Walking Tall and Unashamed: An Ethical Examination of Women's Bodies as the Place of Sin, Shame, and Violence in Monotheistic Development

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Dedicated to my parents who stand with me in everything

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Introduction

How does one begin a discussion of women? Despite the tremendous attention this topic generates, the answers remain elusive. Scholars struggle to define what it is to be a woman and what encompasses female experiences. Moreover, the waters of definition on issues like sex and gender become even murkier. However elusive the definition of womanhood may be in academic conversation today, we can reconstruct what the historical picture of womanhood has been. The dominant line of thinking in Western archeology, for example, expresses the idea that no matter how much a society grows from one phase of development to another, gender roles are set biologically.[1] Although this notion has recently begun to shift the mainstream interpretations hold up men as the dominant providers and cast women as passive recipients of male care. The female role historically centered on childcare and secondary food processing, thus from the very beginning women were cast at the center of domestic life. This dominant ideology has had profound sway over our societal image of early humanity. Museums and history books offer pictures of men as mobile and working while women are shown as isolated from public life, caring for children, and cooking food.[2] This depiction of women as subordinate to male care and passive by nature is backed by our religious notions.

Religion functions as a primary mode of construction of gender roles and a process of internalization for cultural values that organize individuals into those gender roles.[3] Within this interpellation in Western culture we learn that the feminine is associated with sexuality, sin, and

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[1] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine a Western Religious History* (Charlesbourg, Québec: Braille Jymico Inc), 2009, 14-15.
[2] Ruether, *Goddesses and The Divine Feminine*, 15.
[3] Daniel Boyarin, "Gender," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 117.

the body. Men in contrast are connected to the spirit, reason, and culture, providing an ideology of natural domination over women and the ideas they represent.[4] These categories are lived as part of those elusive female experiences. Such experiences are understood by Rachel Baard as leading to a particular *Kairos*, a moment of necessary action. A broad concept, Baard defines *Kairos* as encompassing all elements of various situations, including the time, place, speaker, and audience involved. In this way, Baard explores *Kairos* as dynamic concept that carefully deals with specific situations in order to include the diverse experiences of women while acknowledging their similarities. *Kairos* represents a moment of struggle between different factors, factors which we may see as the struggle between women and sexism, misogyny, and the patriarchy. *Kairos*, however, also carries a demand for justice that allows situations to be read relationally.[5] Therefore, Baard states that "to name the *Kairos* of the feminist rhetorical situation," feminist theologians use overlapping, yet distinct terms to encompass different aspects of the female experience such as sexism, misogyny, patriarchy, and androcentrism.[6] Thus she recognizes that while no single female experience can be sketched, the global prevalence of male dominance suggests that we may find similar themes between the lives of women. Such an example of male dominance in the western world can be found in the 1955 Good Housekeeping Wife's Guide which tells women how to please their husbands while imploring them to take on a submissive existence.[7]

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[4] Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19.
[5] Rachel Sophia Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk: Feminist Conversations on the Human Condition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 33.
[6] Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*, 37.
[7] Burke, AC. "The 'Good' Wife's Guide." Primer, February 2, 2012. https://www.primermagazine.com/2009/love/the-good-wifes-guide.

These themes are my central area of concern and focus. The association between women, the body and sin, name the *Kairos* of different yet overlapping female experiences. For example, "Walk like you have three men walking behind you"[8] is a quote by popular designer Oscar De La Renta. Meant to inspire confidence, a desire to stand a little taller, and strut because a promising man might be watching, the quote doesn't sound quite right to female ears. Rather than inspiring a desire to flaunt one's sex appeal, those words raise a red flag in the back of the female mind and instead inspires the desire to run. For men, the quote generally inspires confidence and defines an opportunity. For many women, the quote likely communicates danger rather than an opportunity. Most women can cite one or several moments where men trailing behind them inspired fear, an awareness of her body, and the fact that her body would be used against her if an assault occurred. Those moments connect to the *Kairos* defined by Baard as each experience adds to the collective whole as well as the desire and demand for justice.

I can recall more than one experience when I was aware of being followed by men. Leaving the beach with a friend in the late evening, a group of men exited a nearby house and began to trail behind us. We tried to convince ourselves that they were simply taking a walk, nothing out of the ordinary. Still we were tense, definitely not strutting. When the men began to shout in our direction, we ran. Fortunately they did not put in the effort to follow our sprint from the beach toward the main road. Such experiences are not rare for women. A twitter user shared his experience of meeting a random woman who asked him to pretend to know her because she was being followed by a group of men.[9] His post received much attention and gratitude from

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[8] Natalia Borecka, "Pinterest Poison: Insanely Popular Quotes We Need to Stop Repinning Stat." Lone Wolf Magazine, April 8, 2017. https://lonewolfmag.com/pinterest-poison-insanely-popular-quotes-need-stop-repinning-stat/.

[9] Ilona Baliūnaitė, "Woman Gets Followed Home by Three Strangers, Hugs This Black Guy And Asks Him To Help Her." Bored Panda. Bored Panda, February 11, 2020.

other women who shared similar experiences. That kind of situation is unnerving and makes a woman highly aware of her body. There is an internal sense or feeling that she is the source of the problem and that blame will follow her body. This interpretation of experience shouldn't be a great revelation considering it is taught to women at young ages. Girls of all ages continue to speak out against the objectification of school dress codes that dictate that a young woman's body is distracting to the education of young men.[10] School dress codes continue to teach women that their bodies are a source of shame and that modesty is their responsibility. Such teachings are connected to the lineage of western Christianity.

Women, sin and the body were not always so intertwined. The Semitic peoples of the Ancient Near East did not embrace the dichotomies of mind/body and sacred/profane that Western culture has embraced so whole-heartedly, dichotomies that trouble the concepts of body and sexuality. Rather, the Semitic peoples connected the body and sexuality to the sacred order through the divine pantheon. The categories of mind/body and sacred/profane were delineated over time. Examining the sociopolitical conditions of the Israelites in exile, the philosophical development of the Greeks, and the struggle of the Church Fathers to understand the nature of humanity according to monotheism shows the growth of a new world order. These movements began to imagine the world in new ways so the material and spiritual realms were divided and associated with the masculine and feminine as well as the sacred and profane. The body became a troubled space and heavily associated with uncleanliness, desire and sin, leaning into what we interoperate as the realm of the profane. The notion of a singular disembodied God permitted the

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https://www.boredpanda.com/woman-followed-by-men-stranger-helps-her-out/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic.

[10] Cecilia D'Anastasio, "Girls Speak Out Against Sexist School Dress Codes." The Nation, June 29, 2015. https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/girls-speak-out-against-sexist-school-dress-codes/.

mind and spirit to ascend in pursuit of godly perfection and salvation. In further developing an understanding of monotheism, Christianity inherited these strands of thought, perpetuating and solidifying the intertwinement of women, the body, and sin.

I. The Before Time

In the tradition of the Western world, human society has historically delineated between the sacred and profane. Particular rules and codes about purity generally set apart the sacred from the profane and are pervasive in both the biblical world and our own. These rules help us to categorize order from disorder, the holy from the unholy. The Bible itself has an affinity for many kinds of rules, yet Western culture has and continues to fixate particularly on those tenets that pertain to sex. While today's society does not have as highly sophisticated system of purity or a consistent concern about individual levels of purity, it does acculturate within us a sense of what is dirty.

In western culture we divide purity among a variety of headings such as hygiene and aesthetics, so that our conceptual range of the idea is not wholly an aspect of religion. The US alone contains a multitude of groups, consequently notions of purity vary. Yet in the matter of sexual ethics, American purity rules remain quite powerful as we continue to associate sex with the potential for moral and or religious offenses. In the 1950's, much of the Christian church treated sex with a unanimous voice that held a restrictive code for the young so that almost no physical contact was permitted prior to marriage. Society has become more tolerant since the 1960's and 1970's due to a variety of factors such as shifts in intellectual leadership, changes in popular culture, changes in birth control, and an increasing demand for equality from women and queer communities.[11] Despite the more tolerant attitude of general American society toward sex, religion continues to communicate purity codes about sex so that some religious groups advocate

[11] L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, & Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 15.

for a national acceptance of their particular codes. Sex remains an area of some confusion as it can be understood as sacred or profane depending on the context of the act.

Societally, we do not always inquire about the nature of dirt and what actually qualifies something as dirty but, in reality, a system that divides the clean from the unclean is a way of understanding not only what it means to be human but to be part of a particular human group. William Countryman argues that "Dirt is what lies outside the system, what is perceived as not belonging in association with people of this particular society, whether as unfamiliar, irregular, unhealthy or otherwise objectionable."[12] Therefore, given Countryman's definition and argument about perception, it follows that not all groups define the sacred and the profane in the same way, especially when one considers change over time. Cultures in the Ancient Near East, for example, came to order themselves along a spectrum wherein sex and the body existed as part of the natural and sacred order of things connected to the world of the divine.

The divine pantheon in Mesopotamia was a complex system of relationships. Some early metaphors of the divine suggested parallel gods and goddesses, with the gender of the deities associated with natural powers such as the sky, earth, plants, and animals. In these early metaphors, the gender of the deities was more fluid as nature called for an interchange of male and female powers.[13] Though most Mesopotamian deities are generally characterized as either masculine or feminine, the gender identity of many was actually more fluid and changeable. For example, two deities could be merged into one of male, female, or an unspecified gender.[14]

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[12] Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, & Sex*, 13.
[13]Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine,* 47.
[14]Julia M.Asher-Greve and Joan Goodnick Westenholz. *Goddesses in Context: on Divine Powers, Roles, Relationships and Gender in Mesopotamian Textual and Visual Sources* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2013), 17.

Additionally, the gods regulated the natural elements so that all aspects of the cosmos were supervised and determined. In doing so, their supervision brought order to chaos for the sake of humanity. Each city state of ancient Sumer had its own pantheon, headed by either a chief god or goddess of that city. City deities held secondary spouses and courts with the relationships between them defined by familial ties.[15] The patron god of a city was believed to oversee the general well-being of that city. In this way, the head god or goddess oversaw the peace and prosperity of their city and usually maintained a significant relationship with the city's ruler. Such an organization communicates a sense of community as an organic whole wherein these spaces were a locus of divinity that had unity, integrity, and power.[16]

Given the complex organization of ancient Sumer and its various city states, the gods of each city state came into relationship with one another. Through the development of various historical periods, the relative power of city-gods fluctuated as people came into conflict with one another. Throughout this movement the various gods and goddesses of city states were either identified with one another or were brought into family relationships. Rival theologies also developed but were smoothed over with the later creation of national pantheons.[17] The intermingling of the gods and goddesses were set in motion by two distinct peoples who occupied southern Iraq from the beginning of history.

The cultures of the Sumerians and Akkadians (who later became Assyrian and Babylonian peoples) were not kept separate despite the fact that they spoke two different

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[15] Joan Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East 3000-1000 BC," in *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence* , 63–81 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 68.
[16] Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 9.
[17] Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess*, 10.

languages. To a great extent, Akkadian speakers participated in Sumerian civilization. The beginning of recorded history indicates a fair amount of cultural syncretism between the two groups.[18] Therefore, the pantheon existed in a state of fluctuation due to historical and ethnic factors as well as different economic systems and new socioeconomic realities.

The Sumerian pantheon functioned as a divine counterpart for society and communicated the order of the cosmos as a division between male and female powers, each of which had an impact on events and processes in the world. The elements and things of the sky were largely relegated to male gods while the powers of the goddesses were more earthbound, though these distinctions may not have always been the case.[19] Nevertheless, Tivka Frymer-Kensk, represents a group of scholars who tend to overemphasize the sexual difference between the gods and goddesses. Though the realm of the gods appears more masculine and the goddesses more feminine and approachable, these associations can be attributed to our Western lens. The goddesses occupied every level of organization in Sumerian pantheons and had a variety of epithets in common with gods, controlling largely the same realms.[20] Both gods and goddesses were patrons of culture and took part in the creation of the world and organization of civilization.[21] The goddesses performed many functions as they personified social roles, familial relationships, and performed domestic as well as other tasks. Involved in the production of grain, clothing manufacture, and beer brewing they also had control over the education of children and various learned arts such as writing and accounting, and scribal knowledge.[22]

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[18] Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess*, 10.
[19] Ibid., 46.
[20] Asher-Greve, Westenholz, *Goddesses in Context*, 21.
[21] Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess*, 32.
[22] Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East," 70.

In order to reconstruct the role of the goddesses in history, we must recognize the various cultural filters through which we see them. Joan Westenholz notes that we impose our own cultural preconceptions and interpretations on surviving texts and artifacts of history and helpfully reminds us about those filters, "if we cannot properly discard them, at least make allowances for the distortion they produce."[23] The Western association of body with the female results in the attachment of women to the realms of reproduction, sexuality, and fertility. Yet these values are generally seen in a negative light given the connection between the body and sin which, according to Boyarin, results from religion as a process that teaches us gendered roles and meanings.[24] It is tempting to apply a similar lens of associations to the goddesses of Mesopotamia. While they operate within the realms of reproduction, sexuality, and fertility, the goddesses are not limited to them nor do they have sole control over these areas. Rather, both the gods and goddesses were imminent in all the forces of nature with their actions having direct impact on humanity.

Essential to Mesopotamian thought, the body and mind were inseparable and as they conceptualized "the body as the agent of thinking, feeling, experiencing, and knowing. The body was the essential ego/being. In absence of a specific concept of mind the corporeal body was representative of the totality of the individual."[25] Therefore, no distinction between the sacred and profane existed as the whole of the world was part of a sacred order. This holistic understanding and appreciation can be seen through the dual participation of divine figures in

[23] Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East," 63.
[24] Boyarin, "Gender," 17.
[25]Julia M. Asher-Greve, "The Essential Body: Mesopotamian Conceptions of the Gendered Body." *Gender & History* 9, no. 3 (November 1997): 432–61, 447.

matters of the body. Such participation showcases an ideology wherein the body is viewed as an important and positive element of the sacred order.

In the realm of reproduction, the goddesses are generally thought to take sole control the moment a man's semen left his body. Yet the source of reproduction was attributed to male sexuality and the production of semen, therefore, the gods did oversee fertility and were believed to initiate conception.[26] The stages of childbirth, however, were largely in the hands of the goddesses. Several goddesses took part in the formation and gestation of the child in the womb as well as the act of birth.[27] This supervision was an intimate process as the goddesses were believed to shape each child individually in the womb, bring on the moment of birth, and decide the fate of the child. Indeed, the process of birth took on a ritual element with the involvement of the goddesses. The goddess Inanna describes Nintu ready with the birthing brick and her daughters ready to serve as assistant midwives, holding the pail to catch the placenta and the knife for cutting the umbilical cord in Enki and the World Order.[28] Thus the goddesses were present and involved in the birthing process, celebrated and honored in the birth ritual; however, male gods could also intervene on behalf of the birthing mother.

Male deities such as Sin and Marduk could be called upon during particularly difficult births. Incantation experts would invoke male deities in rituals to aid the mother, such as The Cow of Sin. In this ritual, a female cow beloved by the moon god Sin represents the birthing mother. In hearing her pained cries during labor, he sends other goddesses to help relieve her

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[26]Julia M. Asher-Greve, "Decisive Sex, Essential Gender," in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2-6, 2001*, 11–21 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 16.
[27] Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East," 68-69.
[28] Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess*, 49.

pain and deliver the child.[29] Through this involvement we see that the pain of mothers and the birth of children was not an issue below the concern of the gods. In this way, the process of birth involved divine regulation and participation between divine and human bodies.

The goddesses also brought the body into the realm of the natural and sacred through the creation of the world. Firstly, the goddess Nammu—the personification of the subterranean waters—was understood as the creator of all the deities as the self-procreating womb.[30] Therefore the womb, which is often contextualized as part of the profane is already brought into the divine order in the creation of the other divinities themselves. Secondly, the body is brought into the sacred order as a unified being through humanity's creation at the hands of the goddess. While in the modern West, the mind is the locus of power, thought, and will, the Mesopotamians did not have a clear notion of the brain as the seat of human intelligence and will. Rather they considered the heart as the locus of the will, thought, and feeling. Therefore, In Mesopotamian culture the heart was representative of the mind. Julia Asher-Greve defines the relationship in this way, "The heart is not only the core of the body, but heart, body and mind as the same word is a holistic concept. Thus conceptually there is no dichotomy between mind and body."[31] This holistic perspective is expressed in the creation myths wherein humanity is formed in one process by the goddess.[32]

The realm of sexuality was largely credited to Inanna/Ishtar (Inanna in Sumerian and Ishtar in Akkadian) and it was through her that sexuality was brought into the sacred order. This

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[29] Meredith B. Hammons, "Before Joan of Arc: Gender Identity and Heroism in Ancient Mesopotamian Birth Rituals" (PhD diss., University of Vanderbilt, 2008), 59.
[30] Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East," 68.
[31] Asher-Greve, "The Essential Body," 434.
[32] Asher-Greve, "The Essential Body,"434.

particular goddess was the most revered and popular of ancient Mesopotamia.[33] Inanna first appears in the fourth millennium as the patron deity of Uruk but later becomes more widely known as the youthful goddess of love.[34] Inanna is frequently considered significant for the way in which she embodies the masculine and the feminine. Although she is gendered as feminine, one of her main characteristics according to scholars is her gender ambiguity, which is also included in her domain as the goddess of sex and sexuality.[35] What scholars have considered as Inanna's fluidity may be more closely associated with the western cultural lens that scholarship has applied to her over time. Inanna embodied traits we do not consider normative for women, therefore, she has come to embody both masculine and feminine. It is likely, however, that Inanna was fully conceived as a feminine deity who embodied multiple ways of being a woman. Thus, in her freedom as a woman she was able to bring sexuality to the realm of the sacred to be celebrated by both men and women.

In this way, Inanna represented the attraction necessary for all sexual relations regardless of social purpose or value. The unencumbered woman, represented as virgin and harlot,[36] as well as unrestrained and marital sex, all fall under her domain as she embodied all modes of womanhood.[37] In the *Exaltation of Inanna*, written by Enheduanna, the first known author of the Ancient Near East (2300 B.C.E.) makes clear that disobedience to Inanna would result in a loss of sexual relations. Inanna would depart from the city and "its woman no longer speaks

[33] Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East," 72.
[34] Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East," 73.
[35] Asher-Greve, Westenholz, *Goddesses in Context*, 17.
[36] Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East," 73.
[37] Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess*, 47.

affectionately with her husband; at dead of night she no longer takes counsel with him."[38] In this manner, Inanna is the sexual joy of the cosmos and thus brings joy and life to humankind. Inanna is said to bring happiness to children and dances to young women, associating the power of sex with the power of joy, she is the embodiment spirit of play. This embodiment of play can be seen as her feasts are festivals that involve games, dances, and music. Fymer-Kensky affirms this interpretation writing, "Inanna's sexual essence is the source of joy and play for all."[39] Rather than associated with concepts of the profane or sin, through Inanna, sexuality was expressed in the divine sphere as a source of life and joy.

The importance of sexuality is additionally tied to the role of the gods in fertility. None of the goddesses were fertility goddesses in the conventional sense. Both gods and goddesses were involved in ensuring the fertility of the land and the cooperation of all the natural forces needed for success, but the forces of agricultural renewal were set in motion by sexual attraction.[40] The Sacred Marriage ritual was a royal affair wherein the king took on the role of the god Dumuzi in his courtship of Inanna. The union of Inanna and Dumuzi is rife with language that compares sexuality to agricultural fertility. Before their union, Inanna cries out, "who will plow my vulva? Who will plow my high field?" When Dumuzi declares that he will she replies, "Then plow my vulva, man of my heart, plow my vulva."[41] Upon their coming together the land begins to flourish, "Plants grew high by their side. Grains grew high by their side. Gardens flourished luxuriantly."[42]

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[38] J.A Black, G. Cunningham, E. Fluckiger-Hawker, E. Robson, G. Zólyomi. "The Exaltation of Inana," *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. (http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/), Oxford 1998.
[39] Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess*, 48.
[40] Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess*, 50.
[41] Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 51.
[42] Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 51.

In this union, Inanna is the field that pours out the grain while Dumuzi is the fertilizing power that makes the plants grow. In the process Inanna also establishes Dumuzi on the throne. In this way, the Sacred Marriage ritual establishes the king's power, allowing him access to the world of the gods in a manner impossible for other humans to achieve. The union between the king and Inanna also worked to ensure the fertility and growth of the land as their sexual congress demonstrates the "metaphysical connection between human sexuality and the survival and regeneration of the world."[43] Sexuality thus becomes an important force for fertility and renewal because sex unites; the sacred marriage is about the coming together of interlocking elements to make a fertile world.

Through the realms of reproduction, sexuality, and fertility we see the strands of an ideology that accepted the whole body as well as sexuality as positive and important forces within the ordering of the cosmos. Divine figures were not above participating in human affairs dealing directly with the body as multiple gods and goddesses took part in the regulation of birth and fertility. Sexuality becomes an important force in both of these realms as demonstrated through the goddess Inanna. The involvement of both the gods and goddesses demonstrates that the Mesopotamians did not develop a system of binary gender that associated the male with positive and the female with negative values. Such thinking would have been contradictory to their holistic concept of the human, "with the body as the fundamental point of reference."[44]

The more positive notions of the body shifted with the onset of monotheistic thinking, particularly among the Israelites. Yet the early Israelites were not as far from this early ideology that accepted the body as we often imagine. Prior to the Babylonian exile and even after, the

[43] Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess*, 54.
[44] Asher-Greve, "The Essential Body," 453.

early Israelites were not quite the monotheists given by the picture of the Bible. Monotheism developed over time. The early history of the Hebrew people is difficult to pin down. Little to no evidence exists to confirm the legends of the patriarchs, the Exodus, or the people's long journey through the Sinai desert. In a similar vein, not much exists to separate the Israelite's culture, language, and practices from the people of Canaan.[45] Rather than a great conquest of the land, it is more likely that the Israelites were part of the Canaanite people who broke off from the community or who gradually settled into the foothills. Therefore, the early Israelites were not separate from Canaanite culture and the influence of Mesopotamian religious practices.[46]

Both biblical and extra biblical evidence suggest that the early worship of Yahweh took place along with a consort/goddess. Jeremiah contains references to women making cakes, burning incense, and providing offerings for an unspecified "queen of heaven" (Jeremiah 7:17-18; 44:19). According to Karel van der Toorn, letters from the Jewish colony at Elephantine in upper Egypt contain evidence which supports the inference that the worship of the Queen of Heaven was brought to Egypt by migrants from Judah.[47] He notes that the Jews at Elephantine were mostly known by Aramaic letters and documents they wrote, one of which includes a recorded oath to "Anat of Yahu."[48] The name Anat referring to the goddess and Yahu as a variation of Yahweh, the main god of Israel. Van der Toorn argues that this document thus indicates that the Jews at Elephantine worshiped Anat as the consort of Yahweh. Further, he argues that the correspondence with the authorities in Jerusalem regarding the destruction of the

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[45] Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess: a Symbol for Our Time* (London: Aquarian Press, 1995),169.
[46] K. L. Noll, "Canaanite Religion." *Religion Compass* 1, no. 1 (2007): 61–92, 69.
[47] Karel Van der Toorn, "Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion," in *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence* , 83–97 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 83.
[48] Van der Toorn, "Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion," 85.

temple at Elephantine in 410 BC shows the sanctuary was acknowledged by Jewish authorities in their homeland.[49] Therefore, Van der Toorn states that the worship of a divine consort was not merely a syncretism developed through intercultural contact and conformed to a well-established practice in Judah and Israel wherein Yahweh was worshipped with a divine consort.[50] He corroborates this argument with the discovery of inscriptions dated between 800 and 750 BC which contain blessings by Yahweh and "by his Asherah"[51] and continues that the discovered texts reflect the notions and practices of Israel.[52]

Not much is known of Asherah beyond the Ugaritic texts that indicate she was a major West Semitic goddess.[53] She is believed to be the mother of the other gods and popularly considered a sea goddess by American Scholars though her association with the sea is heavily problematized by Tilde Binger.[54] More can be told about Anat, who came from a branch of Amorites that settled in Mesopotamia in the second millennium and brought their goddess to Ugarit.[55] Anat was both strong and independent, patroness of warriors and kings she fought battles on behalf of her brother Baal. In this way she is linked to kinship ideology in a manner similar to Inanna as she establishes Baal on the throne.[56] In addition, she was associated with sexuality and maidenhood. Her connection to Inanna in both her roles dealing with war and sex and her role as the power behind the throne speaks to the shared beliefs and influences within Mesopotamia. Both Inanna and Anat functioned within a gender spectrum that allows them

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[49] Van der Toorn, "Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion," 85.
[50] Ibid., 86.
[51] Ibid., 89.
[52] Ibid., 90.
[53] Ibid., 88,
[54] Tilde Binger, *Asherah: Godesses in Ugarit, Israel, and the Old Testament*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997., 43-45.
[55] Van der Toorn, "Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion," 87.
[56] Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 56.

fluidity between what we consider male and female roles.[57] While there is no scholarly consensus to what extent Anat, as the potential Queen of Heaven to the early Israelites, resembled the way she was presented in Ugaritic texts, it is nonetheless plausible that acceptance of the body and sexuality as part of the sacred order remained. In addition, it is important to note that the word for "soul" and "body" is the same in Hebrew. This lack of a distinction between the two makes relatively clear that the Israelites did not embrace a mind versus body dichotomy as was later developed in Greek thought.[58] This interpretation furthers the plausibility that the early Israelites embraced the body and sexuality in all its fullness alongside their Mesopotamian neighbors.

Another important point in this argument of bodily acceptance is the prevalence of Israelite figurines that represent women. The naked female with a large bust is a statuary figure frequently found throughout the Near East dating as far back to the fourth millennium BC. Such images have frequently been interpreted as goddess or fertility images and championed by the goddess movement as proof of a period in history in which women were either equal or superior to men.[59] Such assumptions, however, have become complicated in scholarship as individuals debate over the potential purpose of such figurines. It is difficult not to recognize some significance in the level of their distribution throughout Palestinian soil from 1200 until about 550 BC.[60] One non-religious explanation is that the figurines functioned as dolls, toys, or some kind of educational aids for children. Van der Toorn hypothesizes that the figurines were devotional objects that were smaller counterparts of official cult images used outside organized

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[57] Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East," 79.
[58] Daniel Lys, "The Israelite Soul According to the LXX," *Vetus Testamentum* 16: 2 (Apr., 1966), 181-228.
[59] Ruth Tringham and Margaret Conkey. "Rethinking Figureines." In *Ancient Goddesses: the Myths and the Evidence* , 22–45. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, 22.
[60] Van der Toorn, Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion, 92.

practice for devotional purposes. This speculation coincides with that of Elinor Gadon who similarly views the figurines as part of intimate devotional worship as they were "small enough to fit into a clasping hand . . ."[61] Asher-Greve offers another interpretation, namely that they were source of erotic power.[62] Clearly multiple interpretations exist to explain the purpose of these figurines and the answer is likely varied.

Regardless of their intended purpose, I find their vast distribution significant because their existence likely points to a comfortability with the body among the early Israelites. It is important to note that whatever body positivity remained during this time was surely less for various reasons. The dual participation of the gods had diminished as the goddesses were increasingly marginalized into lesser roles. The goddesses Innana/ Ishtar, Anat, and Asherah maintained their positions of power for longer due to their popularity and their connection to kingship.

[61] Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess,* 184.
[62] Asher-Greve, "The Essential Body," 444.

II. The Ideological Shift

The Israelites

From the period of the Judges to the early monarchy and exile, the biblical narrative shows a process of convergence where the roles previously played by multiple gods were taken over by Yahweh.[63] The qualities of Yahweh were often expressed in terms largely shaped by the characteristics of other deities belonging to ancient Israel's heritage that they would later reject. Thus, what emerged was a picture of Yahweh as an omnicompetent deity. Yet, given the argument in the previous section it is clear that the people we know as the Israelites were among and part of the Canaanites who were also not immune to the influence of neighboring cultures. Too much evidence exists attesting to the complexity and multiplicity of the Israelite's divine realm prior to the assaults of Assyria and Babylonia to support the notion that the Israelites were always monotheistic. The biblical text displays a multitude of references not only to other gods but to Israel's religious toleration. Psalms 29 and 82 refer to a multiplicity of gods including reference to the Queen of Heaven previously mentioned in Jeremiah (See also Psalms 86:8; 96:4; 97:7; 135:5; and various texts like Ex 20:3; 23:32-33). It follows, therefore, that the belief in the God of Abraham did not require a denial of the existence of other deities and for a time actually included them. The exact manner in which Yahweh actually entered the Israelite pantheon cannot be known but it is clear that by the 10th century Yahweh appears as a dynastic god in Jerusalem alongside various local gods.[64] The religious development of Israel was a slow progression toward the distinctive monotheistic ideas found in the later Israelite tradition. Prior

[63] Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 76.
[64] Diana Vikander Edelman, *The Triumph of Elohim: from Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 52.

to the development of an ideology of Yahweh as the only God over that of a tribal god, even god's name was not firmly settled, indicating a gradual convergence of multiple deities as the social, political, and cultural entity of Israel emerged out of their own multiplicity of peoples and experiences.[65] According to Thomas Thompson:

> Certainly Judah of the 8-6th centuries and Samaria of the 9-7th centuries maintained Yahweh among their dominant deities, along with El, Baal, Anat, Asherah and others. However, there were many Yahwehs . . . That some in Judah saw his consort as Asherah is hardly any longer debatable, but that he was sole god of Jerusalem or of the state of Judah seems unlikely. One should no more identify the many Yahweh's than with the various Baals (with whom Yahweh is identified) or Els (of which the biblical tradition is replete).[66]

The religious development of the Israelite people was a slower progression toward the distinctive monotheistic ideas found in the Hebrew Bible as they were not crucial to those involved at the beginning of Israel's narrative. While several factors contributed to the development of a monotheistic theology among the Israelites, most compelling are the sociopolitical dimensions, to which I now turn.

The sixth century came with the continued assault by Assyria and ended in 539 BCE with the Babylonian exile. Over the course of this time the Israelites slowly began to develop an exclusive monotheistic ideology. This ideology is expressed most dramatically throughout Second Isaiah: "Thus said the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no god."[67] While the peoples of Israel and Judah had previously accepted the existence of multiple local deities collected under the title of Elohim and Adonai, sometimes acknowledged as lesser members of the gods ruled by Yahweh,

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[65] Laurel C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 31.
[66] Edelman, *The Triumph of Elohim,* 119.
[67] Isaiah 44:6 NRSV.

Isaiah's statement indicates that not only does God stand supreme but that the other gods no longer exist. It is important to consider this shift in the context of a sociopolitical crisis with Babylon.

According to the biblical writers, the roots of monotheism began a century earlier under the reign of King Josiah (his reign is usually dated from 640-609 BCE). Josiah initiated the Deuteronomic reform that set out to link more tightly the kingdoms of Judah and Israel as well as consolidate power under the looming threat of the Assyrian empire.[68] Promoting an agenda of national unity, the Deuteronomistic writers were prepared to reorganize previous religious institutions and structures particularly with the centralization of worship and reorganization of the priesthood.

Deuteronomy's reforms were potentially a necessary response to the state of affairs as the assault of the Assyrian empire threatened older patterns of settlement because much of Judah's territory had been destroyed or confiscated thereby calling for a unified center of worship.[69] In addition to the centralization of space, Deuteronomy utilized a strong polemic against their origins in Canaanite culture to motivate a singular devotion to Yahweh.[70] Deuteronomy attempted to centralize both place and practice, seeking to reunify a threatened society through exclusive worship to Yahweh at an authorized communal location. Such an attempt at unification under one God alone did not solidify, however, as we know that even after the fall of Israel to Assyria and the continued assault of Babylon on Judah the people continued some level of devotion to the Queen of Heaven. In fact, the people appear to believe their misfortune is related

[68] Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism*, 29.
[69] William S. Morrow, , *An Introduction to Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 2017, 219.
[70] Morrow, *An Introduction to Biblical Law*, 226.

to ignoring the Queen of Heaven rather than Yahweh as the Prophets proclaim: "But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine."[71]

Unable to stand against the clash of empires, Judah fell to Babylon and the people were thrown into exile. In exile the people faced a unique challenge to remain both Jewish and survive. Within this struggle, it is possible that the earlier attempt at unification under Deuteronomistic reform was remembered and taken more seriously. Regardless, the Israelites would form into a strong and even intolerant monotheism by the time Second Isaiah was written.[72] Israelite identity, as expressed by the Hebrew Bible, thus became associated highly with one God in worship and practice, with strong polemics against other gods and even the concept of multiplicity. In this process, the God of Israel changed in important ways as the "imagery and language of the defeated kingdom is not lost but is converted into the language of victorious divinity."[73] The ruler of Israel shifts from a tribal deity tied to a particular land and people. Mark Smith notes that the particular power of this period resided in the ways in which the people turned a political downfall into the ascension of the Israelite God amidst the events leading to the Judean exile.[74] The attributes of God as warrior and creator are molded so that God becomes ruler of all lands and nations. Isaiah 45:18-25 articulates the notion that if God can shape the destiny of Israel, God's purpose is that every nation should know that there is but one God and that they should worship that God alone:

> Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall

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[71] Jeremiah 44:18.
[72] Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism,* 31.
[73] Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism*, 32.
[74] Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israels Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.,165.

> not return; "to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." . . . In the Lord all the offspring of Israel shall triumph and glory.[75]

The once tribal deity of a small and defeated people, who self declares a role as the master of the Universe, used Babylon as a tool in the punishment of the Israelites for disobedience reflecting a divine plan and control over the state of things rather than accepting defeat by foreign nations and foreign gods. Yet while declaring mastery of the universe and that all nations will know God, Israel maintains their position as the particular people of God because it is through the nation of Israel that others will come to know this God.

Laurel Schneider notes that the monotheism made out of the period of Israelite convergence and differentiation is not always consistent: "The different circumstances of Jews after the exile and throughout the second temple period (from ca .520 BCE to 70 CE) meant that monotheism played various roles in the religious and political rhetoric of a still colonized people."[76] Three distinct types of monotheism can be identified that influenced this period and all illustrate a sense of political anxiety in the face of continued threats to the Israelite identity. It is perhaps easier to identify these as three facets of monotheism as it developed and overlapped together rather than thinking of them as three separate types.

The first facet is the polemic against other people, nations, and cultures found throughout the period of the Babylonian exile and echoed throughout the prophetic books.[77] With the loss of their center of worship and spread out amongst foreigners, such polemics were a tactic to deal with the resulting identity crisis. In order to maintain their identity as the Israelite people, the prophets warned against any form of intermingling with foreign peoples that would taint their

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[75] Isaiah 45: 22-25.
[76] Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism*, 33.
[77] Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism,* 34.

genealogical line. In addition, it was a tactic used to unify so that they did not give up on their identity and give in to the ways of their captors. This concern for identity will function as a part of a larger argument later on.

The second facet involves a realization of the fact that despite attempts to unify their identity, the Israelites remained a split people in the face of opposing others.[78] Divided between those sent into exile and those left behind, generations passed so that those Israelites that returned to their homeland in the Persian Period, were not the same people that had left. Therefore, the people struggled to make accommodations for their fractured sense of identity while comprehending the theological implications of a deity that bound them beyond the confines of land but through act and obedience.

The third facet is actually a connection with colonizing culture. After taking over Babylon, the Persians were far less heavy handed with the Israelite community and even allowing some of them to return to their homeland. Over the course of the Persian Period, Hellenistic culture was also emerging in Greece and spread enough to enter Jewish intellectual life so that it developed a more philosophical depth.[79]

This developing ideology of an exclusive relationship with Yahweh as the only god connects to developing notion of purity of identity. Maintaining themselves as the people of God put women in a precarious position as gate keepers of the Israelite identity which the prophets utilized as a grand metaphor to speak about the nature of the people's relationship with God.

[78] Ibid., 33.
[79] Ibid., 34.

Implications

The Israelite community put a high value on the practices that made them distinct from others. Their sociopolitical conditions between the assault of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires through the Persian period ensured the production of a new theology wherein God mastered the universe and became the God of all nations. This ideology, however, was built out of necessity, to prove their God had not abandoned them. Therefore, the extension of God's power over others was not an attempt to evangelize but to preserve. They did not lose their standing as the people of God and continued to see themselves as distinct from others.

The Jews[80] placed a high value on the distinctive practices that set them apart from the nations, standing out by the degree to which they kept themselves separate from other ethnic groups.[81] The foundational history and relationship between the Israelites and God helped solidify and define their exclusive group-oriented identity. Functioning as a group-oriented society, individuals understood their identity to derive from the group as a whole and through their exclusive relationship as the people of God.[82] One's goals in life, in this kind of community, are geared toward the benefit of the group rather than the individual. Acting for the benefit of an exclusive group required adherence to strict codes that maintained this identity. Due to this group orientation, the Israelites had strong boundaries that differentiated them from outsiders. Not unlike many other groups the Israelite people had a strong sense of group identity. Therefore, marriage and the family were highly valued because they ensured the continuation of the group.

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[80] Scholars debate in which time period Judaism fully emerged. The proposed time periods include the Babylonian and Persian periods to the Hellenistic period and earliest centuries of Christianity. See: Cynthia Baker. "The Emergence of Judaism." Bible Odyssey. Accessed March 15, 2020. http://bibleodyssey.com/people/related-articles/emergence-of-judaism.
[81] Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, & Sex*, 20.
[82] Lyn M. Bechtel, "What If Dinah Is Not Raped? (Genesis 34)," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19:62 (1994): 19-36., 21.

Consequently, any relationships outside the group threaten to undermine its power and longevity.[83]

This preoccupation with identity corroborates with their concern for the purity and holiness of the seed or their genealogical longevity. Israelite law codes appear deeply concerned with purity and regulation of the body in how the people related to the sacred as well as the world around them, a world which was largely considered impure: e.g., "The land that you are entering to possess is a land unclean with the pollutions of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations" (Ezra 9: 10). The Israelites differentiated heavily between the holy and unholy as well as the clean and unclean. Societies create lines of differentiation that help interpret human experience and interaction. This kind of line drawing is typical of many societies and is generally done in connection with beliefs and practices so that societies and persons can differentiate between those inside and those outside of the communally held boundaries.[84] Purity rules were a means to determine proper place and order. Pure, or clean, are those things set aside in their proper place as defined by the community.[85] While uncleanliness was understood as a natural part of life, women in particular were more prone to uncleanliness. In western society we tend to read these categories as sacred and profane and therefore associate women and their bodies with the profane.

Purity rules are scattered throughout the Hebrew Bible but the most substantial collections appear in Leviticus 11-16 and 17-26. These two collections are the Priestly and the Holiness Codes. The first is primarily concerned with ritual purity while the latter, the holiness

[83] Bechtel, "What if Dinah Is Not Raped," 23.
[84] Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 164.
[85] Malina, *The New Testament World*, 165.

code, is concerned with the historical consequences of uncleanliness for the land of Canaan and the Israelites residing there.[86] While difficult to date, most scholars place the codes around the Babylonian exile.[87] The Holiness Code in particular sought to lay blame for the catastrophe of exile at the feet of those who had disobeyed the purity standards set by the writers in the preceding era. The code did not introduce a different kind of purity but raised the stakes of the system and extended its scope in order to reinforce other ethical principles.[88] The code is primarily concerned with preserving boundaries between Israel and other nations and among themselves.[89] In this way, the holiness code appears to communicate a deep concern for separating the holy from the unholy and demarcating cleanliness. Western society, as Boyrain suggests, tends to fixate on these rules as they pertain to gender and sex as a means to construct our norms. Therefore, we are entering a new order where sex and the body have become unlike God and the world is no longer part of the whole sacred order but differentiated into sacred and profane.

The Holiness Code and other laws regulating purity in the Hebrew Bible associate women more closely with the world of the unclean due to their bodily functions. For example, prominent concern was placed on menstruation which made women unclean for seven days. During this time, their uncleanliness was considered highly contagious and forced them to remain separate from religious practice for most of their adult lives.[90] The concern was placed on

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[86] Countryman, , *Dirt, Greed, & Sex,* 22.
[87] T.C. Sun Henry, "Holiness Code," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 3, Ed, David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2574-257; Knierim, r. P. "The Problem of Ancient Israel's Prescriptive Legal Traditions," *Semeia* 45: 7-25.
[88] Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, & Sex,* 44.
[89] Jennifer Wright Knust, *Unprotected Texts: the Bibles Surprising Contradictions about Sex and Desire*. New York: HarperOne, 2012., 140.
[90] Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 174.

the uncleanliness of blood but that concern was transcribed onto women themselves. In addition, the period of cleansing after the birth of a daughter is twice as long than the time required after the birth of a son (Lev 12:1-5). These rules articulate a broad anxiety about the polluting potential of women and their bodies. This concept relates to the fact that men were the primary audience and concern of the Hebrew Bible and women posed particular threats to the purity of the male line.[91] Given that focus, female sexuality was heavily regulated.

The main contribution of a woman to her family and society was through her sexuality, which was viewed as the exclusive property of her husband.[92] Countryman specifies that property denotes something that is an extension of the self, therefore, a violation of one's property is a violation of one's personhood.[93] With the continuity of the family entirely dependent on heirs, there was a strong concern for the legitimacy of heirs and the purity of the family line and sexual property was tightly regulated. Because of this concern, female sexuality was not only regulated but a central factor in the societal understanding of both honor and shame. Families, particularly the male heads, attained and maintained status and respect by their ability to control their property and thus could gain or lose honor based on the actions of their daughters and wives who faced the most regulation due to their role in preserving the group identity.

The laws concerning virginity and adultery act as the main safeguards to a man's right to a particular woman's sexuality.[94] A girl who committed fornication while in the house of her

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[91] Plaskow, *Standing again at Sinai*, 4.
[92] Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 41–88 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 51.
[93] Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, & Sex*, 147.
[94] Plaskow, *Standing Again at Saini*, 171.

father violated both his rights and those of her future husband. The act defied her father's authority, thereby shaming the family, and robbed her future husband of his claim to her sexuality.[95] This cultural reality was also significant because female virginity was essential for making a marriage alliance and affording a woman's natal family influence and political security.[96] Adultery was also a serious crime against sexual property that threatened the purity and honor of the family. Considered a capital crime, the punishment for intercourse between a man and a married woman was the death of both parties (Lev. 20:10). The man was executed for violating another man's property while the woman was executed for giving away what belonged only to her husband. The crime of adultery was so serious that a man who even suspected his wife could subject her to a magic ritual of "the waters of bitterness" (Numbers 5:11-31).[97] No parallel trial existed for men, in fact men could engage in sexual relations outside of marriage provided they did not involve virgins or married women. [98] This lack of balance demonstrates the weight and responsibility placed on women in guarding the purity and honor of the family line. The story of Dinah further illustrates the severity with which the Israelites took their notion of identity as a separate people, particularly as they became a scattered minority among gentiles.[99]

Deeply concerned with purity and regulation of the body, the Israelite law codes functioned in several ways. Their main purpose was to delineate the Israelites from others in their relationship with God yet they had important implications for women. The regulations pertaining to female menstruation demonstrate the notion that female sexuality was associated

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[95] Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, & Sex*, 159.
[96] Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, & Sex*, 158.
[97] Plaskow, *Standing Again at Saini*, 171.
[98] Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, & Sex*, 159.
[99] Alexander Rofé, "Defilement of Virgins in Biblical Law and the Case of Dinah (Genesis 34)" *Biblica* 86, no. 3 (2005): 369-75., 372-374.

with the polluting and unclean. Again, Western society tends to read uncleanliness as the profane. As sexual property women were also a valuable resource to the continuation of the male line. Therefore, their sexuality was heavily regulated as a commodity and as Judith Plaskow argues, was the locus of their otherness: "the desire to control female sexuality is the chief source of male anxiety about women and thus also the source of the central vocabulary and symbolism for the construction of women's otherness."[100]

The language of purity, sexuality, and identity has further implications for women in relation to the tactics of the prophets. Comparing the exclusive relationship with God to sexual fidelity, the Israelite prophets used cultural understandings of sexual property and the fidelity a wife owed her husband as a polemic against the people themselves. The prophetic books each used strong sexual language to demonstrate how the people's lack of devotion to God alone resulted in their ruin. For example, Hosea likens the worship of foreign gods to prostitution and blames the fall of Israel to Assyria on Israel's apparent infidelity to god. Therefore, Hosea compares Israel to a whore, and concludes God must punish her (the people) and lay waste to the land (Hosea 2:1-13). Ezekiel, similarly, compares Israel to a whore (Ezekiel 16:15) and blames the Babylonian conquest on the people's inability to change their ways and turn to God alone.[101] In this way, the metaphor invokes the shame an adulterous wife causes her husband or daughter causes her father and directs it at Israel.

Renita Weems examines how the books of Hosea, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah used the metaphor of marriage along with provocative images of infidelity and depravity to cast Israel's behavior in the strongest moral terms possible. I have earlier expressed that marriage and the

[100] Plaskow, *Standing Again at Saini*, 174.
[101] Knust, *Unprotected Texts*, 116.

family were a central part of the Israelite community due to the importance of their identity as the people of God. Weems reiterates this point, arguing that the sexually deviant woman struck at the heart of the most cherished institutions: marriage and the family.[102] Men, the audience of the prophets, were invested in the topic of family and deviant women because promiscuity in women threatened the established order as well as their status.[103] The metaphor, therefore, was, used and reinforced understandings of sexual property and the importance of marital fidelity in women to communicate a particular message about God.

Weems argues that this message about God asserted four things: (1) that the relationship between God and the people was a relationship of unequal's, (2) that the relationship was one of responsibility, (3) that the burden of the relationship fell upon the subordinate partner, and (4) that God as the dominant partner had the power to punish and direct the relationship in ways that ensured conformity to social standards.[104] Each of these aspects is communicated in the relationship between a husband and wife, thus the productivity of the metaphor. Due to the nature of this relationship and the failure of Israel to fulfill their obligations to God, the implication is that the violence, both the sexual violence articulated by the prophets and the actual conquering of Israel, is justified. Weems articulates this justification as follows:

> God, then, is not a harsh, cruel, vindictive husband who threatens and beats his wife simply because he has the power to do so. He is himself a victim, because he has been driven to extreme measures by a wife who has again and again dishonored him and has disregarded the norms governing marriage relations.[105]

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[102] Renita J Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3.
[103] Weems, *Battered Love*, 43.
[104] Weems, *Battered Love*, 33.
[105] Ibid., 19.

The metaphor is also meant to communicate God's abundant love as the prophets articulate that God does take his wife, the people, back. This forgiveness counters Israelite law as men were instructed not to take back an adulterous wife. Therefore, the metaphor articulates that redemption is possible.[106] However horrible and hopeful the marriage metaphor is meant to appear to its original audience, it contributes to an image of women as sexually deviant and dangerous.[107] In order to communicate a message of monotheism, the prophets take advantage of the prevailing notions regarding women and sacrifice them by solidifying an image of women as conduits of sexuality and shame for the sake of the faith of men.

In order to solidify their identity as a monotheistic people with a special relationship with God, the biblical writers formulated strict boundaries between themselves and others through an ideology of purity. These purity codes associated women with sex and sexuality which were decidedly unlike God. Previously sexuality was part of the divine realm yet the writers of the Hebrew Bible keep the sexual and divine realms separate. They do not describe God in erotic terms and put space and time between sacred and sexual experiences.[108] For example, God would not reveal the divine presence on Mount Saini till the men had abstained from sex for three days. Rather sex is considered part of human behavior and channeled into the societal structure as the proper outlet. Yet the laws reveal that sex had the capacity to unravel society through deviant women.

In this way, women were both othered and valued through their bodies as they were sources of impurity and purity, functioning as a resource for the continuation of the Israelite identity. Therefore, we begin to see the dichotomy in which women live as sources of both honor

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[106] Ibid., 90.
[107] Ibid., 5.
[108] Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess*, 188.

and shame. The Prophets accentuate this dichotomy through the metaphor of the promiscuous wife who has defiled herself and thereby her husband in order to illustrate the people's special relationship with God.

The Greeks

The honor/shame paradigm tied to women and sexuality in the Israelite community paralleled another system within Greco-Roman society. Sexual behavior was an important component of the production and maintenance of status. Men were expected to be the active partner but in control of their passions. Failing these expectations meant failure as a man.[109] Ancient authors knew who the elite were because they were virtuous men. Charges of femininity were dangerous enough that young men were trained to shun feminine mannerisms all together.[110] Women were considered to have voracious sexual appetites that would shame families if they were not properly supervised by men.[111] Therefore, men could be shamed by others for their lack of ability to control their women. The goodness of Rome itself was displayed by the purity of its freeborn women. Jennifer Knust argues, "attacks against women can be placed within a tradition of representation in which women could figure as signifiers in discussions about men and the larger society. The honor due a city, an emperor, or an individual man depended, in part, upon the chastity of the women they were expected to control."[112] Thus in the same manner as with the Israelites, beliefs about status, sex and gender served as mutually

[109] Jennifer Wright Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2006), 28.
[110] Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 37.
[111] Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 44.
[112] Ibid., 39.

reinforcing cultural codes. Sexual slander formed a way of distinguishing the central community from those considered as other.

In addition to this parallel, while the Israelite's theology shifted in the face of strenuous sociopolitical conditions, the Greeks were also shifting toward monotheism in ways that impacted women. The tradition of Greek philosophy was around for Judaism in first century Palestine as well as the beginnings of Christianity. The Persian empire which took Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland was taken by Alexander the Great who ushered in the Hellenistic Age.[113] Prior to this event, while the Israelites were contemplating God in exile the Greeks were in a similar position of reflection due to sociopolitical conditions. The context for Israel and Greece both involved war and the clash of empires, which altered prevailing theological systems. For the Greeks, this turbulence and clash of empire was more self-contained due to ongoing civil war between city states and continued a process where local gods came into confrontation with one another, rose and fell with little consistency. Both the Jewish elite in exile and the Greeks in conquered Asia Minor territories came to theological contemplation in the face of political turmoil, questioning the cogency of their local gods and contemplating the potential for oneness, "apart from the smoke and stench of defeat."[114] Rejecting the inconsistency found in the clash of gods in the midst of feuding city states, Greek intellectual life became more concerned with coherence and the truth.

Important teachers began to doubt traditional ideas regarding divinity and sought to pursue mathematical notions as a remedy to address the inconsistent and unreliable nature of the gods. Though not the first of his time to begin such speculation, Pythagoras turned attention to

[113] Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism*, 39.
[114] Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism*, 40-41.

the number one, defining it as the number of reason itself, thus moving away from multiplicity.[115] Later in the sixth century Xenophiles actually critiqued the pantheon of Greek gods and called for reform. Like Pythagoras he argued for a coherent conception of the divine realm so that divinity was immutable and indivisible.[116] Xenophiles laid a main foundational piece for Greek philosophy in reasoning that the divine must embody truth and therefore, cannot change.

Like Xenophiles, Plato was interested in immutable truth, we see this idea in his conception of the human body. Since all bodies change then what is true about them cannot be the physical form but the disembodied, the ideal form of a thing.[117] In a similar vein as his theory of forms, for the divine to conquer the inconsistencies of people and politics god must also be a singular, unchanging and thereby immutable truth. Christians would later take up Plato's theory of forms in a dualistic distinction between the soul and the body. Plato himself made this distinction, stating that god "made the soul in origin and excellence prior to and older than the body, to be the ruler and mistress, of whom the body was to be subject."[118] Plato took particular issue with the bodies of women and their role in mothering. Due to the female bodies association with sex they were viewed as inferior to the male body.[119]

Aristotle furthered the concept of god along with a particular understanding of the body. Though he rejected Plato's denial of reality of the material world he may have succeeded in ensuring its success in later Hellenistic thought by making it more accessible. He reasoned that all things have prior cause and are put into motion or brought to rest by its own inherent purpose.

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[115] Ibid., 43.
[116] Ibid., 45.
[117] Ibid., 49.
[118] Plato, *Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, ed. and trans. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 234 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 34.
[119] Lilian Calles Barger, *Eves Revenge: Women and a Spirituality of the Body* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 60-61.

Maintaining the supremacy of oneness he argued that motion is eternal and all things are put into effect by a disembodied unmoving mover, an entity that came to be identified as God.[120] In this paradigm of cause and effect through motion, Aristotle conceptualized women as passive, lower matter that needed to be brought into motion (via obedience) to the active superior male.[121] In this way, men were associated with the soul and action and thus closely tied to the same ideology of God as the prime mover while women were passive and lower body.

Through this system of development, the logic of one was rooted in Hellenistic thought by the time Rome first started taking Greece. Laurel Schneider suggests that given the power and influence of Greek philosophy even after it was taken by Rome, it is worth noting that the education of upper-class males would have been one immersed in Greek philosophical thinking so that the logic of the one was stamped on both Second Temple Jewish poets and early Christian thought.[122]

[120] Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism*, 52.
[121] Barger, *Eve's Revenge*, 61.
[122] Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism*, 39-40.

III. The Setting In

Christianity first emerged as a sect of Judaism within the Roman Empire. Many ethnic groups in the Eastern Mediterranean world became heavily Hellenized during the last few centuries BCE and began an assimilation of language and culture. The Jews took much from Hellenistic culture but kept their distance from matters of religious practice.[123] Maintaining a distance was an easier task for Jews living within the confines of Judah and Galilee. Many others, however, lived outside those confines in the Hellenistic cities of the Roman world. It was among them that Christianity first began to spread.

The sexual language previously discussed was employed not only to define the self but to separate from the other as the Israelites accused the gentiles of many sexual depravities. This is a tradition continued by Paul in setting apart the Christian community.[124] Paul defined the Christian community by using similar tactics to the Greco-Romans and Israelites against gentile idolaters. In doing so he held up widely shared assumptions regarding sex, gender, and status. Trained in varying degrees in Greek or Latin rhetoric and living within the cultural environment of the Mediterranean, early Christian authors such as Paul would have been aware of the rhetorical commonplaces referencing virtue and vice, including the attribution of women with hypersexual appetites that could shame the whole family.[125]

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[123] Countryman, *Dirt Greed & Sex*, 19.
[124] Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 51.
[125] Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 54.

According to Paul, the followers of Christ should be exceptionally chaste, they should not visit brothels (Rom 6: 15-21) or tolerate *porneia* in their midst (1 Cor 5:1-13; Eph 5:5).[126] His followers ensured to stress the importance that Christian wives in particular remain chaste and submissive (Col 3:18, Eph 5:22-4; 1 Tim 2:8-15; see also 1 Pet 3:1-7). Paul argues that a transformation in Christ results in a decisive break with the depravity of the world. Gentiles exemplified this depravity as they were described as enslaved to lust while Christian followers became slaves of god (Rom 6:13-23). Such sexualized language held the purpose of differentiating between Christian followers and gentiles while persuading the audience to accept a kind of sexual morality that belonged to Christians alone.[127] Paul thereby began to communicate a logic wherein Christians were associated with purity and spirit while the body and sex fall outside these categories to the impure and unlike God.

Through his work Paul has puzzled ancient and modern readers alike in his exact intention regarding the body. William Countryman argues that Paul was unconcerned with matters of physical purity and in fact rejected them. Rather he is focused on developing an ethic of purity of the heart, which can necessitate but does not require physical purity.[128] Therefore the language of Paul and the gospels is highly metaphorical, used to communicate the nature of the Christian community. This notion is confusing to most readers given that the Protestant and Catholic traditions alike have made physical purity a primary concern of religious bodies and because we read Paul in tandem with the Old Testament texts that are concerned with physical purity. As Knust points out, regardless of whether or not Paul was actually concerned with sex

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[126] For a good overview of the interpretation and interpretive difficulties with the term *porneia* see Kyle Harper, "Porneia: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm," *Journal of Biblical Literaure* 2 (2011): 363-383.
[127] Ibid., 63.
[128] Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*, 123.

and gender, he continuously uses sex, gender, and the body as rhetorical strategies.[129] Therefore we are left with a fixation on those categories and interpretations of Paul that understand his metaphorical language more literally than he perhaps intended. When interested in drawing boundaries between insiders and outsiders or discussing the nature of sin, he does so by talking about sexual depravity.

For example, his claims about sexual behavior, the body, slavery, and the flesh are essential to the persuasive force behind much of Romans. He describes the unnatural and dishonorable lusts of those who have rejected God versus the transformed lives of Christians (Rom 1:18-3:20). Therein resides an association between sin and the flesh as Paul states "those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the spirit."[130] He similarly states in Galatians, "what the flesh desires is against the sprit and the spirit is against the flesh."[131] In addition, he furthers the idea that the flesh is not of God in 1 Corinthians 15:50 when he states that flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God. In the formulation of this flesh/ spirit dichotomy the sin associated with flesh is largely described in sexual and bodily terms. In Romans 6:12 Paul calls the people to not let sin reign in their mortal bodies or obey its desires. The nature of such language is overtly sexual as is his description of sinners given up to lust in Romans 1:23. Therefore throughout Romans Paul apparently[132] posits those who live "according

[129] Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 65.
[130] Romans 8:5.
[131] Galatians 5:17.
[132] I say "apparently" because Paul has been interpreted several different ways but this interpretation remains the most popular. See Westfall for an in-depth discussion of Paul.

to the flesh" as living in a state of uncontrolled desire while those who live with the spirit maintain control over one's body and desire.[133]

It is easy to see sexual desire as a problem for Paul given his advocacy for celibacy. He proclaims that even in the confines of marriage an individual will become distracted, torn between matters of the body and the spirit (1 Corinthians 7:33-35). Yet, Paul also advocates for marriage as a solution to sexual desire though he appears to prefer celibacy. In this way he suggests two types of Christian followers, those who were strong enough to overcome their sexual desire and those who keep sex within the confines of marriage because they could not attain the self-mastery of the celibate.[134] Women enter into a difficult position if any wished to remain a virgin and dedicated to God since Paul advocates that a man overcome with desire for a woman should marry her.[135] The woman has no say in this situation wherein she would be forced to forfeit her virginity and thereby her own dedication to God for the sake of a man.

Desire is additionally thought to be the focus of Paul's address that women ought to be veiled during worship. Paul argues from the order of creation and from custom that women ought to be veiled though men need not be.[136] He also states that women ought to veil "on account of the angels," which Knust interprets as a possible concern for the sexual temptation of unveiled women and that taking off the veil risks association with the unnatural women Paul describes in Romans 1:26-27.[137]

Parts of Christian tradition associate sinful flesh with the human body. Due to this association the body is equated with sin and evil. While Paul is not the first to put forth the

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[133] Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 65.
[134] Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 79.
[135] 1 Corinthians 7:36
[136] Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 82.
[137] Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 84.

argument of sex and the body as profane. He is, however, heavily associated with such ideas. Paul makes this comparison easy through passages like Romans 8:3-8 wherein the flesh weakens the law, is sinful, condemned by Jesus, and is the polar opposite of the spirit, leading to death and hostility with God. Those under the influence of the flesh cannot please God and Paul's condemnation of flesh has historically been taken to condemn sexuality and the sex drive, and lead to a widespread belief that heaven is an escape from bodily existence.[138]

Paul's division of flesh and spirit creates a concern about the body and spirit for early church thinkers as they ponder genesis and the nature of the Imago Dei. Here I will deal with the thoughts of some of the early Church Fathers and how their interpretations of the body and spirit related to a degradation of women.

Like many Hellenistic Jews, Philo, a later contemporary of Paul was concerned with sexual difference and the oneness of spirit.[139] He recognizes the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2 separately and interoperates them differently but together. His reading of Genesis 1 involves the creation of the first Adam who is an entirely spiritual being of non-corporeal existence and understood as male and female. It is this disembodied Adam being that possesses the image of God.[140] The carnal Adam is introduced in Genesis 2 wherein Eve, the female counterpart, is constructed from Adam. Therefore, Philo reasons that there are in fact two races of men. A disembodied and androgynous spiritual Adam made in the likeness of God and another molded into flesh.[141] This oneness of spirit was significant in the Hellenistic Age with the prominence of

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[138] Westfall, Cynthia Long. *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostles Vision for Men and Women in Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016., 179.
[139] Boyarin, "Gender," 120.
[140] Boyrarin, "Gender," 120.
[141] Ibid.

Platonic dualism and the supremacy of the spirit over matter. This is apparent in Philo's statement that the being made after the image of God, "was an idea or type or seal, an object of thought, incorporeal, neither male nor female, by nature incorruptible."[142] In this way, Philo's account of Genesis 1 and 2 expresses the idea that the undifferentiated spiritual Adam is superior to the secondarily sexed Adam and Eve. He illustrates then, in line with the teachings of Paul, that humanity in bodily form is corruptible while the spiritual form is not.

Philo's ontology of the spiritual Adam seemingly allows for equity between men and women as this Adam exists as an unsexed being. Yet despite his assertion that this being is neither male nor female, he does not actually manage to transcend gender in the spirit. Though unsexed, the spiritual and supposedly androgynous Adam remains gendered male. Women could only achieve this spiritual state by forsaking their own bodies and sexuality. This example helps us understand how the body and sex have been interpreted as profane over time.

Philo argues that virgins who forsake their sex are not accorded the base status which he assigns women due to their sexuality.[143] Daniel Boyarin uses the examples of Thekla and Maximillia to illustrate that through celibacy the female ceases to be a woman and becomes a virtual man so that the manipulation of conventional gender categories produces an androgyne who is always gendered male.[144] He argues that from Philo and Paul through late antiquity, gender equality is found on the grounds of disembodied souls and depends on a disavowing of the body which is itself represented as female.[145] Philo himself states that in the making of Adam

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[142] Philo, *On the Creation: Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3*, ed. G. H. Whitaker and trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library 226:1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 107.
[143] Boyarin, "Gender," 122.
[144] Boyarin, "Gender," 125.
[145] Ibid., 126.

and Eve, God formed the mind prior to the helper which he refers to as the body or, Eve. "He had formed the mind before and is about to form its helper."[146] Therefore, the helper, who is woman, is the body itself and men and women both must transcend the feminine body through virtue.[147] This need to transcend the flesh through virtue is an ideology reiterated by Irenaeus as he continues Philo's line of thinking.

By the second century, most Christian thinkers affirmed bodily creation over that of a spiritualized image of God. Yet, redemption was still characterized as a rejection of the body and a flight from the material world.[148] In Irenaeus's perspective Adam was created in sinless flesh which became tainted by the original sin and therefore lost the essence of the spirit. Christ then exemplifies the potential for humanity to reach the true image and likeness of God in redemption and resurrection.[149] Heavily influenced by Paul and his statement that "flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God,"[150] Irenaeus argued that Paul differentiated between types of flesh in order to maintain bodily creation. The first type being mortal and polluted by sin while the other essential to the identity of the person and redeemed in resurrection. Philo differentiates the flesh by substance and quality, the qualities of the flesh are associated with sexual desire, corruption, and weakness, which are not inherent to the actual substance of the flesh in its redeemed state.[151] Therefore, there exists a trend of bodily affirmation in the resurrection. This affirmed body, however, does not include the female body. Such qualities of the flesh were considered feminine

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[146] Philo, *On the Creation*, 107.
[147] Boyarin, "Gender," 126.
[148] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 150–80 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 153.
[149] Taylor G. Petrey, *Resurrecting Parts: Early Christians on Desire, Reproduction, and Sexual Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 71.
[150] 1 Corinthians 15:50.
[151] Petrey, *Resurrecting Parts*, 75.

as he followed the legacy of Hellenistic thinking wherein the body and material are associated with positivity and the feminine while the active and spiritual are associated with the masculine.

Ultimately came the view that the feminine qualities of the flesh must be eliminated through virtue. This concept echoes Philo's understanding of the necessary eradication of the female as Philo states that progress toward virtue, "is indeed nothing else than the giving up of the female gender by changing into the male, since the female gender is material, passive, corporeal, and sense-perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal, and more akin to mind and thought."[152] Since the female offers nothing to the progression of virtue the typological role of women according to Irenaeus is to exemplify obedience. He contrasts Eve and her perceived unruly sexuality with Mary's virginity and obedience to God to illustrate both the potential danger and proper role for women. In this way we see that the body can be affirmed only once it has been separated from the feminine flesh through the spiritual renewal of the resurrection.

Many early church thinkers use Eve and Mary as parallels to discuss the nature of women. Perhaps the most notorious example is that of Tertullian, another second century thinker who compared every woman to Eve:

> And do you not know that you are (each) and Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of *your* desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die.[153]

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[152] Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, ed. G. H. Whitaker and trans. Ralph Marcus, Loeb Classical Library 380 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 18 and 2.12.
[153] Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarium*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. S Thelwall, The Ante-Nicene Fathers 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1.1.12 (italics in original).

In this statement, Tertullian makes several things clear. Firstly, he places the blame for the fall on Eve alone and associates this sin with women collectively. Women then, he describes as weak and full of a perpetual shame as they represent the first to break with divine law. He also establishes a natural superiority between men and women since he casts the devil as afraid to tempt man alone. Adam, and therefore all men, he suggests would not have been susceptible to the temptation of the serpent.

Tertullian is somewhat different in his perception of the soul and the body. This difference in belief relates to his perception of the final judgement. For Tertullian, judgment requires the body and the soul together in order for God's judgement to be complete. He suggests that the soul and the flesh are equally accountable for the individual and must therefore be judged together.[154] He actually argues that the soul appears as the flesh it inhabits in all its parts.[155] This idea is somewhat paradoxical given that the close connection between the soul and the flesh does not eliminate the hierarchy between them. His construction of the hierarchy does not differentiate from those before him as the soul takes the dominant masculine role while the flesh takes that of the passive and feminine. He uses analogies of slavery and marriage to illustrate the relationship between the soul and the flesh.[156] Clearly in his description of women as Eve he associates the flesh as the place of weakness. The passivity of the female flesh is somewhat ironic in this construction given that Eve, the personification of passive female flesh actually acts. This description is likely dealt with by the association of her action as one that went against the natural order and resulted in sin. While men, as previously stated by Tertullian would not have acted in the same manner as Eve.

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[154] Petrey, *Resurrecting Parts*, 87.
[155] Petrey, *Resurrecting Parts*, 88.
[156] Ibid., 89-90.

Tertullian has a particular dislike for female flesh, which he reiterates in his works as a source of disgust, fragility, and shame.[157] Sexual desire also continues to be associated with the female flesh and Tertullian encourages Christian men to avoid sexual desire entirely.[158] With the flesh as the source of weakness and sin he reasons that it must be transformed in the resurrection. Since Tertullian holds that judgment takes place with the soul and the body together the transformation of the flesh is particularly important. In his configuration, female sexuality comes to a decisive halt. He casts negatively female flesh and the womb in particular as a source of impurity and shame. Therefore, Tertullian makes clear that resurrected bodies will not be subject to the "shameful" acts of birth and lactation.[159] In so doing, he joins the cast of other Christian thinkers who configure the redemption of women as the loss of that which makes them women which only further communicates the idea that the female body is shameful.

For Augustine the body continued to pose the essential problem of sin and lust. He continued the lineage of identifying the female with the body and the male with the spiritual. In his reasoning, man needed woman for her procreative ability but her sexual allure and connection to the flesh kept her forever tied to the body.[160] Augustine in particular could never remove intercourse from the realm of sin, which heavily influenced his view of women.[161] Had Adam and Eve remained in paradise he reasons that man would have used woman for procreation in an entirely unfeeling way, thus, sin introduces the problem of lust. Augustine differs somewhat for his identification of desire in the male penis and thus associates it with

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[157] Ibid., 97.
[158] Ibid., 93.
[159] Ibid., 98.
[160] Barger, *Eve's Revenge*, 61.
[161] Elizabeth L Gerhardt, *The Cross and Gendercide: a Theological Response to Global Violence against Women and Girls* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 61.

disorder and sin.[162] As Rosemary Ruether reasons, if the male erection was the essence of sin then woman as its source became the object and extension of sin. This idea introduces a depersonalizing and objectifying relationship with women wherein they are the object of sexual desire and sin. This objectification of women is an issue with which society continues to be well acquainted. Ruether points out that in Augustine's construction of sexual relationships women are either wrongly used for carnal pleasure or rightly used in an objective manner for procreation.[163] In both constructions the woman does not extend to anything beyond a sex object.

Therefore, given the shamefulness of the body Augustine also anticipates a loss of the female body in bodily resurrection. He echoes Tertullian in the resurrection of men and women as male and female. Yet there will be a transformation to the female body so that they are no longer suited to intercourse and childbearing but are "fitted to glory rather than shame."[164] Even in resurrection, women are not permitted an equality of spirit as Augustine perceives man alone as the image of God.

> I have said already, when I was treating of the nature of the human mind, that the woman, together with her own husband is the image of God, so that the whole substance may be one image, but shown she is referred to separately in her quality as a helpmeet, which regards he woman alone, then she is not the image of God, but as regards to the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one.[165]

He justifies this view by reference to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3-12 wherein the male is described as the head of the woman. Through this perspective we see that women in body and in spirit are not permitted full humanity due to a strong association of the sins of the body. These

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[162] Ruether, *Virgininal Feminism*, 162.
[163] Ruether, *Virgninal Feminism,* 163.
[164] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. William M. Green, Loeb Classical Library 417 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 22.17.
[165] Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.7, 10.

men and many other like them influenced the dominant mode of thinking in western Christianity. The mind and body dualism in addition to the association of the female with sin was strong enough that even in the Protestant reformation, which tried to separate the idea of women from sin, nevertheless ended up in the same place as earlier thinkers, still blaming women for sin.[166] For example, the Puritans challenge the idea of the carnal woman but also believed the devil could more easily take over the weaker bodies of women, making them more prone to temptation. In addition, Luther argued that female subjugation was punishment for their sin while Calvin saw female subordination as a matter of the natural order and blamed women for tempting men with their desire.[167]

In this way, we see a tradition within western Christianity that associates the female body with the world of the profane. The profane indicates something in which God does not reside, therefore, the body and sex could be regarded as profane through women since they were not conceptualized as the full image of God alone. Women could still attain the spirit and even potentially live in the image of God but not without men alongside them or giving up essential parts of themselves. These thinkers communicate the notion that Christians must be pure in order to live in or attain the spirit and sex and the body were particular obstacles to that purity of spirit. Therefore, sex and the body gain a precarious reputation wherein they have appropriate contexts, such as marriage and procreation, but most thinkers still regarded these actions with distaste and worked through such feelings by applying those things which were unlike God to women.

[166] Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*, 89.
[167] Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*, 88-89.

IV. The Result of Monotheistic Ethics (The Now)

As we have seen, the concept of oneness inspired a mind/body dualism in Greek philosophy and a purity of identity in the Jewish people. These traditions saw the feminine as passive while simultaneously placing the responsibility of honor and identity on female sexuality. Christianity inherited these strands of thinking so that Paul would further the flesh/spirit dichotomy in largely sexual terms to describe the quality of the Christian community. This mold allowed Christian thinkers to settle into and solidify an ideology wherein women were associated with the lower flesh and the need to transcend their deficient nature. In order to overcome this nature, these Church thinkers strongly emphasized the importance of virginity so that women transcend a created lineage of sin, sexuality, and shame.

These lines of thinking create not only a strong gendered binary but a hierarchy which can contribute to gender-based violence. Rachel Baard points out that gender-based violence is less prevalent in places where gendered binaries are not as strong.[168] The lineage of western Christianity which subordinates the female body to that of sexuality and flesh indicates how the church has contributed to cultural expectations that feed gender violence. The church, actually has a long history of condoning or justifying violence against women though some efforts were made to limit the extent of such violence. For example, Gratian's classical twelfth-century compilation of canon law said that a husband could "chastise" his wife though not beat her. Rosemary Ruether notes that this has been interpreted to mean that a man can strike his wife in

[168] Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*, 48.

anger though not "whip her like a slave."[169] She also notes that most laws in the Renaissance periods allowed men to beat their wives provided they didn't die. Turning to the Protestant reformation, Luther supported spousal abuse in stating, "When Katie gets saucy, she gets nothing but a box on the ear,"[170] and Calvin exhorted women to bear their lot in life even if it included abuse.[171]

This history of violence against women is intrinsically connected to the identification of women with sexuality and sin as such ideas were powerful influencers on men's views toward women and on church teachings.[172] The consequences of a history of misogyny shaped the institutional response to women that continues to linger in the church today. It is in the response to the female body that we begin to see the purity rules and notions of sacred and profane in Western society. The impure, or profane, remember, is considered what lies outside the system and Christian thought has historically defined women, their bodies, and sexuality as outside the system of the sacred or spiritual. Therefore, women in particular are bound by particular rules that regulate their bodies in order to attain some level of the spiritual. Such rules are more pronounced in Israelite society yet the Church Fathers have made clear that women due to their fleshliness and associated sexuality are deficient by nature, beyond the image of God. The Church Fathers emphasize the virtue of virginity for women in order to work against their nature. This narrative of female deficiency was made holy through its perpetuation in religious language and thought so that it became the authentic Christian truth.

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[169] Rosemary Ruether, "The Western Religious Tradition and Violence against Women in the Home," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, 31–41 (Cleveland , OH: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 34.
[170] Martin Luther. "Lectures on Genesis" In *Luther's Works*. Vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 68-69.
[171] Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*, 50.
[172] Gerhardt, *The Cross and Gendercide*, 61.

This truth is revealed in the struggle women continue to face in the church today. Contemporary leaders of the Roman Catholic Church affirm the position that only male bodies can represent the image of God at the altar. They stand firmly on the Theology of Thomas Aquinas who portrayed women as failed men, as naturally subordinate creatures who could not signify the true eminence of God.[173] Aquinas, as we have seen, is not alone in this kind of thinking. One might argue that Christ himself follows this logic wherein women are lesser and separate from the spirit. The Gospel of Thomas, for example, ends with this conversation between Jesus and Peter regarding Mary: "Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life." Jesus said: "Look, I will draw her in so as to make her male, so that she too may become a living male spirit, similar to you." (But I say to you): "Every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven"[174] Here again is the ideology of women as separate from the sacred nature of the spirit and a reiteration of the need for women to become like men in order to reach salvation.

Although women in Protestant traditions can be ordained it remains a struggle as churches are often entrenched in a theology based on the ethical, philosophical, and theological views of the early church thinkers who degraded women by connecting the feminine body and sin. The consequences of that perspective are evident in the Southern Baptist Convention, which is notable for revoking women's right to ordination in 1995 on the basis that scripture only permits men the role of pastoral leadership.[175] It is important to note that the SBC resolution is nonbinding and individual SBC churches may decide through their own discernment who they

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[173] April D. DeConick, *Holy Misogyny Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter* (London: Continuum, 2013), 149.
[174] Gospel of Thomas 114. Trans. Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer (http://ww3.haverford.edu/religion/courses/122b/GThomas2translations.htm).
[175] DeConick, *Holy Misogyny*, 150.

ordain. Nevertheless, the association decides whether or not an individual church's decision is in line with their particular vision. Even so, the resolution speaks to the continuation of a particular vision of women. April DeConick points out that this reversal in the Southern Baptist Convention did not occur suddenly but developed over two decades, in part, as a conservative response to the secular woman's movement. In the early 1970's the leaders of the SBC framed the women's liberation movement as an attack on the scriptural laws regarding the proper place of women in society. They reaffirmed that man is the head of the woman, as stated by Paul, and that women would not exist without man, reiterating a conservative interpretation of the Genesis story.[176] In the process, they continued the tension where the female body was declared a lesser subordinate of man's and simultaneously the female body was held to high standards of purity.

The influence of Western Christianity's lineage of thought on women is perhaps best exemplified through purity culture. Purity culture brings to light Western Christianity's ties to the ideals of purity, to the identity articulated by the ancient Israelites, and ties to the contempt for the female body furthered by early Christian thinkers who associated the female with the baseness of flesh, sexuality, and sin.

Many strands of Christianity have associations with purity culture but it is largely associated with the evangelical movement. Purity culture within the evangelical Christian movement is a trend that has gained popularity in the last two decades. The purity movement began within a transitional period following the sexual revolution. In the 1980's and 1990's society shifted back toward sexual conservatism due to declines in the economy and the emergence of the AIDS epidemic. 1992 saw a rising number of sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancies. In response, a group of southern Baptist ministers created a sexual education

[176] DeConick, *Holy Misogyny*, 151.

system called "True Love Waits" that emphasized abstinence until marriage. In the following years, thousands of abstinence pledges were publicly displayed. Purity culture has since moved beyond the True Love Waits campaign into a larger phenomenon. The church has generally taught that sex should only occur in the context of marriage. Purity culture, however, takes the prohibition of sex until marriage to another level, calling for physical abstinence as well as emotional and mental purity.[177]

Purity culture plays a strong role in regulating the body and behavior but also has a focus on one's mental state, emphasizing the mind/body or flesh/spirit dualism. This emphasis on multiple spheres of purity relates the movement back to the purity codes found in the Old Testament as well as the Church Fathers' concern for the sinful nature of the body and sexuality.

In her study, Christine Gardner notes that "Purity extends to behaviors beyond just sex. According to the *Silver Ring Thing Sexual Abstinence Study Bible*, 'Purity is a way of life. It has to do with the way you dress, the way you act, what you think, and what you say. Purity is not about what *you can not do* but rather about treasuring *who you are*.'"[178]

The culture of Christian purity reflects a conglomeration of the ethics of the Israelites around physical purity and identity as well as Paul and the Church Fathers belief that the Christian people must reflect a particular holiness of spirit through acts of virtue that delineated sex to marriage and procreation. The purity movement has moved beyond just a campaign for sexual abstinence. It is now rooted in a theology of identity and morality that parallels that of the

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[177] Barbee, Amanda. "Naked and Ashamed: Women and Evangelical Purity Culture." The Other Journal. The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology, March 3, 2014. https://theotherjournal.com/2014/03/03/naked-and-ashamed-women-and-evangelical-purity-culture/.

[178] Christine J. Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy: the Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2011), 30.

old testament and the Church Fathers. Suzy Weibel, an evangelical retreat facilitator describes purity in relationship to identity. Purity is a state of being rather than a list of do's and don'ts,[179] again, reflecting a particular way of life that relates to a state of mind and spirit. Dennis Hollinger further exemplifies how evangelical purity culture reflects these ideas. His book, *The Meaning of Sex,* delves into a Christian theological understanding of the purpose of sex. Hollinger builds on this notion of purity as a part of identity by adding his understanding that the Christian meaning of sex is radically counter cultural and "goes against the grain of almost everything in our society and culture."[180] This idea of the evangelical Christian perspective as counter cultural is articulated elsewhere in evangelical literature. Sociologist Christian Smith argues that evangelicals thrive because they view themselves as embattled "They define themselves as oppositional: to be an evangelical is not to be part of secular society."[181] In this way, boundaries are drawn between the followers of God who are sexually moral and those who are "other." Their "othering" continues to mirror the notion of having a particular identity as well as the tradition of sexual slander used by the Jews and early Christians to define themselves against the gentiles. In addition, this tradition places exceptional responsibility for maintaining those boundaries on women.

The evangelical basis for purity culture comes from an understanding in line with the thinking of the early Church Fathers that God created the world a particular way and God's specific design for sex is revealed through the Bible. Hollinger articulates this theology as he builds his foundation on Genesis, which reveals the two ways of being human—male and

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[179] Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy*, 30.
[180] Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 123.
[181] Gardner*, Making Chastity Sexy*, 24.

female. Todd Wilson, an evangelical pastor, follows this portrayal of identity, arguing that God provides individuals with a vocation as a male or female.[182] Both Wilson and Hollinger reference Genesis 2:24 and uphold this passage as God's divine intention for a man and woman to become "one flesh" in marriage. Both Wilson and Hollinger articulate similar concerns to the Church Fathers in the differentiation of gender in Genesis as well as the nature of sex and the flesh.

From this basis Hollinger explores, what he considers, the four God-given purposes for sex: consummation of marriage, procreation, love, and pleasure. He argues, "These four purposes are found in only one location, the marriage of a man and woman. This is where God designed sexual intimacy to be."[183] Wilson on the other hand places a larger emphasis on sex as a divine gift from God that is an intimate part of the Christian relationship to the divine: "Yet as important as the procreative and uniting purposes of sex are, these aren't the ultimate end for which God has given us either sex or marriage. Both sex and marriage have a greater missional purpose: the advance of the kingdom of God."[184] While they differ from church thinkers in allowing sex for pleasure, both Wilson and Hollinger highlight the understanding that sex should only occur within marriage. Sex within any other context taints the individual as well as one's relationship with God thus echoing the voices of the Church Fathers. This perspective is additionally voiced by evangelical literature on purity and abstinence such as, *I kissed Dating Goodbye*, *Every Young Woman's Battle*, and *Lady in Waiting*.[185]

In line with theme of the Israelite purity codes and Church Fathers, the evangelical purity movement ties to a similar theology of identity and morality. Purity is more than waiting to have

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[182] Todd A. Wilson, *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 69.
[183] Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 125.
[184] Wilson, *Mere Sexuality*, 106.
[185] Barbee, "Naked and Ashamed."

sex before marriage but the moral way of life, a life given to people by God. In addition, evangelical purity culture also parallels the pressure placed on women to uphold purity for themselves and the community. Tina Seller is a scholar who studies the impact of purity culture on young adults. She notes the significance that modesty plays in the understanding of purity and that girls were more often told that they were to keep themselves "pure and protected," to guard themselves so as not to "get the boys going."[186] In this way women are burdened with the responsibility of controlling the sexual behavior of men.

When Carley Gelsinger admitted to a violent assault as a 15-year old, her youth leader asked what she was wearing and, similarly, when Jules Woodson reported that her youth pastor took her to an isolated area and had her perform oral sex on him, her pastor replied, "So you're telling me you participated?"[187] Both responses assume that the women were assaulted because they failed their responsibility of modesty, discretion, and had done something to entice the men that abused them. Blaming and shaming responses to the abuse of women highlight the influence of the Old Testament and interpretations of the Church Fathers that locate both responsibility and blame in the bodies of women.

There is a common assumption in the evangelical world that boys may pressure girls to have sex because that is just "boys being boys." Gardner notes,

> Boys were taught to be the traditional masculine hero who battles evil forces, but the battle is first and foremost for his own body and soul, not for a princess. The prince has arrived at the castle with the princess trapped inside, guarded by a fire-breathing dragon, but this time the prince realizes that he is the dragon, unwittingly holding the princess captive by his own untamed lusts and selfish desires.[188]

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[186] Barbee, "Naked and Ashamed."
[187] Christa Brown, "Left Behind: When Will Baptists Catch up with #MeToo?" Child Friendly Faith, January 11, 2018. https://childfriendlyfaith.org/2018/01/left-behind-when-will-baptists-catch-up-with-metoo/.
[188] Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy*, 81.

This perspective indicates that the teachings of purity culture corroborate with the thinking of the Church Fathers, where desire poses an ultimate threat to the pure life of Christian men. Women are thus problematized as the object of desire and the responsibility of modesty is enforced upon them. Gardner's note also points to the lasting influence of language in the development of our reality. Typical evangelical interpretations of the biblical narrative and the language of the Church Fathers reveal a patriarchal narrative that posits men as superior, has been perpetuated throughout time, and continues to teach men and women alike to construct sexist worldviews.[189] In her essay, Amanda Barbee relays a disturbing example of such a worldview and how the purity movement treats the female body. A youth leader at a middle school retreat was attempting to help a group of girls understand the importance of modesty. To illustrate the sexual temptation women cause men he held a box of donuts to his chest where the donuts were not visible, then leaned over exposing the clear top of the donut box so everyone could see the donuts inside. This example shows the rampant objectification of the female body in American culture, "but like most discussions of male sexuality within the purity movement, the objectification was seen as normative; rather than teaching middle-school boys to respect the bodies of their female peers, these girls are being taught that their bodies are dangerous and tempting."[190] This comparison with the female body as tempting and dangerous to the faith of men echoes the language of the Church Fathers as well as that of the Old Testament. In addition, the evangelical purity movement places more emphasis on female purity when it comes to sex in a manner that continues to mirror the purity codes and language of the Church Fathers.

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[189] John Marcus Sweeney, *I'd Rather Be Dead than Be a Girl: Implications of Whitehead, Whorf, and Piaget for Inclusive Language in Religious Education* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 9.
[190] Barbee, "Naked and Ashamed."

Additionally, there is an oppressive discourse around the shame a woman incurs should she allow herself to be tainted by sex before marriage. The culture warns of spiritual pain, separation from God, along with rejection by their family and potential future husband.[191] This kind of discourse highlights the sense in which women owe their purity to others. This kind of mentality exists on a spectrum, with more extreme ends represented in the tradition of Purity Balls. An extension of chastity pledges, Purity Balls make that pledge literal by encouraging young girls to pledge their virginity to their fathers until marriage. The purpose of this tradition lies in the belief that fathers ought to guard their daughter's purity as their own property. A common pledge read by the fathers is as follows:

> "I, (daughters name)'s father, choose before God to cover my daughter as her authority and protection in the area of purity. I will be pure in my own life as a man, husband and father. I will be a man of integrity and accountability as I lead, guide and pray over my daughter and my family as the high priest in my home. This covering will be used by God to influence generations to come."[192]

Breanne Fahs argues that Purity Balls take women into a system of commerce wherein their sexuality becomes an object to be traded among men. Other critics argue that this style of tradition strips women of their sexuality until it is given to their husband in marriage.[193] In this kind of culture, women never own their own bodies and sexuality, yet their bodies have significant value in the system. This concept echoes a similar issue with the body found in the Church Fathers wherein the flesh can be both sacred and profane. The practice of Purity Balls illuminates the essential problem that underscores the purity movement on all ends of the spectrum, whether or not a woman pledged her purity to her father directly the culture values

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[191] Breanne Fahs, "Daddy's Little Girls: On the Perils of Chastity Clubs, Purity Balls, and Ritualized Abstinence," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 31, no. 3 (2010): 116–42.,127.
[192] Fahs, "Daddy's Little Girls," 132.
[193] Fahs, "Daddy's Little Girls," 137.

women based on their purity. Their worth is largely defined by a perceived state of being rather than who they are as individuals. Women learn to see themselves as essentially different from men as showed in the language of Hollinger and Wilson which echoes the lineage of thought in western Christianity. Women hold a God given vocation that has come to revolve around modesty and not giving into illicit sex. This kind of perspective normalizes sexual violence and removes the agency of women.

So pervasive is the problem of purity culture that it lies at the roots of a movement. Through a frame of empowerment and a supportive community speaking together the #MeToo movement created space for a more specific conversation around sexual assault in Evangelical church communities. Inspired by what she saw in the #MeToo movement, Emily Joy and Hannah Paasch found courage in the collective identity of #MeToo to share their own stories of abuse, but they also saw a unique opportunity to raise an alarm about sexual harassment in the church. Joy tweeted her own story prefaced with, "This is me being brave as a result of so many women in the world being brave right now. This is me standing on your shoulders. I'm so thankful for all of you."[194] Her preface emphasizes the power and importance of #MeToo's empowerment in motivating her to share her own story but also in focusing the conversation on abuse in the church. Hannah Paasch tagged her friends post with #ChurchToo and the girls quickly found people from all over sharing their stories of sexual abuse in church communities, particularly in evangelical communities.

[194] Becca Andrews, "As a Teen, Emily Joy Was Abused by a Church Youth Leader. Now She's Leading Movement to Change Evangelical America," *Mother Jones*. July 26, 2018. Accessed September 15, 2018 https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2018/05/evangelical-church-metoo-movement abuse/.

Both Paasch and Joy punctuate the problem of purity culture in leading this movement. Some persons in the evangelical community feel the pressure of purity culture from an early age. Prioritizing sexual and emotional purity before marriage as the ultimate moral achievement, the culture heavily focuses on female virginity and a woman's duty to keep herself pure. Thus, that religious culture perpetuates gender roles that characterize women as "sexual gatekeepers" and men as slaves to their sexual desires.[195] This modern worldview echoes the worldview of the Church Fathers who continuously look at desire as a problem of the flesh. Simultaneously, this religious culture teaches women to trust men as leaders and providers while shaming themselves when men cross their boundaries.[196]

In the evangelical church, many embrace traditional or biblical gender roles that perceive men as having intrinsic authority. Again, the Southern Baptist Convention, which stands as the largest evangelical denomination, frames traditional gender roles as complementarianism. This philosophy declares that while equal before God, men and women have separate but complementary roles ordained by God. Based on a particular interpretation of the creation accounts and passages from 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, Colossians, and Ephesians, complementarianism gives men final authority in domestic and spiritual life while women are expected to submit to their husbands in all arenas.[197]

Hannah Paasach, one of the founders of #ChurchToo, noted that complementarianism deprives women of agency and encourages men to make decisions for them.[198] Thus, the

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[195] Andrews, "As a Teen."
[196] Hannah Paasch, "Sexual Abuse Happens In #ChurchToo -- We're Living Proof." The Huffington Post. December 05, 2017. Accessed September 15, 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sexualabusechurchtoo_us_5a205b30e4b03350e0b53131.
[197] Carol Kuruvilla, "Evangelical Pastor Claims Traditional Gender Roles Can Prevent Sexual Abuse." The Huffington Post. March 26, 2018. Accessed October 16, 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/john-piper-gender-roles-me-too_us_5ab15636e4b0decad044b14a.
[198] Kuruvilla, "Evangelical Pastor."

theology validates an everyday relational structure where women have little power relative to men. This lack of authority afforded to women is enhanced by a parallel theology embedded in purity culture. Many women cite this traditional perspective as an issue in their narratives of abuse, explaining that purity culture deprived them of bodily autonomy. "God owned them, they said, but really, that meant that *men* owned them. Our fathers. Our pastors. Our husbands. Our politicians. Never ourselves."[199] While women lack domestic and religious authority in addition to a loss of bodily autonomy, they also bear enormous responsibility. This culture teaches women that they are responsible for their own purity but also that of men around them. Part of a woman's job involves modesty for the sake of men, to cover up their sexuality so as not to tempt men to act on their sexual desires.

The #ChurchToo movement itself is a step toward creating accountability in domestic and church structure as well as theological culture. The power of social media allowed survivors of abuse to gather into a community in a way that was previously unavailable to them. The unfortunate truth is that the gendered theology found in the church was never assessed nor critiqued and thereby necessitated a movement for women to be heard. Individually, women have been shamed and silenced, asked to forgive, and encouraged to move on from their abuse. This kind of theology is particularly damaging when it supports a power structure that can choose to ignore women. As a community, these women have called attention to the church and put pressure on religious institutions to make amends. The movement presents an opportunity for

[199] Carly Gelsinger, "I Know Why Evangelical Women Support Brett Kavanaugh. I Was Raised To Do The Same." The Huffington Post. October 03, 2018. Accessed October 16, 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/brett-kavanaugh-evangelical-women_us_5bb3a28de4b0ba8bb211985b.

the church to do better, not only to lament the ways they have facilitated and ignored abuse in the church but to create real change.[200]

The connection of the #ChurchToo movement to #MeToo highlights how these issues extend beyond explicitly religious circles. The connection of the female body to both responsibility and shame permeates into secular society through language and associations with religious culture. Western society in general contains similar notions as it holds women primarily responsible for their own bodily safety. Victims of sexual assault are often faulted for their supposed failure to adequality guard their own sexual boundaries, for their dress, or alcohol intake.[201] The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements illuminate a continued tradition of blaming women.

The pervasiveness of purity culture and its connection to rape culture found throughout western society parallels an ancient construction of purity based on identity and morality. The purity codes of the Israelites are designed to separate them from others while emphasizing their own understanding of identity as the people of God. Similarly, the writings and thoughts of the church fathers were meant to work out and articulate the Christian way of life through particular virtues that problematized sexuality and women. Both understandings involve a particular way of life that gives detailed attention to the importance of purity in maintaining a relationship with God. Similarly, evangelicals paint their stance of sexual purity as a battle against secular society. In this way, they separate themselves with a kind of communal identity as followers of a way of

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[200] Ruth Everhart, "I Am a Pastor and Rape Survivor. #MeToo Is an Opportunity for the Church." Sojourners. November 02, 2017. Accessed October 16, 2018. https://sojo.net/articles/sexual-violence-and-church/i-am-pastor-and-rape-survivor-metoo-opportunity-church.

[201] Jessica Keady, "Rape Culture Discourse and Female Impurity: Genesis 34 as a Case Study." In *Rape Culture, Gender Violence, & Religion: Biblical Perspectives*, 67–82 (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 69.

life given by God. Both structures value the purity of women due to their ability to further the life of community. They place a disproportionate amount of pressure on women to uphold purity in a system that views them as property.

While not all strands of purity culture go to the extremes of daughters pledging their purity to their fathers, they do consist of an understanding that a woman's purity is not so much her own but something she owes. This view is also problematic because while women are not legally property in today's society, there remains among some religious adherents a theological understanding regarding the ownership of women, their agency, and their duty to purity persists. That understanding and its adherents continue a culture where women are stripped of various levels of autonomy and agency.

Conclusions

Western society divides purity among a variety of categories so that it is not only an aspect of religion yet it is religiously influenced, especially when it comes to sexual ethics. Cultures in the Ancient Near East, on the other hand, ordered themselves along a spectrum where the body and sexuality existed as part of the sacred and natural order of things. There was gender fluidity among the gods of the divine pantheon who all took part in the organization of civilization and formulation of culture. It is tempting to view the goddesses of the Ancient Near East through a Western lens but as Westenholz reminds us, we must dispose of those filters in order to gain a clearer picture. The goddesses were not confined beings as both gods and goddesses took part in all the forces of nature including reproduction, sexuality, and fertility.

For the people of the Ancient Near East, the body and mind were inseparable, and composed the totality of an individual. Such holism is honored in the gods participation in matters of the body through sexuality, fertility, and reproduction. When the body was whole it was honored. In that ancient context, Inanna represents and celebrates the spectrum of womanhood. What are generally considered her "masculine" features highlight our lack of understanding of gender norms and what womanhood truly meant in the Ancient Near East. The courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi illustrates the role of sexuality in bringing about prosperity. Even the early Israelites may have shared this body embracing ideology for they too did not differentiated between the soul and the body. For the early Israelites the cosmos was also affected by more than one god and involved devotion to the consort of Yahweh. Though her identity is uncertain both suggestions are connected to goddesses of great power while the additional presence of female figurines suggests a comfortability with the body and sexuality.

Sex and the body become unlike god and disassociate from the sacred amid the torrid sociopolitical conditions of the Israelites and Greek philosophers. The mind and body were separated and god became a disembodied singular male entity. In this delineation, a new theology of identity became crucial for the Israelites as they separated themselves from the other through purity codes that disproportionately weigh down on women. Women were then placed in a precarious position where female sexuality was a source of uncleanliness and shame but also male honor when properly regulated. So compelling was the concern for female sexuality in relation to identity that it became a grand metaphor for the state of the people. The formulation of female sexual behavior as a sign of honor was mirrored by the Greeks and Romans who had at this point driven the spirit from the body as well as from women.

Paul took up this flesh/spirit dichotomy and used it to talk about the apocalyptic nature of the Christian community. Good Christians abandoned desire and lived according to the spirit. Therefore, he communicated a logic where Christians were associated with the purity of spirit while sex and the body fell to the profane and unlike god. The Church Fathers struggled with the flesh/spirit dichotomy and gender differentiation in ways quite unlike the Ancient Near East. Women in their fleshliness were associated with desire and separated from spirit unless they gave up essential parts of themselves. Women continue in a precarious situation where their body and sexuality was both debased and valued in particular contexts. Thus, women have been historically subject to particular rules or order to satisfy the theological troubles of men.

The church has lent itself to a history of violence exemplified through purity culture. Yet the issue intersects with the secular world as women are socialized, as Boryarin describes, to understand their bodies as a problematic source. Additionally, Eliza Styles examines the struggle women may face with their bodies by stating that a woman's body "causes sin in others by the

way the female body is simply present and existing in the world . . . To talk about a woman in the church is to deal with the reality of her body, as if her body—her physical being—is some issue with which she must deal. Girls and women are left carrying shame and questions about the goodness of their own bodies."[202] I would argue that to talk about women at all, not just in the church, is to deal with the reality of her body. Consequently, in the process of becoming monotheists, the separation of spirit and body and the emphasis on purity of identity the female body was sacrificed and has yet to be resurrected.

The picture of Western Christianity is one where women are steeped in a religious culture that problematizes their ability to find joy in their bodies. In addition, the associations of women, body, and sinfulness has formulated a culture of blame wherein women are held responsible for acts against their own bodies. Therefore, we arrive as Baard suggests, at a poignant moment of *Kairos*. The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements are responses to this *Kairos* but we cannot turn back time to theologically re-embrace the body. Nor are we allowed to ignore the power of the Christian faith for men and women alike. We are left with *Kairos*, a moment for change, for moving forward as women have always done. Many female scholars and activists alike have hunted for the right answer to change and we have yet to find one. Yet here is what we know, we know that history has taught us to disregard our bodies as sinful by nature and that our sexuality is an obstacle to salvation. At the same time, history has also taught us that there is power in angry women who refuse to give up the fight.

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[202] Eliza Stiles, "The Mother of God and the Female Body." CBE International, December 5, 2019. https://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/mutuality/mother-god-and-female-body.

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