, and many people (theologians included) would still reject these conclusions altogether.

Kinship in the Reformation Period

Conceptions of kinship were dramatically different in Europe during the Reformation period than they were in the Greco-Roman world during the Patristic period. Most notably, the importance of the nuclear core family unit increased as social life became more inward looking. The late 14th and early 15th centuries were relative times of peace and prosperity following the Hundred Years' War and the plague.[118] The population density in Europe had diminished significantly during the preceding catastrophic decades, thereby providing an opening for economic activity related to rebuilding. As societies stabilized, people had more time to devote to reading, art, and education resulting in a general turn towards interest in the individual.[119] Throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, the authority of the Catholic Church and the lineage of the powerful families of the medieval times began to erode in light of increased individual conscience.[120] This socio-cultural context influenced Protestant conceptions of the role of family, and thus marriage and sex. As social life became more inward looking, Protestant emphasis on companionship within marriage and the primacy of family as the origin and expression of Christian morality became the norm.[121]

These significant shifts in the role of the family in the social sphere continued to penetrate into the 17th and 18th centuries and were eventually the familial models of

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[118] Brian W. Grant, *The Social Structure of Christian Families: A Historical Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 59.

[119] Grant, 60.

[120] Grant, 66.

[121] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 100.

organizing that were transplanted to America. The increasing individual conscious and rise of the nuclear family ultimately resulted in a) increased attention on the relationships within the husband-wife and parent-child paradigms and b) decreased connection with extended kin members and extra-familial parties.[122] For example, in England in the early 17th century, an individual was only considered a full member of adult society when he or she was married; the purpose of childhood, appropriately, was preparation for marriage.[123] Furthermore, society in the Reformation period valued strong and closely-knit families under the assumption that strong families would translate to strong societies.[124] This new emphasis on the family relationships and marriage as companionship ultimately gave rise to the modern individualism and nuclear family ideal that is present in American society.[125]

All of these shifts influenced how pronatalism functioned in Christian society during the Reformation period. In pre-Reformation Europe, children were seen primarily in light of furthering economic status and political interests by maintaining property (inheritance) and continuation of male-lineage.[126] However, as Protestant thought infiltrated society, marriages and family life became more insular and morally focused while economic and political interests became more transactional and commercial in nature.[127] As Luther and other Reformation theologians added theological reflections to

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[122] Stone, 95.

[123] Eric Josef Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Blackwell Pub, 1994), 106.

[124] Carle C. Zimmerman, *Family and Civilization*, ed. F. Stuart Chapin, Harper's Social Science Series (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 514.

[125] Grant, *The Social Structure of Christian Families*, 72.

[126] Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, 88.

[127] Stone, 100.

the role of companionship within marriage, they further upheld the nuclear family and idealized the husband-wife relationship.[128] The nuclear family, therefore, became the appropriate context for living a Christian life. In terms of pronatalism, this shift in societal and kinship organization (the withdrawal of the nuclear family from community life) resulted in more emphasis on relational bonds within the family (between husband and wife and between parents and child), thereby increasing affect individualism.[129] Having and raising children, therefore, became a responsibility that rested solely on the nuclear family and expressed rightly ordered Christian morality.

The above analysis briefly highlights some of the various conceptions of procreation, sex, marriage, and kinship in Christian thought and culture that have evolved over the last 2000 years. These historical and theological underpinnings will be valuable when considering the current societal structures and theological landscape of western culture. Two clear implications of the above analysis must be noted. First, Christian theologians generally agree that the normative, ontological nature of sex is 1) relational and 2) procreative. While Catholic and Protestant thought diverged on the relative weights of each of these purposes of sex they nevertheless share common roots in the narratives of Genesis 1 and 2. Furthermore, these purposes of sex still function prominently in conversations about sexual ethics and family dynamics today. Second, societal, economic, and environmental contexts impart significant influence on the ideology and theology of sex, procreation, and family structure. As cultural contexts change, expectations around procreation and kinship also change. This will prove to be

[128] Charles J. Reid, "The History of the Family," in *The Family*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill and Dietmar Mieth (London: SCM Press, 1995), 16.

[129] Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, 149–50.

significant when examining western culture and Christianity today in light of climate change.

PRONATALISM RE-EXAMINED

The reception of pronatalism throughout Christian history sheds insight into understanding and contextualizing pronatalism today. It is clear from this discussion that the Christian tradition has thoroughly understood God's command, "to be fruitful and multiply" as integral to the nature of humanity as created by God. However, as discussed in the theological developments made by Luther and subsequent theologians, it remains clear that despite a soundly pronatal theology that emerged from interpretations of the Genesis text, room nonetheless remains for renewed emphasis on the companionship aspect of God's intention for humanity. Furthermore, the pronatal sentiments described above were largely driven by the socio-economic-environmental contexts of families in those time periods. As these contexts change, it is pertinent to reflect anew on the role of reproduction in societies with vastly different associations related to social status, inheritance, transcending death, economic stability, and environmental realities. Guided by feminist theology, the following exposition will draw firmly on the biblical texts discussed above and on Luther's work to explicate an ethical position that Christians living in first world contexts should not procreate just because scripture tells them to do so. Rather, these Christians should contextualize procreation by reflecting on the implications of reproduction within their own socio-economic-environmental contexts.

Today's Context: Climate Change

As Jürgen Moltmann articulates in his introduction to *God in Creation*, the environmental crisis is "the beginning of a life and death struggle for creation on this

earth."[130] There is enormous scientific consensus that human activities are the dominant cause of global warming. According to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations."[131] Though sobering, this statement is also hopeful. If humans are causing climate change through greenhouse gas emissions, then humans can also be part of the solution to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. People in upper socioeconomic classes in the world, and people who live in the United States in particular, produce more greenhouse gas emissions per capital than the majority of the rest of the world. In 2014 alone, the United States produced 16.49 metric tons of carbon dioxide per capita, compared to the 4.97 metric tons of carbon dioxide per capita produced globally.[132] When countries are delineated by income, those countries with high-income (defined as a Gross National Income per capita over $12,235 in 2016) produced 10.98 metric tons of carbon dioxide per capita, compared to 3.48 metric tons of carbon dioxide per capita produced by low and middle-income countries combined.[133] This comparison demonstrates that people in the United States and other high income earning countries disproportionately produce more greenhouse gas emissions and thus have contribute more significantly to global climate change.

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[130] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, xi.

[131] IPCC, 2013, "Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change" (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1535.

[132] The World Bank Group, "CO2 Emissions (Metric Tons per Capita)," The World Bank | Data, 2018, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC?locations=US-1W&name_desc=true.

[133] The World Bank Group, "CO2 Emissions (Metric Tons per Capita)," The World Bank | Data, 2018, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC?locations=US-XD-XO.

Climate change is potentially the greatest public health concern of our time. According to the *Humana Impact Report on Climate Change* compiled by the Global Humanitarian Forum in Geneva in 2009, "climate change is already seriously affecting hundreds of millions of people today… making it the greatest emerging humanitarian challenge of our time."[134] The report continues to say that "developing countries bear over nine-tenths of the climate change burden: 98 percent of the seriously affected and 99 percent of all deaths from weather-related disasters, along with over 90 percent of the total economic losses."[135] The IPCC found that weather events are becoming more frequent and more extreme, with the number of weather-related disasters (including storms, hurricanes, floods, heat waves, and droughts) increasing dramatically both in recent history and in future weather projections.[136] Each of these weather-related disasters carry a plethora of public health challenges, from access to medical assistance, to exposure to disease, to shortages of fresh food and water, in addition to infrastructure and economic disruption. The Global Humanitarian Forum Report surmises, "By the year 2030, the lives of 660 million people are expected to be seriously affected, either by natural disasters caused [by] climate change or through gradual environmental degradation."[137] It is fair to say that climate change poses one of the greatest public health concerns humanity has ever seen.

Highlighting the connection between climate change and public health is of paramount importance for furthering efforts to mitigate climate change. In addition to the

[134] Global Humanitarian Forum, "The Anatomy of A Silent Crisis," 2009, 2, http://www.ghf-ge.org/human-impact-report.pdf.

[135] Global Humanitarian Forum, 3.

[136] IPCC, 2013, "Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change," 111–13.

[137] Global Humanitarian Forum, "The Anatomy of A Silent Crisis," 12.

direct health threats of extreme weather events discussed above, climate change also poses a number of indirect health threats. For example, food yields, pathogen reproduction rates, the range and activity of disease vectors (such as mosquitoes), and water quality and quantity are all under threat due to changes in climate.[138] Inflated food prices due to decreased crop yields, in turn, has the potential to rapidly disrupt economic stability all around the world, furthering public health issues related to malnutrition, hunger, disease susceptibility, and premature death.[139]

Though people in high-income countries contribute significantly more to climate change in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, climate change disproportionally affects people living in poverty worldwide. In the face of weather-related natural disasters, those with economic means often have the ability to rebuild, recuperate health (if possible), and physically relocate (if necessary). Conversely, people without resources to respond in this way in the wake of disaster are often left without housing, without food and water, and much more susceptible to disease.[140] Theologian and ethicist Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda sums the problem well, "caused overwhelmingly by the world's high-consuming people, climate change is wreaking death and destruction first and foremost on impoverished people, who are also disproportionally people of color."[141]

This social context of climate change should motivate Christians to respond to climate change with even more fervor, particularly Christians who find themselves in the

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[138] Tony McMichael, Hugh Montgomery, and Anthony Costello, "Health Risks from Climate Change," *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 344, no. 7849 (2012): 27.

[139] McMichael, Montgomery, and Costello, 27.

[140] A. J. McMichael, A. Nyong, and C. Corvalan, "Global Environmental Change and Health: Impacts, Inequalities, and the Health Sector," *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 336, no. 7637 (2008): 192.

[141] Cynthia D Moe-Lobeda, "Climate Change as Climate Debt: Forging a Just Future," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2016): 28.

upper socioeconomic classes of the first world. All humans are vulnerable to the threat of climate change, but some people are vastly more vulnerable than others. For example, one public health study estimated that in the year 2000, climate change accounted for over 150,000 deaths world- wide, 88% of whom were children.[142] Furthermore, millions of the people who had little role in causing climate change will be displaced by climate change due to extreme weather events and sea level rise. In 2016 alone 23.5 million people were newly displaced by extreme weather events (primarily drought).[143] People who are displaced are often more vulnerable to extreme weather events, and in turn, often implicated in conflicts surrounding access to food, water, and medical care.[144]

Populations of people in first world contexts contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, however, many sociological factors are at play in population growth and decline. It should be noted that sociologically, birthrates only decline after mortality rates decrease.[145] As child mortality declines, many traditions still encourage families to have many children leading to environmental pressures if birthrates remain high. However, social development also shows that birthrates are negatively correlated with socioeconomic conditions; as socioeconomic statuses increase, birthrates tend to decrease.[146] In modern times, female education is also prominently linked to reducing

[142] Perry E. Sheffield and Philip J. Landrigan, "Global Climate Change and Children's Health: Threats and Strategies for Prevention," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119, no. 3 (2011): 291.

[143] Oxfam, "People in Poorer Countries Five Times More Likely to Be Displaced by Extreme Weather," Oxfam America, November 2, 2017, https://www.oxfamamerica.org/press/people-in-poorer-countries-five-times-more-likely-to-be-displaced-by-extreme-weather/.

[144] McMichael, Montgomery, and Costello, "Health Risks from Climate Change," 28.

[145] Ralph Thomlinson, *Population Dynamics: Causes and Consequences of World Demographic Change* (New York: Random House, 1965), 15.

[146] Thomlinson, 16.

the birthrate in both developing and developed countries.[147] These sociological conditions are pertinent to this discussion on pronatalism because as birthrates decline and socioeconomic statuses increase, greenhouse gas emissions also tend to increase, as demonstrated above. Furthermore, population growth tends to be slower in first world contexts than in third world contexts.[148] Despite differences in rates of population growth, people in first world contexts still contribute more to greenhouse gas emissions than people living in developing world contexts. As such, people living in first world contexts can still contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by choosing not to reproduce themselves. Although the population growth of first world countries tend to be low, maintaining large population sizes still results in significant greenhouse gas emissions by people in those countries.

People living in upper socioeconomic classes in developed countries produce significantly more greenhouse gases than people living in developing countries with low-income, yet people who live in poverty disproportionally face the challenges and health risks associated with climate change. As such, people in upper socioeconomic class contexts have an ethical imperative to address the causes of climate change under the principle of commensurate burdens and benefits; those who reap the benefits of high greenhouse gas emissions should also face the burdens associated with climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions. Christians in high-income earning countries have an additional reason to address climate change out of love for neighbor as an expression of the kenotic love of God (discussed below). As discussed in the introduction,

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[147] Helen Ginn Daugherty, *An Introduction to Population*, 2nd edition (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 181.

[148] Daugherty, 218.

anthropogenic climate change can be described as too many people consuming too many of earth's non-renewable resources that are sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Since populations of people in first world contexts contribute more to greenhouse gas emissions (and thus climate change) than populations of people in developing nations, Christians living in first world contexts should consider the ethical ramifications of reproduction within the environmental context of climate change.

Kenosis and Love of Neighbor

Christians have a theological commitment to love the neighbor, as is described in Jesus' words to the apostles in John 13:34, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34, NRSV). This commandment of Christ-like love (*agape*) is the underlying foundation for an ethical Christian response to climate change. As discussed above, the earth is currently undergoing massive changes as a result of climate change. Millions of people all around the world are living with the threat and reality of climate change and have been, are being, and will be subjected to extreme weather events that threaten their lives. A theological response to climate change must include an affirmation of the importance of health for all people and the environment. This claim is validated anthropocentrically because humanity cannot flourish without the natural world.[149] This claim is also validated theocentrically because God created the whole world and all that is in it; therefore all of the created order is good (cf. Genesis 1).

[149] Humanity is dependent on the created order for a plethora of basic necessities, often termed 'environmental services.' These services provide everything from food and fresh water to climate and disease regulation. This is an anthropogenic argument because environmental services see the natural world as a means to the end of human flourishing, without considering the natural world in and of itself. See Joseph Alcamo and Elena Bennett, "Ecosystems and Their Services," in *Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: A Framework for Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2003), 57.

Furthermore, Christians are called to action to love one another. If the health of people and the environment all over the world are threatened as a result of climate change (primarily due to greenhouse gas emissions by people in the United States and other high-income earning countries), then Christians living in those countries have a theological imperative to address climate change out of concern for the other (i.e love of neighbor). Appropriate Christian ethical responses to climate change might consist of a variety of actions such as reducing personal greenhouse gas emissions, advocating for policies that limit greenhouse gas emissions from high-income earning countries, or seeking avenues of reparations for people in low-income countries who are experiencing the burdens of climate change. Additionally, Christians might also reconsider social and cultural commitments to pronatalism in light of these concerns for the health of people and the environment. The above examination of pronatalism, companionship, and kinship in the Hebrew Bible and in Luther's theology provided support for this recontextualization of pronatalism in today's world.

Christians in first world contexts should also consider the environmental ramifications of reproduction out of concern for the ecological integrity of the whole created order. This concern is rooted in the conception of kenosis, described by theologians Simone Weil and Sallie McFague. Weil presents an ethic of love that stems from her understanding of creation, of the kenotic act whereby God emptied God's self in creation, denying God's self for our sake and in turn "giving us the possibility of denying ourselves for [God]."[150] Weil recognized that God is utterly transcendent and therefore one can only love God indirectly through a) religious ceremonies, b) the beauty of the

[150] Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Crauford (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 89.

world, and c) our neighbor.[151] In order to love the neighbor, Weil attests that we must empty ourselves just as God emptied God's self for us so that we can truly attend to the needs of others. In essence, Weil might contest that love is, at its core, attention to the realities of the world with particular attention directed to the neighbor so that both self and neighbor can be oriented correctly towards God.

McFague applies Weil's conception of kenosis and love of neighbor in the context of concern for the ecological integrity of the earth in light of anthropogenic climate change. McFague attests that kenosis provides an avenue to pay attention to the "otherness" that surrounds us as individuals.[152] It mandates that we recognize relatedness both within the human arena and across the created order so that the interdependence of abundant life can be realized.[153] When selfish endeavors are put aside, we empty ourselves and instead attend to the needs of the other, which in turn empowers all to seek flourishing in life. McFague argues that in kenotic living, Christians choose to give up the selfishness of power, possessions, and consumption and instead attend to the interdependence of the created order.[154] In this vein, Christians living in first world contexts might choose to refrain from procreation in a kenotic act of love for the other. In choosing to not have children, Christians participate in God's kenotic act of creation by attending to a) the needs of the created order to maintain ecological integrity and b) the needs of people all around the world suffering from the effects of climate change.

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[151] Weil, 83.

[152] Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint*, UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 144.

[153] McFague, 147.

[154] McFague, 166–67.

Participation in kenosis as an act of love for the neighbor is also rooted in the gospel narrative. Jesus deemphasized the natural family and rejected the necessity to build a nationalistic or religious identity in his ministry. With his family in the temple Jesus proclaims, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). On the cross Jesus reassigned family lines between his disciple John and his mother saying to his mother "woman, here is your son," and to his disciple, "Here is your mother" (John 19:26-27). Like an olive tree with branches grafted in, so too God grafts in those who believe to be brothers and sisters in the kingdom of God (cf. Rom 11:17-24, Gal. 3:26-29). By expanding the definition of who "belongs" as a part of the family, nation, or faith community, Jesus downplayed social constructs that defined people by highlighting their common humanity as children of God. In terms of procreation, this suggests that kenotic acts of love should not just be limited to people within family relationships. Rather, since humanity exists within the whole created order, Jesus' expansive understanding of the Kingdom of God validates limiting procreation out of concern for the whole created order and in particular people around the world affected by climate change.

Pronatalism Re-Examined

In light of the context of climate change and disproportional greenhouse gas emissions by people in high-income earning countries, one must ask if the pronatal sentiments reflected in Genesis 1 that persist throughout the Hebrew Bible and into Christian theology should be re-examined in our current context. It is clear that we are living in a world in which the ecological stability present in the last 11,700 years (i.e., the Holocene) is shifting. Post-Industrial Revolution human activities in the biosphere are

disrupting life on earth by contributing to the extinction of many species on earth, upending the ecological stability that has been present for all of human written history.[155]

The Priestly account of Genesis 1 was written in the context of an agrarian society concerned with scarcity of food and provisions. God commanded humanity to "be fruitful and multiply." In the ancient Israelite society human fertility (through reproduction) was intimately tied to fertility of the land itself. Families required children to work the land and produce enough food for families to live, and in turn reproduce. The Priestly account of Genesis, consequently, bestows a vision of the flourishing of all of creation where each part of creation is provided for and contributes to the health of the whole.

The current ecological context suggests a different relationship between humans and the earth. Like the vision in Genesis 1, humans are not distinct from the land that they depend on for food, water, shelter, and more. Unlike the vision of Genesis 1, humans (and particularly people living in first world contexts) have exerted themselves to the detriment of the whole created order. Anthropogenic climate change driven by unchecked consumption of earth's resources and greenhouse gas emissions by first world populations has tipped the ecological balance once present. The original settings of Genesis 1 and the divine command to "be fruitful and multiply" reflect the agricultural position of ancient Israelite society. However, our current environmental position reflects a different relationship between people and the rest of the created order. As such, it is pertinent to re-consider the divine command to "be fruitful and multiply" in our time in light of concern for the whole created order and the flourishing of all creation.

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[155] Jill S. Schneiderman, "The Anthropocene Controversy," in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. Richard Grusin (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 182.

Human interdependence with the rest of the created order is furthered in the Yahwist account of Genesis 2. In the Yahwist's account, the *'adam* (earthling/man) is created from the *'adama* (arable land). Not only are people and animals made from the dust of the earth, but in their agrarian context they also serve the dust of the earth and depend on the dust of the earth for their lives and livelihood. Should the land be threatened, the very existence of the *'adam* would be threatened as well. Furthermore, God creates both the *'adam* and the animals out of the same material, and presents the animals to the *'adam* as viable companions. As discussed above, themes of companionship in life emerge from the narrative in Genesis 2. These themes of companionship suggest that humanity, at the core, was created to be in relationship and communion with each other and the rest of the created order rather than distinguished as separate from the created order or even as individuals.

Companionship itself does not necessitate reproduction, as Luther and other theologians articulated based on their lived experiences and their interpretations of the texts in Genesis. However, cultural and religious norms surrounding marriage, sex, and procreation dramatically influenced theological conceptions of God's intention for humanity and reprduction. In a break from the Catholic theologians, Luther separated marriage from the sacraments of the church, thereby allowing sex within marriage to function in ways that further companionship between men and women, rather than solely for the purpose of reproduction. In essence, Luther argues that procreation is not the sole purpose of marriage; rather marriage and sex are inherently good (so long as sex is only conducted within the confines of marriage between a man and a woman). In separating reproduction from the sole purpose of marriage, the logical door is opened for sexual

activity itself to be seen not only as a means for reproduction, but also as a means for furthering companionship.

It is important to note that the idea of intentionally limiting population size via birth control (or other measures) in light of the ecological crisis has been thoroughly rejected by the Catholic Church.[156] The Catholic position holds that Christians should engage in other means to work towards restoring ecological integrity, such as managing resources and reducing consumption in life.[157] Even the recent document released by Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, describes the current ecological crisis and calls Christians to engage in dialogue and action to address this crisis by attending to greenhouse gas emissions and lifestyle habits that contribute to the ecological crisis, rather than by considering limiting reproduction.[158] Historically, however, efforts to reduced greenhouse gas emissions to the degree necessary to stop or reverse climate change have not been successful. While many efforts are underway to develop new technologies that produce fewer carbon emissions, it is nonetheless pertinent to examine other methods, such as choosing to not reproduce, to address this crisis. Furthermore, the above contextualization of pronatalism in the Hebrew Bible suggests that pronatalism was connected to many of the socio-economic-environmental realities of ancient Israelite society. Likewise, considerations of pronatalism today should also be rooted in current socio-economic-environmental contexts.

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[156] John Paul VI, "Humanae Vitae."

[157] John Paul II, "The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility" (Vatican, 1989).

[158] Francis, "Laudato Si'," Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Intentionally limiting reproduction is often portrayed as contradictory to the command to "be fruitful and multiply" that features so prominently in the discussion of pronatalism. However, the examination above of the barrenness texts in Genesis and Hannah's story in 1 Samuel shed light on how pronatalism is contextualized in the Hebrew Bible and thus should also be contextualized today. The 'agon of the baron wife' type scene illustrates that issues of status for women in ancient Israelite society were crucial. Having a child was not just about living into God's command to be fruitful. Rather, childbearing had real significance for women in a society that recognized the economic value of children. Hannah's story accentuates this claim. The social pressure of Peninnah's taunts drove Hannah to pray to God for a child. Furthermore, Elkanah loved her despite her barrenness and Hannah dedicated her son as a Nazarite, suggesting that issues of inheritance and maintaining a family lineage were of secondary importance to status for woman. These narratives suggest that the imperative to have children is, at least in a significant measure, socially construed. As the roles of women and children in society change, the status of women in conjunction to childbirth is likely to change as well.

Today's first world societies measure status in regards to childbearing in significantly different terms than the ancient Israelite societies did. As discussed above, the kinship and family structures that emerged between the 16th and 18th centuries were ultimately transplanted to Western society. In the context of the nuclear family, decisions surrounding child bearing, childbirth, and child rearing became more privatized. This, in conjunction with the decreasing importance of children in the economic sphere, effectively moved reproductive decision making into the family life and out of the private

arena. Though expectations surrounding reproduction continue to be debated in the public light, the economic and social significance of children is less important in our society today than it was for ancient agricultural societies. Furthermore, women continue to exert more roles in the public sphere. As expectations around reproductive decisions are brought into the private sphere and women exert more prominent roles in public society, societal expectations about childbearing become muted.

In the Hebrew Bible, procreation also plays a fundamental role in inheritance and transcending death. The narratives in Genesis of Abraham and Jacob articulate these concerns, both as inheritance operates in kinship structures and as maintaining a family name functions to transcend death. Conversely, the story of the eunuchs in Isaiah suggests that even if procreative capacity is muted, avenues exist for eunuchs to participate in the cultic assembly (and thus maintain a place in Israelite society) and transcend death. In Isaiah, God affirms that despite the laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy and the social stigma against eunuchs, they can nevertheless uphold the covenant of God and thus should have access to the temple and be included in the social life of the ancient Israelites. Furthermore, despite lack of reproductive potential, God promises that those eunuchs who keep the covenant will be remembered after their deaths. In this story, pronatal sentiments are muted to expand who can participate in the temple life of the ancient Israelites and transcend death.

Both symbolic and pragmatic issues influenced cultural norms about reproduction and inheritance in ancient Israelite society, particularly given the operative kinship structures. As seen above, bearing sons was of existential significance. Not only were sons instrumental for maintaining the family line, they were also important for keeping

the memory alive of those relatives who came before.[159] As kinship patterns shifted from the agrarian context of ancient Israel to the house-church pattern of the early Christians and through the Reformation to the nuclear family of today, issues of inheritance and transcending death have also shifted. In Western society today, concerns of inheritance are not tied to households. Furthermore, Christianity offers Christians a different way of transcending death than through remembrance of one's offspring. Inheritance and transcending death, therefore, are not primary concerns for procreation today. Rather, in today's context of climate change, it is reasonable to argue that the primary concern surrounding procreation is the integrity of the whole created order that is threatened by the actions of humans living in first world contexts.

The notions of kenosis and love of neighbor in the gospel narrative serve to reorient Christian ideas of kinship away from the nuclear family and towards kinship with the whole created order. The kinship structures of the ancient Israelite society provided insight into how pronatalism functioned in the Hebrew Bible. Kinship structures of the early church and throughout the Reformation period illumine how theological concepts of marriage, sex, and companionship developed. If Christians take seriously the concept of kenosis and God's activity in the whole created order, then kinship can essentially be extended to all of creation. Kinship with creation dramatically changes one's outlook on how to live within society and within the created order. Kinship with creation implies that "each and every creature on this planet is linked

[159] Deryck Sheriffs, "The Human Need for Continuity: Some ANE and OT Perspectives," *Tyndale Bulletin* 55, no. 1 (2004): 3.

together in a single fabric of relationships."[160] We are all connected, we are all family, and we all have an inherent command to love the other for the integrity of the whole.

Qualifications on Pronatalism Re-Examined: A Feminist Ethical Framework

Contextualizing procreation within socio-economic-environmental contexts provides an avenue to understand scriptural texts about reproduction in a new light. Rather than accept procreation as God's sole intention for humanity, Christians in upper socioeconomic classes today should consider the ethical implications of bringing new children into this world out of concern for both the ecological integrity of the whole created order and the needs of people all around the world who are affected by climate change. Christians living in first world settings should reflect on the environmental context as part of their deliberations on family and faith by positioning pronatalism within the context of climate change. This re-contextualization of pronatalism must be accomplished in an ethical manner. The following qualifications and clarifications seek to provide a framework in which this re-contextualization of pronatalism can be carried out ethically.

First, it must be noted that love of neighbor cannot be enforced (i.e. the means of limiting reproduction matter). Choosing not to have a child out of kenotic love for the ecological integrity of the whole created order and people around the world cannot be mandated, else it is a violation of love itself. Societal constructs that pressure people to choose the self-sacrificial route of not having children must be thoroughly rejected for both theological and ethical reasons. Theologically, feminist theologian Barbara Hilkert Andolsen critiques the notion of self-sacrifice as an expression of love from the female

[160] Richard D Weis, "We Are All Connected: Toward a Biblical Theology of Creation," *Lexington Theological Quarterly (Online)* 45, no. 3–4 (September 2013): 58.

experience where women are expected to give to others to a damaging degree to one's self.[161] Consequently, she advocates for a balance between self-sacrifice and complementary virtues including honesty, courage, and self-assertion.[162] Building off Margaret Farley's work, Andolsen describes love rightly exerted as mutuality marked by equality between activity (self-assertion) and receptivity (self-sacrifice) in relationship to others that requires a re-imagining of the social order where public life and private life are merged.[163] Andolsen's work is valuable to this discussion on pronatalism because she articulates a position that prevents self-sacrifice from being the standard by which to convict people. In essence, some people cannot require other people to decide not to have children out of concern for the whole created order because it violates an understanding of mutuality that affirms the goodness of the whole. This qualification on pronatalism is also important from an ethical perspective. The eugenics movement in the 20th century in the United States is a prime example of how debates and efforts surrounding population control have proved to be wildly unethical (and particularly racist).[164] The white, middle-class, Protestant nuclear family consisting of two parents and two planned gender-balanced children must not be the model by which other configurations of family are compared.[165] The very question of who can or should

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[161] Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "Agape in Feminist Ethics," in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Lois K. Daly (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 151.

[162] Andolsen, 153.

[163] Andolsen, 154–56.

[164] Melissa J. Wilde and Sabrina Danielsen, "Fewer and Better Children: Race, Class, Religion, and Birth Control Reform in America," *American Journal of Sociology* 119, no. 6 (2014): 1710–60; Robert F. Murray, "The Ethical and Moral Values of Black Americans and Population Policy," in *Population Policy and Ethics: The American Experience*, ed. Robert M. Veatch (New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc., 1977), 197–210.

[165] Amy Laura Hall, *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 10.

procreate with whom is antithetical to the sentiments of mutuality described by Andolsen and violates the bioethical principle of autonomy itself.

Second, positioning pronatalism within the context of climate change necessitates attention to the principle of commensurate burdens and benefits. The context of climate change and disproportional greenhouse gas emissions by people in the United States and other high-income countries requires that those same people who contribute more proportionally to the problem bear the proportionally greater responsibility towards addressing the problem. Effectively, those consumers who produce the most greenhouse gas emissions have the most responsibility to create fewer consumers (just as they have the most responsibility of reducing greenhouse gas emissions themselves). This qualification on re-contextualizing pronatalism ensures that population control related to third world development is excluded from this analysis. Population control as an effort to reduce climate change cannot be exported to non-industrialized countries because people in those countries are not themselves contributing as much to the problem in the first place.

Third, this re-contextualization of pronatalism must occur within the framework of the whole human family. In this essay, choosing to not have children as an expression of God's kenotic love has been portrayed as a means to further the ecological integrity of the whole created order and the health of people living under the threat of climate change. The kenotic love expressed in this decision effectively minimizes interest in the self while upholding the good of the whole human family, and by extension the whole created order. If Christian identity is restructured in a way so as to identify with the whole of the created order as kin, then familial, nationalistic, and religious identities are muted in

favor of the ecological integrity of the whole (i.e., the balanced creation portrayed in Genesis 1). Declining birth-rates in one part of the world or for one population of people, therefore, are less important because all of humanity and creation are understood as kin and the integrity of the whole is upheld as a higher good than individual reproduction.

Finally, it must be admitted that this re-contextualization of pronatalism assumes that an additional human child will have an overall negative impact on the ecological integrity of the whole creation. Does a new child's potential carbon footprint outweigh what the child might or might not contribute to the greater good of the whole created order? Ultimately it is impossible to tell, and as environmental ethicist Joseph R. DesJardins articulates, future generations are particularly difficult to consider in ethical evaluations because of the inherent fact that they do not actually exist.[166] This final qualification on the re-contextualization of pronatalism is mentioned to accentuate the uncertainty and complexity surrounding efforts to address the climate change crisis. Climate change is a "wicked problem." Wicked problems are those characterized by complexity, variability, and multiple-interests in spatial and temporal spheres. In essence, wicked problems "resist professional solutions because they outstrip a society's scientific and ethical competencies."[167] Re-contextualizing pronatalism in light of current socio-economic-environmental realities is not a final solution to the climate change crisis, but it can be furthered as one avenue of progress amidst an ever-changing stream of potential solutions.

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[166] Joseph R. DesJardins, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*, 4th edition (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 76.

[167] Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 171.

CONCLUSION

Anthropogenic climate change poses the greatest threat to the integrity of the whole created order that has ever been seen. Pronatal sentiments expressed in the Hebrew Bible and carried throughout Christian tradition have been validated and influenced by the socio-economic-environmental contexts of their times. Changing cultural conditions and conceptions of kinship, therefore, should also result in changing considerations of pronatalism. Despite religious convictions that promote reproduction, Christians today should re-conceptualize pronatalism within their own socio-economic-environmental contexts, thereby bringing concern for the ecological integrity of the earth and people suffering from the affects of climate change into their deliberations on family and faith.

Throughout this analysis, it must remain clear that although pronatal sentiments have been called into question, the goodness of human life must without doubt be upheld. Just as the ancient Israelites conceived of fertility of the land and humans as a blessing from God, so too must we assert the role of God's blessing in creating and furthering life. We are called to be faithful stewards of the life that God has given us by attending to the needs of the other. In the context of climate change we must both lament the pain and cry out in the hope of a new creation and the redemption of all living things, recognizing that all of creation can exist in its right state of praising God. This re-contextualization of pronantalism within the feminist ethical framework described above asserts that we must recognize who we are in the created order, as intimately bound to and dependent on the ecological integrity of the whole. This act of kenotic love realizes kinship with the other so that all of the created order might flourish in the balanced vision Genesis 1.

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