THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE IN THE GOSPEL OF PHILIP

BY

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In the Old Testament one of the most striking analogies provided to the relation of God with Israel is derived from human marriage. This analogy does not come as a complete surprise when one recalls the importance of marriage in the patriarchal narratives and in the story of creation. The prophet Hosea did not entirely lack precedents when he acted out a parable of the relation of God to Israel in his marriage to the faithless Gomer. God loves Israel as a husband loves his wife; and in Hosea’s parabolic action this love was revealed as established in grace rather than based on works. Among some of the rabbis the covenant at Sinai was treated as God’s wedding with Israel. It is significant, however, that in Judaism only God was the husband. Neither Moses nor any messianic figure ever took his place. The Philonic allegories of the union of the soul with the Logos, or even with Wisdom, the “daughter of God,” seem to be the product of an individual’s exegesis and they refer to individuals, not to a community.

In two Matthaean parables, those of the Wedding Banquet (22:2–14) and the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1–13), the coming reign of God is portrayed as a wedding, but it is by no means clear that Jesus is the bridegroom. On the other hand, according to Mark 2:19 (and parallels) Jesus referred to himself as a bridegroom and stated that the “sons of the bridechamber” could not fast while he was with them. The Gospel of John tells us how Jesus “manifested his glory” at the Wedding in Cana (2:1–11), and we learn that John the Baptist described himself as “the bride-

1 E. Stauffer in Theol. Wörterbuch zum N. T., 1, 652.
2 J. Jeremias, ibid., iv, 1094–95.
groom's friend", while Jesus himself—"he who has the bride"—was her husband (3:29).

This kind of imagery is clearly intimated in several Pauline epistles and is most fully worked out in Ephesians. In 1 Corinthians 6:15–17 Paul argues that while union with a prostitute means becoming one body with her, uniting with the Lord means becoming one spirit with him. The analogy of marriage is clearly implicit here, especially since Paul cites Genesis 2:24, "the two shall become one flesh." More explicitly, in 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul writes, "I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband." Christ has taken the place of God at Sinai; the apostle has assumed the rôle of Moses 4. Again, in a rather confused analogy in Romans 7:2–4 one thing, at any rate, seems to be clear: the community was once wedded to the law and therefore to sin, but with the husband's death she is now free to belong to another, i.e. to Christ 5. In Ephesians 5:22–33 the prophecy of Genesis 2:24 is described as "a great mystery" and is referred not only to Christ and the church but also to Christian marriage in general. Schlier has argued that this passage is clearly Gnostic in origin, but as Percy points out the parallels from other Pauline epistles suggest that it is Pauline in nature 6; in turn, Paul's own ideas can be most simply explained in relation to the Old Testament as interpreted in the light of the work of Christ.

In Jewish–Christian apocalyptic the image of Christ as the husband of the church was strongly favored, for in the book of Revelation we frequently encounter "the wedding of the Lamb" (e.g., 19:7–8). And it may be the case that from such circles this image came to be developed in the direction of Gnosticism. The anonymous homily known as 2 Clement treats the church as spiritual and pre-existent, and reflects a semi-Gnostic kind of exegesis when it interprets Genesis 1:27 (God made man male and female) in relation to Christ and the church (2 Clem. 14) 7.

4 Cf. Jeremias, op. cit., 1098.
5 Cf. C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (New York, 1932), 100–1.