

WEAKER VESSELS AND HINDERED PRAYERS: 1 PETER 3:7 IN JEROME AND AUGUSTINE

In his influential article entitled "Augustine's View on Women," T.J. Van Bavel discussed in some detail to the degree to which the Bishop of Hippo derived his views from scripture.¹ While Van Bavel's text and notes make it plain that the most fruitful sources for Augustine's thinking were Pauline, on several occasions he also draws our attention to the role the First Epistle of Peter played in the Bishop's thinking.² The Petrine passage most germane to this issue is undoubtedly that of 1 Peter 3:1-7 and, of these verses, the most interesting is the longish verse 7. Augustine's text of this verse would most likely have read as follows:

Viri simili ratione concordēs et castē uiuentēs cum uxoribus uestris et tamquam uasi infirmiori et subiecto tribuite honorem quasi/uelut coheredibus gratiae, et uidete ne inpediantur orationes uestrae³

It is the aim of this article to discuss in greater detail Augustine's exegesis of this verse and to highlight particular aspects of it by placing his thoughts alongside those of Jerome, his near contemporary. Through such an examination, this article will offer further proof that Van Bavel did the scholarly world a positive service when he highlighted the Bishop of Hippo's relatively moderate attitude toward women, toward married sexuality, and toward inter-gender relationships. While Van Bavel's writings have always remained sensitive to Augustine's being a man of his time, his work has gone a long way toward enabling contemporary scholarship to fully appreciate Augustine's judiciousness vis-à-vis the views of many of his fourth- and fifth-century contemporaries.

¹ See *Augustiniana* 39 (1989): 5-53.

² The first and most direct of these is found on p.6 where, in discussing the Augustine's take on the subordination of women, Van Bavel notes: "As a child of his time Augustine considered the woman as subordinate to the man. He adopted the prevailing idea of antiquity about the inferior condition of women in society ... [but] as Augustine does always after his conversion, in the question of subordination of women, *he bases himself primarily on the Bible, especially on 1 Peter 3:7 ...*" (italics added). Cf. also pp. 14, 42, 51, and 52.

³ This quotation is based on that which may be found in 12,14 of *b. coniug* (cf. CSEL 41, p.206). A comparison of the three places where Augustine clearly cites, or intends to cite, 1 Peter 3:7 reveals that his text remained quite stable between the years 401, the date of composition for *b. coniug.*, and 422, the year in which *c. Iul.* was completed. Indeed, the only significant variant is that he once replaces the normal "quasi" with "uelut." Cf. also the relevant nn. *infra*.

Jerome and 1 Peter 3:7

According to the apparatus of the Beuron project's *Vetus Latina* edition of the Catholic Epistles,⁴ Jerome employed 1 Peter 3:7 eight times. Of these eight, three are rather insignificant allusions that contribute little to our understanding of his reading of this verse.⁵ Of the remaining five, four are worthy of a closer look.⁶

The first interesting reference to 1 Peter 3:7 is in Jerome's commentary on Titus, a relatively superficial work composed in haste in 386.⁷ Jerome uses our verse to comment on Titus 2:3-5, a passage which he read as:

Anus similiter in habitu sancto, non incentrices, non uino multo seruientes; bene docentes, ut ad castitatem erudiant adolescentulas, ut ament uiros suos, ut ament filios: pudicas, castas, habentes domus diligentiam, benignas, subditas uiris suis, ut uerbum Dei non blasphemetur.

Somewhat surprising is the fact that this lemma is not immediately commented on: instead, 1 Peter 3:7 is introduced into the

⁴ See *Vetus Latina die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel* 26/1 Epistulae Catholicae, ed. W. Thiele (Freiburg: Herder, 1969), 131-133. These pp. also reveal that Jerome and Augustine were among the very first Latin writers to make use of this v. In fact, only three other contemporaneous writers make any clear use of it: Ambrose, who references it 3x; Pelagius, who uses it once in his Pauline commentary; and Rufinus who includes a reference to it in his translation of Origen's commentary on the book of Joshua.

⁵ In addition to its being an allusion, that found in Paragraph 52 of the *Praecepta* section of Jerome's translation of the so-called *Pachomiana Latina* is less than helpful precisely because it is not original to Jerome. For the allusion, which uses the epithet "uasa infirmiora" as a synonym for "mulierculae," see *Pachomiana Latina règle et épîtres de S. Pachome, épître de S. Théodore et "liber" de S. Orsiesius texte latin de S. Jérôme*, A. Boon, ed. Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique 7 (Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue, 1932), 27. Those listed by the *Vetus Latina* as coming from Jerome's commentaries on the minor prophets Joel and Micah are also, at best, allusions. In fact, the phrase "uas infirmum" from the Micah commentary could just as easily be an allusion to 1 Thess 4:4 not 1 Pet 3:7. For the evidence on these two, cf. CCSL 76, pp. 185 and 511, respectively. For more on 1 Thess 4:4 in the early Latin tradition, see J. Doignon, "L'exégèse latin ancienne de 1 Thessaloniens 4,4-5 sur la possession de notre vas: schema classiques et éclairages chrétiens" *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 83/3 (1982): 163-177; see pp. 170-172 for Doignon's discussion of Jerome's contribution. For an example of Augustine's use of 1 Thess 4:4, see p. 13 *infra*.

⁶ These five are: *Comm. in e. ad Titum* 2:3-5; *Adu. Iou.* I,7 (2x); I,8; and *e.* 48. Although the use in *Adu. Iou.* I,8 is a clear citation, its use there is relatively unimportant and, hence, will not be included in this discussion.

⁷ For this date see P. Nautin, "Les date des commentaires de Jérôme sur les épîtres pauliniennes" *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 74 (1979): 5-12, esp. p. 9.

discussion straightaway. He writes: "Although the apostle Peter taught that husbands owed their wives honor as weaker vessels, he was not teaching that a wife, who certainly has a weaker vessel for a body, also has a weaker soul."⁸ This is followed by an application of the Lord's statement to Paul regarding Paul's prayers for relief in the face of his "thorn," namely that "power is made perfect in weakness (*uirtus in infirmitate perficitur*; cf. 2 Cor 12:9)." From here there follows a discussion of the Titus passage. For our purposes, most important is the way in which Jerome asserts that Peter's comments regarding a woman's inherent weakness should be restricted to that sex's physical capacities. Having made this assumption, Jerome is then free to make what many in the ancient world must have regarded as a novel assertion, namely that there is no inherent spiritual or "soulical" difference between the sexes.⁹ Indeed, implicit here is the idea that women should embrace and accept their physical deficiencies relative to men since, when seen correctly, they are actually opportunities for a deeper experience of God and His grace.

All of Jerome's other important uses of 1 Peter 3:7 are found in just two paragraphs of his controversial treatise *Aduersus Iovinianum* and in one section of his *epistula* 49. *Adu. Iou.* was published in 393.¹⁰ Its caustic and extreme tone earned Jerome much criticism,

⁸ This is my own trans. For the Latin, cf. PL 26, col. 615: "Tametsi Apostolus Petrus praeceperit, ut uiri uxoribus suis tanquam infirmiori uasculo honorem tribuant, non tamen arbitrandum est, quod uxor, quae corporis uasculum habet infirmum, statim et anima infirmior sit."

⁹ The fact that all of Jerome's Pauline commentaries (there were four in total: Philemon, Galatians, Ephesians and Titus) were written at the urging of his female friends and supporters Paula, Eustocium, and Marcella most probably rendered his comments more "philogynist." For a work which helpfully summarizes many aspects of Jerome, his work, and his context and which pairs these summaries with many helpful, if not always easily obtainable, bibliographical entries see A. Fürst, *Hieronymus Askese und Wissenschaft in der Spätantike* (Freiburg: Herder, 2003). See esp. pp. 52-55 and 309-310 for the topic "Die Frauen um Hieronymus." Prominent in Fürst's bibliography are several works by P. Laurence. By far the most detailed is his *Jérôme et le nouveau modèle féminin*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes Série Antiquité 155 (Paris: Institut Études Augustiniennes, 1997). See pp. 205-224 of that work for a detailed discussion of Jerome's exegesis of 1 Cor 7 in the *Contra Iovinianum*; on p. 211 and n. 154 Laurence comments on the fact that in his exegesis Jerome "diffère grandement d'un" Augustine.

¹⁰ For a thesis that contains several unsupported accusations against Jovinian and his person as well as several equally unexplainable *encomia* for both Jerome and his work, see J. Nolan, *Jerome and Jovinian* (Abstract of S.T.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1956), *passim*. For example, on p. 27 and without referencing a source, Gavin writing about Jovinian's character and trustworthiness claims that "there is no doubt that Jovinian in his new life did not live as a monk should live, that he did give reasons for complaint." For interesting and far more balanced contextualizations of

both overtly and covertly, and this negative reaction compelled him to launch an apologetic campaign in order to rebut his critics and to further defend the positions he had adopted there. *Epistula* 49, which was drafted in 394, was part of that campaign.¹¹

Jovinian's chief "mistake" and most notorious "sin" was his claim that the baptized believer's marital status and degree of past sexual experience made no difference in his or her ability to be pleasing to God or in the quality of his or her eternal reward.¹² Like both Pope Siricius and Ambrose before him, Jerome simply could not abide this attempt at "democratizing" the fourth-century church. In fact, for Jerome, whose commitment to celibacy and asceticism was (like almost everything else he adopted) rendered even more extreme by the peculiarities of his personality, the line between what was an attack on the prevailing orthodoxy and what was an attack on him personally was often blurred.

In the first part of *Adu. Iou.* Book I, Jerome is intent on letting Paul, or, more specifically, the plain text of 1 Corinthians 7, counter Jovinian's disruptive assertions.¹³ I, 7-8, the two paragraphs which

Jovinian, his teachings, and his probable motivations see both A. Budzin, "Jovinian's Four Theses on the Christian Life: An Alternative Patristic Spirituality," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 4 (1988): 44-59 and D. Hunter, "Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in Late Fourth-Century Rome," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993): 47-71, esp. pp. 51-61. For a brief but helpful summary of the role this controversy played in Jerome's life, see J. Kelly, *Jerome* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 181-189. More particularly, for Kelly's positive opinion regarding the literary and rhetorical quality of the *Adu. Iou.*, see pp. 181-182. However, for his assessment that, in the final analysis, its argument seems "singularly superficial and unconvincing," see p. 186.

¹¹ While this fact is widely recognized, the words of K. Cooper are helpful. She writes: "Jerome's Letter 49 to Pammachius represents an attempt to soften the ferocity of his attack on Jovinian." See her *The Virgin and the Bride Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 97.

¹² Indeed, it is this theme that dominates Book I of the *Adu. Iou.* Here, cf. Hunter, *Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary*, 52: "It is baptism, Jovinian argued, that establishes the holiness of each Christian, not ascetic merit" and "Jovinian appears to have placed a particular stress on the unity of the church, a unity constituted by the indwelling of the triune God, a unity which ought not to be divided by distinctions of ascetic merit."

¹³ Cf. these lines from near the end of I, 6 (PL 23, col. 228): "Opponam in prima fronte apostolum Paulum, et quasi fortissimum ducem, suis telis, id est, suis armabo sententiis. Sciscitantibus enim super hac quaestione Corinthiis, plenissime respondit Doctor Gentium, et Magister Ecclesiae. Quidquid autem statuerit, hoc Christi in eo loquentis, legem putemus." Here, too, Kelly is helpful, esp. with regard to the quality of Jerome's exegesis. He writes: "But it was St Paul whom he made his chief oracle, twisting the famous texts of 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Timothy to wrest from them an even greater aversion to marriage and second marriages than they contain ..." and "Where [Jerome] has a useful [exegetical] card, he overplays it. Where he is at a disadvantage ... he resorts to an unnatural exegesis to distort the scriptural record." For these remarks see Kelly, *Jerome*, 183 and 186 respectively.

contain the aforementioned references to our verse, are both dominated by Jerome's exegesis of 1 Cor 7:1b: "bonum est homini mulierem non tangere." A long discussion of the application of this half-verse leads Jerome to a further consideration of the "requirement" mentioned in 7:5 that all married persons should render conjugal rights to their partners in order to ensure that "weak" and "needy" partners are able to maintain their self-control. After quoting 7:5 ("nolite fraudare inuicem, nisi forte ex consensu ad tempus, ut uacetis orationi"), and undoubtedly because that verse includes the notion that, if both partners agree, conjugal relations may be temporarily suspended for the sake of prayer, Jerome links 1 Cor 7:5 and 1 Peter 3:7. His motivation is plain: 1 Peter 3:7, like 1 Cor 7:5, includes the idea that there is a real and unavoidable link between how one treats one's marriage partner and one's prayer life. Most important for our purposes is the fact that in 1 Peter 3:7, the nature of the link is vague enough to allow the creative exegete a lot of room to maneuver. Jerome writes:

I ask you, what is the quality of that good thing which hinders prayer? Which does not allow the body of Christ to be received? So long as I fulfil the role of a husband, I do not fulfill the [call to] continence (*non impleo continentis*). The same Apostle in another place commands us to pray always (cf. 1 Thess 5:17). If we are to pray always, it follows that we must never be in the bondage of wedlock, for as often as I render my wife her due, I am not able to pray. The Apostle Peter had experience of the bonds of marriage (*experimentum habens coniugalium uinculorum*).¹⁴ See how he fashions the Church, and what lesson he teaches Christians: "Husbands in the same way live with your wives according to knowledge, giving honor to the woman, as to a weaker vessel, just as they are also joint-heirs of the grace of life; in order that your prayers might not be hindered" (1 Pet 3:7). Observe that, in the same sense as S. Paul, because in both cases the spirit is also the same, so now S. Peter says that prayers are hindered by the performance of marriage duty (*officio coniugali*).¹⁵

¹⁴ This language regarding Peter and his marriage is, as Kelly points out (cf. his *Jerome*, 187 and n.47), not even the most pejorative of Jerome's statements found in the *Adu. Iou*. Cf. I,26 (PL 23, col.258) where he refers Peter's marriage as a "defilement (*sordes*) ... [that] is not washed away by martyrdom."

¹⁵ This English trans. is based on that of W. Freemantle, *The Principle Works of St. Jerome*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church Second Series, 6, eds. P. Schaff and H. Wace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1893; reprint, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 351. In several places I have modified the English to make it more contemporary and, in the case of the quotations from *e.49*, in order to bring the text into conformity with the CSEL edition. For the Latin behind this particular passage, see PL 23, col.230.

Especially noteworthy in this passage is the extremely literal and rigid nature of the exegesis. Apparently, Jerome wanted his readers to accept that Paul's exhortation to "let us pray always (*semper oremus*)" was best understood as a call to be literally always at prayer. He also seems to have expected his readers to accept that his own well-known and normal day-to-day activities such as writing, translating, and reading – not to mention eating, drinking, and sleeping – did not prohibit *his* fulfilling of this scriptural "command."¹⁶ After citing 1 Pet 3:2-3, Jerome returns to discussing his understanding of Peter's teaching regarding marriage. This comment contains a very clear allusion, to 1 Peter 3:7:

You see what kind of marriage [Peter] enjoins. Husbands and wives are to dwell together according to knowledge, so that they may know what God wishes and desires, and may give honor to the weak vessel, woman. If we abstain from intercourse, we give honour to our wives: if we do not abstain, it is clear that insult is the opposite of honour.¹⁷

The differences between these uses of our verse and that which is found in the Titus commentary are both obvious and striking. Not only has Jerome introduced the whole verse in place of the earlier brief reference to women as "weaker vessels" (apparently a point which he was never overly concerned with), here, he has also settled explicitly on the link between marital relations and prayer. Implicit here is the notion that even lawful sexual intercourse with one's marriage partner renders prayer impossible, just as the exemplary nature of total abstinence, again, even within a marriage, is made quite explicit. When strung together, these ideas allowed Jerome to foist onto his readers the conclusion that 1 Peter 3:7 was originally written with the aim of discouraging marital sexual relations.¹⁸

¹⁶ Here, cf. *e.22,37*, a letter written approximately 10 years earlier, where he is much more realistic about the application of 1 Thess 5:17. There, he implies that having "appointed hours for praying" is sufficient and further moderates the Thessalonian exhortation by asserting that "for the saints even sleep may be a prayer." For the Latin, cf. CSEL 54, p.201; this English trans. was taken from ACW 33, p.173.

¹⁷ For the English, *ibid.*; for the Latin, *ibid.*, col.231. Helpful for "unpacking" all that this passage contains are the comments of Y.-M. Duval, *L'affaire Jovinien. D'une crise de la société romaine à une crise de la pensée chrétienne à la fin du IV^e et au début du V^e siècle*, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 83 (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2003), 119-121 and n.85. Cf. also n.29 *infra*.

¹⁸ That this point was derivative from Jerome's exegesis of 1 Pet 3:7 has also been noted by D. Heimann, "The Polemical Application of Scripture in St. Jerome," in *Studia Patristica XII Papers presented to the Sixth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1971 Part I*, ed. E. Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975), 309-316, esp. 311 where he notes that "One must also read between the lines of Scripture, as it were ... 1 Peter 3,7 ... eventually is manouvered (sic) [by Jerome] into the meaning that perfect chastity is what the Apostle means to prescribe."

As noted above, Jerome's *epistula* 49 was written in 394 as part of his rebuttal against the severe criticism he had received for the views contained in the *Adu. Iou.*¹⁹ As one might expect given Jerome's personality, the tone of this letter is extremely defensive and self-justificatory. Interesting, however, is the fact that this attempt at self-justification is not allowed to alter his expressed view of matrimony or his previously-established exegesis of scripture. In fact, in this letter, the claims that neither his opinions nor his exegesis are novel are pushed to a new position of prominence. Paragraph 15 begins:

From all [the foregoing] considerations it is clear that I have said nothing at all new concerning virginity and marriage, but have followed in all respects the judgment of older writers – of Ambrose, that is to say, and others who have discussed the doctrines of the Church.²⁰

A few lines later, after quoting for his new readers the passage just cited from *Adu. Iou.*, he reprises some of that work's exegesis. He refers again to 1 Thess 5:17, to several verses from 1 Cor 7, and to 1 Pet 3:7. He also reasserts his radical claim regarding the meaning of 1 Cor 7. He follows this with an exegesis of the exegesis he gave in the *Adu. Iou.*:

When I do my duty as a husband, I cannot fulfill the requirements of continence. The same apostle, in another place, commands us to pray always (cf. 1 Thess 5:17). "But if we are always to pray we must never yield to the claims of wedlock, for, as often as I render my wife her due, I am not able to pray (*orare non possum*)." When I spoke thus it is clear that I relied on the words of the apostle: "Do not defraud each other, except by mutual consent and for a brief period, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (cf. 1 Cor 7:5). The

¹⁹ For a well-worded summary regarding the negative reception of the work, see Kelly, *Jerome*, 187. Also interesting is Kelly's labeling (cf. p.188) of *e.* 49 as "an enormously long, carefully argued *pièce justificatif*."

²⁰ For the English, *ibid.*, 75; for the Latin, CSEL 54, 375-376. Although its presence here is not altogether unjustified, it is important to note that there is no clear reference to Ambrose in the Latin original of this passage either in the CSEL or in the older and substantially different PL edition (cf. PL 22, col.505). Jerome's favorable attitude toward the "older writer" Ambrose in the *Adu. Iou.* is surprising given his outspoken animosity toward him on other occasions. Apparently, Jerome felt that their general agreement on the issue of virginity and continence was enough to overlook other theological and exegetical differences. This inconsistency did not escape Kelly's notice. On p. 189 of his *Jerome* he writes: "in his dire straits [Jerome] did not hesitate to cite his *bête-noire* as a witness" (cf. also *ibid.*, pp.143-144). For my approach to this English trans., cf. n.15 *supra*.

Apostle Paul tells us that when we have intercourse (*coimus*) with our wives we are not able to pray (*nos orare non posse*). Peter, too, exhorts us to continence, that our "prayers might not be hindered" (cf. 1 Pet 3:7).²¹

The exaggerated nature of the claims found in this passage are manifest to anyone who takes the time to read the relevant biblical citations. *Prima facie*, in 1 Cor 7:5 Paul seems to have been simply encouraging Christian married couples to set aside time to pray; the idea that intercourse makes prayer impossible is in no way discernable from either the context or wording. The 1 Peter 3 passage is equally unsupportive of Jerome's cause: any reference whatsoever to sexual activity or to continence is singularly absent. In spite of this, Jerome seems to think that he is being exceptionally persuasive. Without further comment, he continues his *apologia*:

How, I should like to know, have I sinned in all this? What have I done? How have I been at fault? ... Am I attacked because I have ventured to add to the words of the apostle these words of my own: "What kind of good thing is that which prevents a man from receiving the body of Christ?" If so, I will make answer briefly thus: Which is the most important, to pray or to receive Christ's body? Surely to receive Christ's body. If, then, sexual intercourse hinders the less important thing, much more does it hinder that which is more important.

Keeping both the tone and the content of these last lines in mind as a foil, we will now briefly survey of how the Bishop of Hippo employed our verse.

Augustine and 1 Peter 3:7

The Bishop of Hippo also employed 1 Peter 3:7 on eight occasions, one of which was in the compendium known as the *Speculum*. Of the remaining seven, four are merely allusions to various parts of verse 7. The three that cite it directly will form the core of the discussion that follows.²²

²¹ For the English, *ibid.*, 75; for the Latin, *ibid.*, 376.

²² Again, this is based on the information provided by the *Vetus Latina* apparatus. Cf. n.4 *supra*. The four allusions mentioned here are *e.* 20,3 in which Augustine refers to the wife of the letter's recipient, Antoninus, as an "infirmiori uasi"; *c. Jul.* 2,20, where, in the midst of a discussion about the role of sexual desire in marriage, Augustine notes Julian's reluctance to admit that sexual desire could negatively affect a Christian couple's prayer life: "coniugum impediretur oratio"; *s.* 51,21, where, in between

De bono coniugali, a treatise written circa 401, represents Augustine's "first attempt at a systematic treatment of marriage."²³ As such, and like Jerome before him, the Bishop of Hippo could have hardly avoided engaging what Paul had to say about marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. Indeed, his exegesis of this chapter of scripture dominates Paragraph 10 along with several of those which follow. Paragraph 12, which is largely dedicated to a discussion of sexual relations that are "unnatural (*contra naturam*)," and the first half of Paragraph 13, in which Augustine follows Paul in extolling the virtues of remaining unmarried so that one is better able to focus on pleasing God (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-35; 40), are, in turn, followed by a discussion which deals with the challenges inherent in trying to balance being married with being devoted to God.

Having voiced his agreement with Paul regarding the reality of this difficulty, Augustine, as he opens Paragraph 14, shifts his focus from married people in general to married women in particular before going on to ask whether some of Paul's words of 1 Cor 7:32-34 should be taken as absolute statements applicable to all married women or simply to the majority of them. As he affirms the latter point, he employs both 1 Tim 2:9-10 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. Like Jerome before him, Augustine's marshalling of the claims and exhortations of two apostles to support his point is a subtle but effective rhetorical technique.²⁴ The implicit message is that if both of these great apostles shared the same view on this subject, then it behooves us to heed their advice. The rest of this paragraph is marked by a realistic, as opposed to an idealistic or romantic, tone:

... there is the rare married woman who even in complying with the demands of marriage thinks only of how to please God, and does not adorn herself "with plaits in her hair or with gold and pearls and

references to important Pauline passages about marriage and the respective roles of the husband and the wife, Augustine affirms that wives are "cohaeredit gratiae"; and, finally, *Trin.* XII,12, where, in a passage that is both similar to that of s.51,21 and one Van Bavel makes much of, the Bishop again alludes to 1 Peter 3:7's co-hereditary principle ("feminas ... sint nobiscum gratiae cohaeredes") in the midst of multiple references to Paul. For Prof. Van Bavel's most detailed comments on this latter passage, see his "Woman as the Image of God in Augustine's '*De Trinitate* XII,'" in *Signum Pietatis Festgabe für Cornelius Petrus Mayer OSA zum 60 Geburtstag* ed. A. Zunkeller OSA (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1989), 267-288.

²³ For this quote and a brief introduction to the work, see A. Fitzgerald et al., eds. *Augustine through the Ages An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), s.v. "*Bono coniugali, de*" by D. Hunter. For more on the *b. coniug*, see Hunter's "Augustinian Pessimism? A New Look At Augustine's Teaching on Sex, Marriage and Celibacy," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 153-177, esp. 157-163.

²⁴ Cf. pp.6-7 *supra* as well as the quotations from 13,15 and the V,40 of the c. *Iul infra*.

expensive clothes, but in the manner appropriate for women who show their devotion by their good conduct" (1 Tim 2:9-10). The apostle Peter also describes and commends this kind of marriage ... (citation of 1 Peter 3:1-7 *in toto*) ... So then, is it true that marriages like this are not concerned about what has to do with the Lord, how to please the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 7:32)? Who could deny though that they are an extremely rare occurrence? Moreover, even in these rare cases almost always people like this did not marry intending to be like this, but they became like this after they were already married.²⁵

13,15 then opens with an interesting and relatively positive claim regarding both the Christian's regenerated ability to opt for celibacy and the Bible's "correctness" in exhorting them to make just such a commitment. The Bishop is quite direct:

In our time when Christians who are free (*liberi*) from the bond of marriage and strong enough (*ualentes*) to abstain from all sexual union perceive that, as it was written, 'it is now not the time for embracing, but the time for refraining from all embracing (Eccl. 3:5),' and it is no longer required as a duty to human society, who would not choose to keep the celibate state of virginity or widowhood rather than endure the tribulation of the flesh (*tribulationem carnis*) that is inseparable from marriage ...?"²⁶

²⁵ For this English trans. see WSA I,9, p.44; for the Latin, CSEL 41, pp.205-206. The (last few and somewhat-oblique) lines of this passage read: "Ita ne uero coniugia talia non cogitant ea quae sunt Domini, quomodo placeant Domino? Sed perraria sunt - quis negat? - Et in ipsa raritate paene omnes, qui tales sunt, non ut tales essent, coniuncti sunt, sed iam coniuncti tales facti sunt."

²⁶ For this English see *ibid.*, pp.44-45; for the Latin, *ibid.*, p.207. Although a detailed discussion would take us too far afield, it is interesting to note that the absence from this discussion of one of Augustine's favorite verses: Wisdom 8:21. This v., which reads "*et cum scirem quia nemo potest esse continens nisi Deus det et hoc ipsum erat sapientiae, scire cuius esset hoc donum,*" was employed by Augustine on more than 25 occasions and frequently when he was addressing issues related to continence (of all kinds), grace, and the intersection of the two. That he had already used it in such contexts is proven by its repeated presence in *conf. X*, and esp. in *X,29. Conf.* was completed in 401 just before and perhaps overlapping with the composition of *b. conjug.* In *conf. X,29*, Augustine makes plain his need for help in the area of sexual continence and twice repeats his famous line "(*Continentiam iubes:*) *Da quod iubes et iube quod uis.*" In *b. conjug.*, however, the emphasis is far more on being "free (*liberi*)" and on being "strong enough (*ualentes*)." This somewhat inconsistent use of Wis 8:21 at this relatively early stage in Augustine's ministry adds support to D. Hunter's claim that "Augustine's ideas on sex, marriage and celibacy developed over the course of his lifetime." See his "*Augustinian Pessimism?*," 153 for this quote. For an excellent study of the role Wisdom played in the thinking and writing of Augustine, see A.-M. La Bonnardière, *Biblia Augustiniana A.T.: Le livre de la Sagesse Études Augustiniennes Série Antiquité* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1970), esp. 103-107 and 287-288 for Wis 8:21.

This obviously rhetorical question is followed by a brief excursus in which Augustine defends the conduct of Old Testament figures, especially with regard to the then-common practice of polygamy. Here, as elsewhere, his idealization of their behavior was based on their "duty" to propagate and increase the number of human beings. Although he recognizes that this duty is no longer binding for this dispensation, Augustine is significantly less idealistic regarding the sexual conduct of his married contemporaries. He continues:

Yet in private conversation, either with married persons or those who have been married, have we ever heard any people give any indication that they never have relations with their wives except with the hope of conceiving? What the apostles command married people to do, therefore, is essential for marriage; but what they allow as something excusable (*uenialiter*), or what hinders prayer (*inpedit orationes*), is not something marriage demands, but something it puts up with.²⁷

Although it is not perfectly clear from this particular context what Augustine is thinking of as the activity that "hinders prayer," it would seem that he had in mind the activities that he elsewhere labeled excessive sexual indulgence.²⁸ If so, it would also seem that the particular idea of a link between one's sexual activities and one's ability to pray without hindrance is an idea that he picked up from his reading of Jerome, but, as elsewhere, is one which he went on to modify. Also significant here is the repeated use of the plural "apostles (*apostoli*)" in another attempt to secure more authority for his position.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.45.

²⁸ Although it is only rarely used in his oeuvre (12x in 7 different works), passages in which the term "*uenialiter*" does occur are often significant. This is esp. true when it shows up in contexts where the main issue is the existence and the effects of *concupiscentia carnis*. See, e.g., *c. Iul* II,10,33 and *c. Iul. imp.* I,68. The phrase "*inpedit orationes*" only occurs 2x in Augustine, both of which are in *b. coniug.* It is in the second of these (i.e., 20,23; cf. CSEL 41, p.217) that Augustine makes the link most clearly. He seems to have done this by extrapolating from a few Old Testament passages that, either implicitly or explicitly, label sexual relations before certain sacred or cultic activities as problematic (e.g., Ex 19:15; Lev 15:16-18; Lev 22:4; and I Sam 21:4-5). He writes: "Nec quod purificari lex hominem et post coniugalem concubitum iubet, peccatum esse declarat, si non est ille, qui secundum ueniam conceditur, qui etiam nimius inpedit orationes." For a solid and balanced account of the Bishop of Hippo's views on sex and sexuality generally, see M. Lamberigts, "A Critical Evaluation of Critiques of Augustine's View of Sexuality," in *Augustine and His Critics Essays in honour of Gerald Bonner* eds. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (London: Routledge, 1999), 176-197.

De bono uiduitatis, a treatise written about 414 in response to the request of Juliana, a Christian widow and member of a Roman noble family, is, in many ways, a re-iteration of Augustine's teaching on marriage and celibacy. Its similarities with *De bono coniugali*, especially with respect to reading and exegesis of scripture, are clear.

Early in the treatise and after reaffirming the good of both marriage and chaste widowhood in 3,4, the Bishop of Hippo goes on in 4,5-5,7 to defend the goodness and acceptability of Christian second marriages and to condemn those "heretics" who reject them, including Tertullian.²⁹ Prominent (again) throughout this section are Pauline statements, especially those borrowed from 1 Corinthians 7.³⁰ Especially interesting is the way in which 4,5 opens. Here, after having concluded the previous paragraph with a citation of 1 Cor 7:6-7 and its emphasis on continence and celibacy as a gift from God (*donum... a Deo*),³¹ Augustine writes "you see how even married chastity (*coniu-galem pudicitiam*) and fidelity to the obligations of a Christian marriage (*tori christiani matrimonialem fidem*) are also a great gift from God."³²

It is 5,7 that contains this work's use of 1 Peter 3:7. In this case, it follows references to 1 Cor 7:35 and 7:8 and is sandwiched between two citations of 1 Cor 7:38, 7:40 and 7:34. Its being placed precisely here is clearly intentional. Not only is the entire paragraph

²⁹ If in fact Augustine was aware of Jerome's dependence on Tertullian for the content of the *Adu. Iou.*, then it is at least possible that the disparaging remarks regarding Tertullian here are also implicit critiques of Jerome, his technique, and his position. For an older study which clearly outlines the links between Tertullian and Jerome's *Adu. Iou.*, see F. Schultzen, "Die Benutzung der Schriften Tertullians *de monogamia* und *de ieiunio* bei Hieronymus *adu. Iouinianum*," *Neue Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie* 3 (1894): 485-502. For a much more recent study which links Tertullian's *De ieiunio* and Jerome's very important *e.22*, see N. Adkin, "Tertullian's 'De ieiunio' and Jerome's 'Libellus de uirginitate seruanda' (epist.22)," *Wiener Studien* 104 (1991): 149-160, esp. 149 and its nn. Still more recently, see *passim* in the two aforementioned works of P. Laurence (*Jérôme et le nouveau modèle féminin*) and Y.-M. Duval (*L'affaire Jovinien*).

³⁰ Note the comment that concludes 1,2 and that comes directly on the heels of a citation of Rom 12:3: "All I must do to teach you, therefore, the words of that Doctor [i.e., Paul] and offer any comment the Lord inspires concerning them." 2,3 then opens with a reference to 1 Cor 7:8.

³¹ Augustine cites 1 Cor 7:6-7 as follows: "Hoc autem dico secundum ueniam, non secundum imperium. Volo autem omnes homines esse sicut me ipsum: sed unusquisque proprium donum habet a Deo, alius sic, alius quidem sic."

³² Although the sentiment quoted here should probably not be regarded as an allusion to Wis 8:21 (there are only one or two vocabulary parallels), it certainly does reflect the spirit of that v. (cf. n.26 *supra*). For the Latin of the portions of 3,5 and 4,5 cited here, see CSEL 41, p.308.

meant to be an indirect refutation of the logic of those, e.g. Jerome, who practically condemned marriage by claiming that it was "bad" in comparison to the "good" of chaste widowhood and the "better" of virginity,³³ the mustering of a quotation by Peter is again intended to add extra apostolic authority of the opinion Augustine wished to defend. In this sense, he was beating Jerome at his own game.³⁴ Augustine writes:

What is more honorable is certainly honorable. [Paul] openly declared that this was better than that other good thing, when he said, "Anyone who has his daughter married does well; and anyone who does not have his daughter married does better" (1 Cor 7:38); and that this was more blessed than that other thing that is blessed, when he said, "She will be more blessed if she remains as she is" (1 Cor 7:40). It is not possible to think something is dishonorable, when the apostle Peter says this about it: "Husbands, honor your wives as more fragile vessels, subject to your guidance but along with you heirs of grace" (1 Peter 3:7). And addressing those women he exhorts them to be subject to their husbands after the example of Sarah ... (1 Peter 3:5-6 *in toto* follows)³⁵

Although he offers no further comment, the Bishop of Hippo clearly wanted to draw attention to Peter's command that husbands were to "give honor (*tribuite honorem*)" to their wives. In Augustine's mind, it was impossible that such a thing would have been written had Peter regarded the having of a wife as intrinsically evil. In Augustine's mind, Peter's marriage is anything but "sordes."³⁶ Also notable is the fact that Augustine says nothing, either explicitly or

³³ For example, following a citation of 1 Cor 7:35, Augustine comments, "[just] because [Paul] called the excellence of the unmarried state honorable, it does not follow that we should think the marriage bond to be dishonorable." Although Jerome repeatedly claims to be pro-marriage (cf., e.g., *Adu. Iou.* I,3), his tortured, if rhetorically-driven, logic regarding the relationship of other states to virginity are made abundantly clear. See, e.g., *Adu. Iou.* I,7.

³⁴ As we saw *supra*, Jerome himself used this exact same rhetorical device to support a decidedly different view in *Adu. Iou.*

³⁵ For this English trans., see WSA I,9, p.116; for the Latin, CSEL 41, p.311.

³⁶ On this label, cf. p.5 and n.14 *supra*. However, conspicuous by its absence is any reference to 1 Cor 9:5, a text which finds Paul waxing eloquent about his "right (*licentiam/potestatem*)" to take along a believing wife on his missionary endeavors, just as he claims the other apostles, Peter, and the Lord's brothers did or were doing. This text is known to have generated many problems for many of the early church's more ascetically minded scribes and commentators. For one of Jerome's longest discussions about this v. as well as an interesting note regarding the history of its exegesis, see p.375 and n.3 (left-hand column) of Freemantle's NPNF trans. (cf. n.15 *supra*) as well as Paragraph 10 of his e. 22.

implicitly, about the remainder of the verse: not only does he refrain from comment regarding the "subjection" or "weakness" that the verse attributes to women, but, in this instance, he also stops short of including the verse's final negative result clause, viz., "and see that your prayers are not hindered (*et uidete ne inpediantur orationes uestrae*)."

V,38 of the *Contra Iulianum* closes with a citation of 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5. According to Augustine, this text reads "that each one of you knows how to possess his own vessel not in the disease of desire, like the pagans who do not know God."³⁷ The Bishop's citation of this text serves as the culmination of a broader accusation that Julian has refused "to understand the words of the apostle." The actual debate about the meaning of these Pauline verses is then discussed at length in V,40: according to Augustine, Julian did not see these verses as applicable to marriage, rather, in his view, they provided us with a warning against fornication. The Bishop of Hippo, on the other hand, thought it better to see them as applicable to marriage and, hence, as further support for his view that even married couples should strive to limit the frequency of their copulation so as to limit their slavery to the evil of sexual concupiscence. Not surprisingly, Augustine's dismissal of Julian's exegesis is highly rhetorical:

[By taking these verses this way] you removed from marital intercourse all the goodness of self-control so that no one thinks that he possesses his vessel in the disease of desire, regardless of the amount of desire with which he goes wild in the sexual organs of his wife! ... You could have said that the apostle was speaking of that disease of desire without incorrectly denying that he referred to a man's wife as "his own vessel." The apostle Peter also uses this expression in the same context when he admonishes husbands to honor their wives as more fragile vessels and as coheirs of grace. He goes on to say, "And see that you do not allow your prayers to be hindered" (1 Pet 3:7). In the same way, his fellow apostle (*coapostolus*) prescribes times of prayer for the self-control of married couples and permits them by way of concession (cf. 1 Cor 7:5-6), though only with one's spouse, to have intercourse with the intention of having not a child, but pleasure."³⁸

Here, Augustine's use of 1 Peter 3:7 serves two distinct purposes. First, and most directly, he calls upon the fact that Paul in 1 Thess 4 and Peter in 1 Peter 3 both use forms of the word "vessel

³⁷ WSA I,24, p.458; cf. PL 44, col. 807: "ut sciat unusquisque uestrum suum uas possidere, non in morbo desiderii, sicut gentes, quae ignorant Deum."

³⁸ See *ibid.*, p.459; for the Latin, *ibid.*

(*uas/uasum*)” to support his more primary contention that 1 Thess 4 instructs us in the proper way of conducting marital relations. Augustine seems to have assumed that this was an opportunity to apply the exegetical principle of allowing the clear portions of the Bible to illuminate and clarify the more obscure.³⁹ Because it is clear that Peter was using “vessel” to refer to a wife, Paul, so the reasoning would go, must have been doing the same thing. Second, in these lines Augustine again claims that Peter and Paul shared the same view of marriage. This time, however, his claim is far more overt: he introduces the term “fellow apostle (*coapostolus*)” in order to underline Peter’s and Paul’s equal level of authority and, of course, to increase the authority of his own statements.⁴⁰ The warrant for this is provided by linking the final exhortatory warning of 1 Peter 3:7 with an allusion to 1 Cor 7, specifically to 7:5-6. Curiously absent is any explanation of why Peter’s exhortation to not allow prayers to be hindered should be seen as a possible danger of overindulgence in sexual activity. That Paul desired married couples to abstain from sexual relations for brief periods and to dedicate these times to prayer is made explicit in 1 Cor 7:5. However, and as was noted in the section on Jerome *supra*, 1 Peter 3 contains no overt reference to (marital) sexual relations whatsoever.

Summary and Conclusion

In spite of the similarities, many of which are undoubtedly due to their being virtual contemporaries, this survey has made the differences between Jerome’s and Augustine’s views on 1 Peter 3:7 plain. It is true that no reader, especially one from the 21st-century, could accuse either of these fathers of advocating sexual license. Both clearly considered it dangerous to exaggerate one’s exposure to sexual desire or to pursue sexual relations with abandon. This, in turn, drove both – albeit for different reasons – to be ardent champions of sexual self-control, even when the subject under discussion was married sexual activity. Both also employed the same rhetorical devices to make their point. Most prominent here is how both repeatedly set Pauline and Petrine statements side by side as a means of implicitly

³⁹ For his discussion of this particular exegetical principle, see *doc Chr.* II,9,14 and III,15,23.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, this *termus technicus*, in various forms, is used 26x by Augustine. It is not restricted to the combination of Peter and Paul. Jerome, on the other hand, never employs it.

claiming the correctness of their views: how could they be wrong if they were teaching precisely what two of the most important apostles had taught?

On the other hand, given their differences in personality and position, to say nothing about the fact that Augustine can occasionally be shown to be attempting a "correction" of some of Jerome's more extreme positions, their respective exegesis also contains several significant differences.

First, the fact that Jerome only references to 1 Peter 3:7's statement on prayer were in polemical contexts should not go overlooked. He obviously knew and was using 1 Peter by the mid-380's. Yet, he only linked it specifically with sexual activity when he penned the *Adu. Iou.* Second, and although he does not offer any explicit support for the idea in the passages examined here, Jerome seems to have assumed that sexual relations always defile the participants, at least temporarily.⁴¹ Jerome apparently believed that even married sexual activity disbars one from (immediate) access to the Eucharist and, to use Peter's phrase, "hinders" one's prayers. Third, he also claims that when a man engages in sexual activity, even with his lawful wife, he dishonors her. Taken together, these three considerations allowed him to assert that Peter's primary motivation for writing 1 Peter 3:7 was to discourage both the sordid bonds of marriage as well as any and all sexual activity, just as it was also Paul's primary motivation for penning 1 Cor 7. Conspicuous by its absence from this exegesis, especially as far as 1 Cor 7 is concerned, is any sensitivity to the New Testament's eschatological sub-currents. Far from seeing Paul's points regarding marriage in relation to the fact that "the time is short" (cf. 1 Cor 7:29), Jerome prefers to see them as intrinsically problematic. In Jerome's view, Christians, if it is at all possible, should avoid marriage just as they should avoid all non-Platonic contact with members of the opposite sex.

Augustine is both more balanced and more realistic. His reading of 1 Peter 3 leads him to the conclusion that it was not Peter's real intent there to discourage marriage. On the contrary, in Augustine's mind, Peter's words make it impossible to regard marriage as dishonorable. Just like Paul in 1 Cor 7, Peter's actual intent was to commend a certain type of marriage, namely one in which both partners strive together to see that the physical aspect of their relationship achieves and maintains its proper place. The Bishop of Hippo clearly prefers

⁴¹ Cf. n.28 *supra* where a list of Old Testament texts which could have been used to support such an agenda is given.

celibacy, just as he clearly intends to exhort all his readers, even the married, to ever-increasing chastity. At the same time, he is also clearly cognizant of the fact that this goal is usually only pursued by a small minority of the most mature Christians. More importantly, in these passages, he never speaks in negative terms about Peter's own marriage just as he never portrays Peter as regretting having taken a wife. In a word, Augustine wanted all those under his care and influence to know the freedom and peace of not being bound by their sexual drives or their marriage beds, as he himself had once been. Unlike Jerome, he always stopped short of outright condemnation.

Is it likely that 21st-century Christians will find Augustine's views on women, married sexuality and inter-gender relationships thoroughly appealing? Probably not. As Van Bavel has repeatedly made plain, however, our difficulties with Augustine or with his views on sexuality, however profound, only assume their true acuity when he is seen as a man of his time and when his thoughts are properly contextualized.

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