



Missio Maritatus in the *Missio Dei*: Genesis 1:28 for Marriage Missiology

Jonas Sello Thinane¹ 

¹ Research Institute for Theology and Religion (RITR), University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

Marriage is a sacred institution that represents God's sent interpersonal relationships to proliferate humanity, rather than just the act of remaining as husband and wife. The phrase "be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth" is perhaps a better way to describe this *missio maritatus*, or marriage mission, as God instructs humanity in Genesis 1:28. God, the eternal missionary here, calls on humanity to be fruitful, multiply, and steward the earth. Although missiology has frequently examined how marriage intersects with redemptive goals within the complex framework of *missio Dei*, no study has formally introduced the theoretical framework of *missio maritatus*. This paper therefore presented the theoretical underpinnings of *missio maritatus*, which embraces the complexity of *missio Dei* and interprets Genesis 1:28 as expressing marriage missiology. It firmly based this mission's theoretical framework on the central Christian doctrines of predestination and divine foresight. It states unequivocally that the limited traditional understanding of marriage still has issues, but it leaves it to future studies to define *missio maritatus* in light of contemporary marriage trends. To put it another way, despite its shortcomings, *missio maritatus* is a useful theoretical framework in missiology, and the scope of this paper justifies further investigation into this area. This paper makes two important contributions to the respective areas of theology: The first and most general part concerns practical theology, as it examines the intersection of marriage with broader Christian social theological teachings. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the novel development of the *missio maritatus* in missiology adds a new missio-theological framework which incorporates the institution of marriage with the context of the *missio Dei*.

Correspondence

Jonas Sello Thinane

Email:

thinajs@unisa.ac.za

Publication History

Received: 29th January, 2024

Accepted: 24th April, 2024

Published online:

4th June, 2024

Keywords: *Missio Dei*, Human Creation, Genesis 1:28, Procreation, *Missio Maritatus*, Marriage Missiology.

INTRODUCTION

In social science studies, marriage as a formal recognition of union between spouses has been the subject of ongoing research. Numerous historical and modern studies that attempt to define and understand the concept of marriage in diverse human societies can be found in social science literature.¹ Parallel to this, a great deal of religious study has concentrated on the relationship between marriage and various religious

¹ Gary S Becker, "A Theory of Marriage: Part II," *Journal of Political Economy* 82, no. 2, Part 2 (1974): S11–26; G. Sherif, R. P. George, and R. T. Anderson, "What Is Marriage," *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* 34, no. 1 (2011): 245–88.

teachings, particularly but not exclusively Christian teachings.² Christian theologians generally agree that marriage is a sacred covenant made by God between a man and a woman to preserve procreation. Religious and social science scholars share the conjugal view, which maintains that marriage exists between a man and a woman who share a domestic life to bear and raise children. Girgis, George and Anderson explain this succinctly: “Marriage is the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together.”³ In any theological context, this definition is consistent with Genesis 1:28, where God is said to have commanded man and woman to multiply, bear fruit and tend to the earth. Thus, despite its ongoing problems, the socio-theological stance that marriage is about procreation rather than just satisfying partners’ sexual desires persists.

Accordingly, in this paper marriage dynamics are studied with reference to Christian theological concepts and practical theology.⁴ The institution of marriage, which is based on God’s instruction to man and woman to be fruitful and procreate, can be seen from different perspectives through the prism of mission theology. To the extent that human preservation can be premeditated in the discourse of human sustainable survival and redemption against degradation, marriage also becomes a human relational act of the triune God to preserve His creation. In other words, the missionary God, in His divine wisdom, established the institution of marriage to guarantee reproduction, preservation and redemption in the face of degradation, rather than as a means to an end in itself. In light of this, the *missio Dei* complexity theory would propose that the missionary God had the foresight to institute marriage in order to preserve humankind from the ensuing degradation, in addition to introducing it for companionship. Matrimony is a symbol of God-sent interpersonal relationships that uphold the human race despite destructive sin, not just the union of husband and wife. The relationship between marriage and *missio Dei*’s redemptive objectives has been extensively studied in missiology, but no study has formally presented a theoretical framework that unites the two. To fill this gap, this article offers the *missio maritatus* as a workable Latin missiological framework that explains the goal of the institution of marriage in the context of the *missio Dei* through the prism of Genesis 1:28. Using the doctrine of foreknowledge, it is emphasized that the omniscient, sovereign God predestined marriage in the context of human salvation, and not only for companionship. The argument that marriage, as a sacred institution, is predestined to fulfill the *missio Dei* is strengthened by the use of Christ and the Church in marriage symbolism.

***Missio Dei* (Complexity)**

There is probably no better way to get this discussion started than with a quick review of complexity theory and how the *missio Dei* concept fits into it. There is a broad range of theories and applications aimed at comprehending complex systems, and complexity theory has drawn the attention of the scientific community in recent years.⁵ In general, complexity theory offers a way to comprehend how the contributing components of chaotic systems self-organize. It attempts to explain how a complex system made up of numerous independent actors can interact either linearly or non-linearly to produce patterned behavior. In a nutshell, complexity theory is simply the application of multiple theories and emergent strategies to the modeling and analysis of complex systems. Social science domains like theology observe complex systems or complexity theory in similar ways as the physical sciences.⁶ There are two reasons why this kind of theology can be characterized as complex theology: firstly, it addresses the innate complexity that is characteristic of the divine; and secondly, it addresses divine complex action in a chaotic

² Alan Booth et al., “Belief and Behavior: Does Religion Matter in Today’s Marriage?,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1995, 661–71; Loren Marks, “How Does Religion Influence Marriage? Christian, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim Perspectives,” *Marriage & Family Review* 38, no. 1 (2005): 85–111; Nelson Tebbe, “Religion and Marriage Equality Statutes,” *Harv. L. & Pol’y Rev.* 9 (2015): 25..

³ Sherif Girgis, Robert P George, and Ryan T Anderson, “What Is Marriage,” *Harv. JL & Pub. Pol’y* 34 (2011): 246.

⁴ C. Burke, *The Theology of Marriage* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2015); Michael G Lawler, “Faith, Praxis, and Practical Theology: At the Interface of Sociology and Theology,” *Horizons* 29, no. 2 (2002): 199–224.

⁵ Steven M Manson, “Simplifying Complexity: A Review of Complexity Theory,” *Geoforum* 32, no. 3 (2001): 405–14.

⁶ Philip Clayton, “The Emergence of Spirit: From Complexity to Anthropology to Theology,” *Theology and Science* 4, no. 3 (2006): 291–307; Graham D Stanton, “A Theology of Complexity for Christian Leadership in an Uncertain Future,” *Practical Theology* 12, no. 2 (2019): 147–57.

world.⁷ At this point, it should be evident that the paper acknowledges the dynamic interplay between mission theories within the *missio Dei* framework in order to accomplish a common objective, namely complete salvation.⁸ A vast variety of mission theoretical frameworks are covered in the wealth of missiology literature, all of which aim to accomplish the objectives of *missio Dei*. *Missio Dei* naturally encompasses a wide range of theoretical frameworks, including *missio Pater*, *missio Christos*, *missio Spiritus*, *missio trinitatis*, *missio ecclesiae* and *missio politica* in *missio hominum*. This paper aims to incorporate an additional mission theoretical framework, the *missio maritatus*, into the intricate web of related mission theories aimed at realizing the *missio Dei*.

Missio Dei is a Latin Christian theological framework that can be translated as “mission of God” and describes or expresses the belief that the mission of salvation is at the heart of God’s self. It presupposes, among other things, the eternal reality that God’s mission of salvation flows from His nature and culminates in God’s existential reality in the world. Additionally, it conveys the belief that, to the extent that God’s mission of salvation persists, faith communities — and the Church specifically — continue to be God’s tools, not the masters of the operation. Though in fewer words, Kirk asserts that God’s mission is derived from His essence and ultimately leads to His everlasting plan for the creation of humans.⁹ Flett repeats this understanding: “Mission is not first something the Church does, but describes the being of God.”¹⁰ Since missiology has adequately defined or covered the historical development of this framework since the latter half of the 20th century, this section does not repeat the exercise. Over years of research, however, it has become somewhat evident that *missio Dei* is a complex phenomenon with numerous facets that are difficult to understand fully. In the words of Thinane: “On the face of it, what can be observed is that the *missio Dei* exhibits properties of a complex system.”¹¹ As a framework, it consists of various interconnected components that work together to accomplish two main objectives, namely complete salvation and the establishment of God’s Kingdom. To this end, Thinane emphasizes that *missio Dei* is marked by the cooperation of multiple elements or agents that work to fulfill unified goals by utilizing the doctrine of synergism.¹² As previously mentioned, the *missio Pater*, *missio Christos*, and *missio Spiritus* are among the mission theoretical components, or commissions, that together operationalize *missio trinitatis* in the framework of the *missio Dei*. Human-based commissions consist of the *missio hominum*, the *missio ecclesiae*, the *missio politica*, and many other frameworks that emphasize human participation in the *missio Dei*. The next section discusses how marriage features in such complexity as a sacred institution preordained by God, which is the main objective of this paper.

The main contention in this section is that marriage is an institution that both accomplishes *missio Dei* objectives and acts as a social framework for family life and sex in a society. Given that sexual activity takes place within the confines of marriage, God created sexuality to facilitate human reproduction on earth. That is to say, marriage was intended by God to be a holy institution that allows people both to fulfill the mission of the *missio Dei* and to create the union between husband and wife. In fact, when God created Adam, He said, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18a). After He had created Eve, a fitting companion, God immediately instructed Adam and Eve to populate and subdue the earth (Gen 1:28). If God had not created Eve for Adam, husband and wife, or marriage as an institution, the purpose of human creation, procreation, and growth would have been defeated. After that, the sacred institution of marriage — from which families and subsequent generations are descended — becomes a means of self-organization for human creation as a whole. Using agents in the form of a husband and wife, matrimony as a much larger institution becomes an instrument that the missionary God uses to facilitate human relationships and recreate humankind. When He instituted marriage, God chose stability over flexibility to prevent the failure or complete disappearance of human creation from the universe. This is arguably the quintessential example of the missionary God’s attempts to counteract or deal with an

⁷ Steven D Crain, “Divine Action in a World Chaos: An Evaluation of John Polkinghorne’s Model of Special Divine Action,” *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (1997): 41–61; Taede Anne Smedes, *Chaos, Complexity, and God: Divine Action and Scientism*, vol. 26 (Peeters, 2004).

⁸ Jonas S Thinane, “Missio Dei through Complexity Theory: Complexity to Total Salvation,” *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 56, no. 1 (2022): 8; Jonas Sello Thinane, “Missio Politica on Coalition Governance: ‘better Devils’ in SA Coalition Politics,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 2 (2023).

⁹ J.G. Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 25.

¹⁰ John G Flett, “A Theology of Missio Dei,” *Theology in Scotland* 21, no. 1 (2014): 69–78.

¹¹ Thinane, “Missio Dei through Complexity Theory: Complexity to Total Salvation,” 2.

¹² Jonas S Thinane, “Missio Dei’s Complexity Prefaced in Synergism,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 2 (2023): 8611.

unstable human environment where sin destroys the human race. Thus, the divine institution of marriage is the predestined, highly evolved adaptive system that allows human reproduction to occur in spite of the chaos caused by sin. Human sexual interaction within the framework of marriage has emergent properties that sustain human reproduction and reorganize the human race, even though humans are still perceived as sinful or chaotic, as in any complex system. While creation is being plunged into perpetual chaos by sin, the missionary God uses the institution of marriage to organize human creation constantly. Marriage is the result of divine foresight, as the following two sections show. It has been preordained as part of a complex system to counter the effects of sin (death).

Missio Dei (Foreknowledge)

This section focuses on divine foresight. It looks at the predetermination of the institution of marriage and draws on a wealth of Christian literature spanning centuries. It emphasizes that the institution of marriage was predestined by God for the purpose of human proliferation, as part of the divine great plan of salvation (*missio Dei*), which is based upon the framework of divine foreknowledge. The doctrine of foreknowledge stands not just as a fundamental tenet in Christian theology, but also as the bedrock upon which the doctrine of predestination rests.¹³ Debates about the nature of God's foreknowledge have historically been influenced by the predestination debate between Arminians and Calvinists,¹⁴ particularly as it relates to the doctrine of election.¹⁵ Calvinists maintain that God's knowledge of the future is causal, while Arminians see it merely as prescience similar to divine omniscience.¹⁶ Accordingly, God, who is regarded as omniscient and infinitely intelligent has known since all eternity how the events that would define His creation would play out.¹⁷ According to Wierenga, Basinger asserts that God has always known everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen in His creation.¹⁸ Stated differently, the idea behind this doctrine is that God knows the nature of reality and events before they happen or become apparent. All this refers to God's omniscience and all-knowing state, where He can see all aspects of reality before they have even come to pass. Hunt, who approaches this from a provincial standpoint explains that the concept of divine omniscience alone creates the assumption that divine foresight is essential to God's providential intervention (salvific mission) in the world.¹⁹ Therefore, the divine salvific mission — or, to put it more conservatively, divine providence — is likewise governed by divine foresight.

The Old and New Testaments both clearly state that no future reality is hidden from God's view and speak repeatedly of God's foreknowledge (Isaiah 41:23, 46:10). Psalms affirms the existence of divine foreknowledge, stating that "Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:16). The Apostle Peter teaches that God had known about Christ's atoning death long before it happened, thereby emphasizing that Christ's death was part of God's eternal plan of salvation (1 Peter 1:20). This echoes Peter's words to the assembled multitude on the day of Pentecost: "This Man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). Likewise, Apostle Paul links God's plan to His foresight in his epistolary letter to the Romans, saying, "What God foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

As the following section shows, *missio Dei* becomes the subject of divine foreknowledge to the extent that what is known in eternity becomes predetermined. That is to say, divine foreknowledge is expressed externally in *missio Dei*, God's primary salvific activity. In this context, based on His foreknowledge, the missionary God preordained the institution of marriage to facilitate human reproduction and counteract the effects of sin (death). As an unchangeable foundation for human existence and procreation, matrimony therefore takes on the status of an institution established by God from eternity.

¹³ David P Hunt, "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no. 3 (1993): 394–414; Philip L Quinn, "Divine Foreknowledge and Divine Freedom," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 1978, 219–40.

¹⁴ Peter Lake, "Predestinarian Propositions," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46, no. 1 (1995): 110–23.

¹⁵ Martin Van Gelderen, "Arminian Trouble. Calvinist Debates on Freedom," *Freedom and the Construction of Europe* 1 (2013): 21–37.

¹⁶ Robert H Lescelius, "Foreknowledge: Prescience or Predestination?," *Reformation AndRevival* 12 (2003): 2539.

¹⁷ R.H. Nash, *The Concept of God* (London: Zondervan, 1983); E.R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press., 1989)..

¹⁸ Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes*, 421.

¹⁹ Hunt, "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," 394.

The missionary God is constantly preserving and guaranteeing the continuation of humankind through structured sexual relationships.

Missio Dei (Predestination)

The predestination theory is based on the idea that God had known and selected the recipients of His salvation prior to creation. As such, the doctrine of foreknowledge stands not only as the foundation upon which the doctrine of predestination is built but also as the cornerstone of the entire Calvinistic Christian theology.²⁰ Augustine, as quoted in Wetzel, explained this as follows: “This is the predestination of the saints, nothing else: plainly the foreknowledge and preparation of God’s benefits, by means of which whoever is to be liberated is most certainly liberated.”²¹ This simply means that the predestination of counteracting measures and events is a natural consequence of the divine foreknowledge of all eternity. This doctrine’s broad understanding, which also influenced and came to be associated with John Calvin’s ideas,²² consequently became the focal point of the Reformed tradition.²³ Predestination encompasses more than just a person’s predetermined salvation as expressed in the doctrine of election. Although the two are often linked, predestination broadly refers to God’s sovereignty predetermining all creation events from eternity. That is to say, the election doctrine only pertains to human discourse, especially within the theological framework of Calvinism, while predestination embraces the idea that God has predetermined the destiny of all creation, including but not limited to humans.²⁴ The next section clarifies the differences between the two by concentrating on election doctrine and then discussing how it can be construed to inform *missio maritatus*. Perhaps the most crucial thing to emphasize now is that predestination in its broadest sense refers to the notion that the all-powerful God predetermined every creation since the beginning of time. Therefore, the predestination theory holds that God’s eternal will determines how creation history as a whole plays out. Predestination was therefore guided by foreknowledge in the context of the election doctrine, according to which the missionary God predestined marriage as a means of preserving the human race.

The predestination doctrine comes before salvation discourse because it is essentially part of the framework of the eternal divine decree, which eventually crystallized or manifested as the *missio Dei*. Stated differently, the entire discourse that highlights the existence of salvation pertains to the concept of predestination, which is based on the eternal will of the triune God. A discussion about salvation, or even just the idea of salvation, is an unqualified acknowledgement of God’s divinely predetermined involvement. Consequently, *missio Dei* indicates that God is actively carrying out His everlasting plan to bring about the restoration and redemption of humanity. He predetermined measures, including the institution of marriage, in order to accomplish this. He similarly preordained marriage to advance the path of salvation, in a manner similar to how He preordained the Church as a social institution for the purpose of salvation. The triune God actively works through marriage, a preordained institution, to both redeem and restore the integrity of His creation. The Church is the larger family made up of the offspring of the institution of marriage and it represents or symbolizes the firstborn in the context of redemption. Married people and their offspring constitute a larger portion of faith communities — the Church in particular — than other members of society. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Joshua stated, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” thus laying the foundation for his service to the Lord via the institution of marriage (Josh 24:2,15). Marital bonds assume the role of a sacred, predestined union and transformative institution that guides couples toward creating families dedicated to sharing in the work of salvation. God Himself said, “Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two will become one flesh,” predestining marriage as a repeated cycle of procreation (Genesis 2:24). God’s statement that “a man will” was both instructive and predicated marriage as an institution meant to be reproduced in the context of creation.

²⁰ M.M. Adams and N. Kretzmann, *Predestination, God’s Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983).

²¹ James Wetzel, “Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge,” *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 2001, 49.

²² Mark E Vander Schaaf, “Predestination and Certainty of Salvation in Augustine and Calvin,” *Reformed Review* 30, no. 1 (1976).

²³ Richard A Layton, “Martin Luther and John Calvin on Predestination,” *Essays in History* 26 (1982); Pieter Rouwendal, “The Doctrine of Predestination in Reformed Orthodoxy,” *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, 2013, 553–90..

²⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Cambridge: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. , 2011).

Missio Dei (Election)

Though it is a fundamental idea in almost all world religions, the biblical concept of election is most prevalent in post-biblical Abrahamic religions like Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. It has to do with God sovereignly selecting or bestowing eternal life upon a people. The concept of the “elect” is particularly clear in the Old Testament, where the Israelites are referred to as the chosen people, and it is carried over into the New Testament, where the Church is similarly defined as the chosen body of Christ. The Old Testament contains a classical example of God’s chosen: God graciously selected Abraham and through him, blessed all nations (Gen. 12:1-3). Similarly, out of love rather than because they were better than other nations or because of their morality, He later declared sovereignly that the people of Israel, Abraham’s descendants, were his most precious possession (Deut. 7:6–8; 14:2). The entire earthly life of Jesus Christ is used in the New Testament as an illustration of how God, propelled by his immense love, selected the Church to be His people in order to save the entire human race. This refers to the Church, the body of Christ, and the means by which the entire human race is to be saved in the context of Christ’s earthly ministry. Apostle Paul also emphasizes that God’s election is based on the work that Christ did on earth when He connects the benefits of God’s electing grace to the Son in his epistolary letter to the Ephesians (Eph 1:3-5). All understanding of the biblical salvific narrative is informed by this idea, to the extent that it appears, whether broadly or narrowly, in both the Old and New Testaments.

The concept of election in Christian theology, especially in the context of Calvinism, has a dual meaning: it describes how God elects to save a particular person individually and particular persons as a group of people. Stated differently, individuals who interpret this doctrine will essentially describe how God chooses to save a particular person or whole group of people. John Calvin, and therefore Calvinism, constructed the doctrine of election after noticing the recurrence of the concept in scripture. 20th-century Swiss theologian Karl Barth broke with tradition by basing his interpretation of election on Jesus Christ, which differed from Calvin’s views and his broad interpretation of the concept. To put it another way, he underlined the Christocentric nature of the doctrine of election, emphasizing that God has chosen Jesus Christ to be the electing God and the elected human.²⁵ In a nutshell, Barth maintained that Christ is the elected electing God, whereas Calvin spoke generally of God in the context of election. However, the main focus of this paper is the concept that humans are elected and not differences of opinion about divine authority. Also, the paper does not focus on the individual election of one person, but on the election of a group of people according to a broad interpretation of *missio Die*. This is generally consistent with the general Christian theology holding that, prior to the creation of the universe, God had elected a specific group of people — referred to as the “elect” — to receive His saving grace. These people were predestined for eternal salvation. This paper sees marriage as an institution that God has chosen to unite a man and a woman, who then become one flesh, and to ensure the continued existence and growth of humankind. In other words, God has chosen those people to be husband and wife in a marriage, with the express purpose of recreating the human family. As the superior being, God retains the right to sanction and bless a marriage, which is the cornerstone of society and human family life. At this point, it is important to note that marriage — an institution approved by God as a means of human family reproduction — rather than people themselves are particularly blessed. Marriage is considered sacred because it has a deeper connection to the divine, but it also serves as a social and religious institution and a framework for childrearing and the unification of human families. As such, it is a lifelong dedication to the divine project of sustaining the human race rather than a mere partnership between two people. Marriage is one of the institutions that the missionary God uses to maintain humankind’s existence on earth, in accordance with the *missio Dei*. The husband and wife are merely participants in the divinely orchestrated process of human reproduction. Girgis et al. actually define the married couple as a “reproductive unit”, which means that their only function is to procreate in accordance with the will of God.²⁶

²⁵ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics the Doctrine of God, Part2: The Election of God; the Command of God*, vol. 2 (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003); Colin Gunton, “Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Election as Part of His Doctrine of God,” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 1974, 381–92.

²⁶ Girgis, George, and Anderson, “What Is Marriage,” 246.

Marriage Symbolism (Christ & Church)

In the Christian traditions, the relationship between Christ and the Church is metaphorically compared to the romantic relationship between a husband and wife. This understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Church highlights how highly the Church has historically valued marriage as a sacrament.²⁷ Matrimony has its origins in the divine construction of human relations involving a solemn covenant with one's spouse, despite the fact that social science usually views it as a social construct (Witte 2012:151-153). In his epistolary letter to the Ephesians, Apostle Paul specifically describes the union of a man and a woman in terms of Christ's relationship with the Church (Eph. 5:22-33), which offers a strong theological foundation for this symbolism. In his letter, Paul uses the comparison to explain how a husband and wife should treat each other. He instructs husbands to show their wives sacrificial love in the same way that Christ does for the Church. Wives are encouraged to submit to their husbands' headship as the Church does to Christ (Eph. 5:22-25). This imagery has been extensively interpreted and developed throughout Christian history. It has also influenced Christian teachings and the perception of marriage as a sacred institution. In light of how widely this marriage analogy — in which Christ is the bridegroom and the Church is his bride — has been used, it might be helpful to emphasize that salvation lies at the core of this symbolism. Naturally, on the one hand, the analogy shows how deeply and selflessly Jesus Christ loves the Church, His bride. The bridegroom's profoundly selfless love also aims to save humanity through the Church, even though it is rarely interpreted as such. Christian doctrines teach that Christ's selfless love is aimed at the salvation of humanity; no other goals are identified, particularly not when this symbolism is viewed in the context of the cross and the resurrection. Moreover, this marriage is the only path to divine reconciliation and possibly everlasting life for believers or the Church, which advocates for the salvation of humanity as a whole. In short, and in line with the paper's thesis, marriage represents a sacred uniting institution which directly centralizes or is aimed at humanity's salvation within the broader context of the *missio Dei*. The institution mirrors Christ's self-sacrifice and profound love for the bride, but its ultimate goal is the salvation of all people. In his epistolary letter to the Ephesians, Apostle Paul unsurprisingly says, "Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its Savior." As such, His great love and selflessness are the means of achieving complete salvation rather than an end in and of themselves.

Christ, the Bridegroom, is God or the missionary God, He is actively engaged in redeeming humanity and therefore we can conclude that marriage plays an important role in human salvation. Like Joshua proclaims, Christ, the Bridegroom, calls the Church into a new community of saints that bears the firstborns of salvation, a husband's role is to guide his wife and household towards serving the Lord. Wives and children must submit to their husbands as they would submit to the Lord, who gave Himself up for their redemption. The Church submits to the headship of Christ in order to be saved. Marriage is elevated to a holy institution in which husbands lead their wives and families on a path to salvation. If Apostle Paul had not believed that marriage is a significant institution that is intended to lead families toward salvation, he would not have spent even a moment of his time giving advice to husbands and wives. If he had not believed that marriage was a sacred institution that was predetermined, he would not have drawn comparisons between it and the Christ–Church relationship. He would not have spent the last part of his letter to the Ephesians outlining the ideal marriage, and he would not have concluded with a passage from Genesis 2 about a man and woman becoming one flesh, calling it a mystery (Eph. 5:32). He explains to the Ephesians that the saving relationship between Christ and the Church was preceded by the mystery of marriage as a sacred institution. As firmly as he believed in the role that the relationship between Christ and the Church plays in the redemption of humanity, he also believed that marriage is an institution that sets societies on a path to salvation.

Missio maritatus (Gen. 1:28)

In general, marriage missiology is a framework that examines the role of marriages in relation to the *missio Dei*, or how marriage interacts with the *missio Dei*. As per the discourse, *missio maritatus* is a Latin Christian theological framework that, like other missiology theoretical frameworks, is prefixed with the term *missio* (sending). The term can be roughly translated as the "mission of marriage". The other

²⁷ Steven Babos, "Marriage as a Sacrament," *Thought: Fordham University Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (1983): 5.

theoretical frameworks referred to are *missio Dei*, *missio Christos*, *missio Spiritus*, *missio hominum*, *missio ecclesiae* and *missio politica*, among others. Since the latter part of the 20th century, *missio Dei* has been recognized as a crucial framework for expressing *missio trinitatis* and all other aforementioned commissions. *Missio maritatus* articulates the idea that the institution of marriage was ordained by the missionary God as a further framework aimed at fulfilling the primary objectives of the *missio Dei*. The institution becomes relevant as soon as creation occurs, especially when human creation is blessed with the ability to procreate in accordance with God's purpose. This raises marriage above the level of a simple human activity and makes it another *missio* tool that the missionary God uses to accomplish the objectives of the *missio Dei*. This implies, that the holy institution of marriage — albeit one that believers observe on a human level — is a divine instrument that helps achieve the primary goal of *missio Dei*, namely salvation. The missionary God preordained this revered institution from eternity to advance the objective of *missio Dei*, which is the total restoration of humanity. A specific reading of Genesis 1:28 is used to clarify this in the following section.

Old Testament scholars, including Davidson, argue convincingly that Genesis 1:28 serves as the pinnacle towards which God has directed all of creation since the very beginning.²⁸ This precise moment symbolizes the divine act of marrying a man and a woman as a means of procreation, or to create an institution that will enable the growth of the human family. In other words, the idea that procreation and the establishment of human families are essential components of marriage is suggested by the divine directive or four instructions to humans to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen. 1:28). Davidson maintains this very assertion by stating that Genesis 1:28 points to human reproduction as the main goal of sexuality. At the very least, this is implied by the phrase “be fruitful and multiply”. He further writes: “Procreation is shown to be part of the divine design for human sexuality – as a special added blessing.”²⁹ Marriage has been acknowledged as the primary social institution for procreating and raising children, and such recognition falls squarely within the parameters of this directive.³⁰ It goes without saying that the foundation of this institution is the union of a husband and a wife, but with the ultimate goal of perpetual procreation. Girgis et al. echo this exact sentiment when they state that marriage has three key elements: a complete union of spouses; a unique connection to children; and norms of permanence, monogamy, and exclusivity.³¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that many religious traditions — Christianity in particular — quote Genesis 1:28 when they discuss the sanctity of marriage. God intended for humanity to multiply through this very institution in order to fill the world. This instruction is the predestined measure resulting from divine foreknowledge, even though it predates the fall of humanity, which is sometimes regarded as the beginning of *missio Dei*. The missionary God has not instituted marriage for the bride and groom's personal sexual fulfilment, but rather to enable them to participate actively in the mission to safeguard the presence of humanity on earth. In accordance with the mandate in Genesis 1:28, husband and wife are given the responsibility to engage in sexual activity as part of the divine mission to preserve humankind's existence on earth. Consequently, this understanding shows that marriage is an institution established by God to join a husband and wife — not for their own erotic pleasure, but rather to ensure sustainable human procreation.

Consequently, the sacred institution of marriage is a divinely prescribed instrument to guarantee that humanity will continue to exist on earth, therefore it involves much more than a couple's interests in happiness. Marriage is part of the missionary God's plan for redemption, which aims to restore humanity to the world in spite of sin, and was predetermined by Him in his omniscience from eternity. In light of the devastation caused by sin, it is possible to declare with certainty that the institution of marriage represents “God's great plan for human proliferation”. Predestination and foreknowledge doctrines frame the divine great plan and dictate that human reproduction is the only means of preventing the extinction of humanity. Thus, marriage is an institution that the missionary God uses to prevent the extinction of humanity. Even though God's plan is all-inclusive and other created beings also reproduce, He only instructed humans to procreate. Stated differently, out of all His creatures, God gave humans — husband

²⁸ Richard M Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 26, no. 1 (1988): 5.

²⁹ Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2,” 9-10.

³⁰ C.J. Reid, “Marriage in Its Procreative Dimension: The Meaning of the Institution of Marriage Throughout the Ages,” in *Augustine and Modern Law* (London: Routledge, 2017), 481–512.

³¹ Girgis, George, and Anderson, “What Is Marriage,” 252.

and wife—the institution of marriage to participate in His mission to sustain human existence. This echoes the words of Erickson (2013), who says: “The plan of God relates primarily to what God Himself does in terms of creating, preserving, directing, and redeeming.”³²

***Missio maritatus* flaws**

Marital missiology continues to face growing challenges from emerging trends in matrimonial discourse and attempts to redefine the biblical institution of marriage with reference to same-sex marriages, individual preferences, barrenness and even childless unions. Before these trends surfaced, marriage was understood to be God’s will and to involve only two members of the two opposite sexes, that is a man and a woman, in keeping with the union between Adam and Eve. This is predicated on the familiar account in Genesis, which acknowledges only two genders — male and female. God made it plain that a man would leave his parents and cling to his wife (Gen. 2:22-24). The framework of marriage missiology was only briefly discussed in this paper; more investigation is required to develop this theory fully in relation to numerous other trends, including celibacy and the LGBTQ community. Specifically, or to the extent that this paper linked the goal of marriage to childbearing, such a perspective would undoubtedly present significant difficulties when it comes to the LGBTQI community, celibacy, childlessness and even barrenness in relation to marriage. The conventional view of marriage also raises concerns about the status of children born out of wedlock. For example, could the children of unmarried parents contribute equally to the goals of *missio Dei*? It is essential that future studies in this field take into account the new family structures and dynamics that are typical of marriage in contemporary society.

Marriage as a means of achieving procreation, as this paper suggested, is a viewpoint that overlooks the legitimacy of other kinds of relationships. For all practical purposes, many married couples who may be unable to conceive for a variety of legitimate reasons are marginalized by this traditional viewpoint, which also denies the validity of childless unions. It is thus anticipated that future research will refocus the conversation on concepts like fellowship, companionship and mutual aid, taking into account alternative models that inform the primary goal of marriage beyond childbearing. The hardest task will be to make a strong case that a childless union could also achieve the goals of the *missio Dei*. That being said, this paper freely and purposefully examined marriage from a limited biblical viewpoint, characterizing marriage primarily as a means of achieving procreation in line with the objectives of the *missio Dei*. The idea of mutual enrichment was disregarded and marriage was described as a divinely instituted communion with the specific aim of procreation in the context of the *missio Dei*. The scope of this paper was restricted based on God’s directive that humans must procreate. Future research would need to develop *missio maritatus* in a way that encompasses contemporary perspectives on marriage. Put simply, this paper admits that its *missio maritatus* is too narrowly defined and that this shortcoming calls for additional study that will broaden the framework beyond the conventional understanding of marriage as guided by biblical interpretation.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, *missio maritatus* was introduced as more than just the act of remaining husband and wife; rather, marriage was presented as a sacred institution established by God to give structure to human relationships that would lead to procreation. This view is based on Genesis 1:28, which commands man and woman to “be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth”. The *missio maritatus* theoretical framework had not been formally introduced in any study, despite missiology’s frequent examination of the intersections between marriage and redemptive goals within the complex framework of *missio Dei*. The theoretical foundations of *missio maritatus*, a mission theoretical framework that acknowledges the complexity of *missio Dei*, were thus presented in this paper. The core Christian doctrines of divine foresight and predestination served as the basis of the *missio maritatus* framework. This paper explicitly acknowledged that its limited traditional understanding of marriage would give rise to criticism, but left it to future research to define *missio maritatus* in light of contemporary marriage trends. As a result, the primary inference that can be made from this work is that when read in accordance with Gen. 1:28, the institution of marriage helps to realize the *missio Dei*.

³² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, M.M., and N. Kretzmann. *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983.
- Babos, Steven. "Marriage as a Sacrament." *Thought: Fordham University Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (1983): 5–17.
- Barth, K. *Church Dogmatics the Doctrine of God, Part2: The Election of God; the Command of God*. Vol. 2. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003.
- Becker, Gary S. "A Theory of Marriage: Part II." *Journal of Political Economy* 82, no. 2, Part 2 (1974): S11–26.
- Booth, Alan, David R Johnson, Ann Branaman, and Alan Sica. "Belief and Behavior: Does Religion Matter in Today's Marriage?" *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1995, 661–71.
- Burke, C. *The Theology of Marriage*. Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2015.
- Clayton, Philip. "The Emergence of Spirit: From Complexity to Anthropology to Theology." *Theology and Science* 4, no. 3 (2006): 291–307.
- Crain, Steven D. "Divine Action in a World Chaos: An Evaluation of John Polkinghorne's Model of Special Divine Action." *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (1997): 41–61.
- Davidson, Richard M. "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2." *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 26, no. 1 (1988): 16.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Flett, John G. "A Theology of Missio Dei." *Theology in Scotland* 21, no. 1 (2014): 69–78.
- Gelderer, Martin Van. "Arminian Trouble. Calvinist Debates on Freedom." *Freedom and the Construction of Europe* 1 (2013): 21–37.
- Girgis, Sherif, Robert P George, and Ryan T Anderson. "What Is Marriage." *Harv. JL & Pub. Pol'y* 34 (2011): 245.
- Gunton, Colin. "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Election as Part of His Doctrine of God." *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 1974, 381–92.
- Hunt, David P. "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge." *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no. 3 (1993): 394–414.
- Kirk, J.G. *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- Lake, Peter. "Predestinarian Propositions." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46, no.1(1995):110–23.
- Lawler, Michael G. "Faith, Praxis, and Practical Theology: At the Interface of Sociology and Theology." *Horizons* 29, no. 2 (2002): 199–224.
- Layton, Richard A. "Martin Luther and John Calvin on Predestination." *Essays in History* 26 (1982).
- Lescelius, Robert H. "Foreknowledge: Prescience or Predestination?" *Reformation AndRevival* 12 (2003): 2539.
- Manson, Steven M. "Simplifying Complexity: A Review of Complexity Theory." *Geoforum* 32, no. 3 (2001): 405–14.
- Marks, Loren. "How Does Religion Influence Marriage? Christian, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim Perspectives." *Marriage & Family Review* 38, no. 1 (2005): 85–111.
- Nash, R.H. *The Concept of God*. London: Zondervan, 1983.
- Quinn, Philip L. "Divine Foreknowledge and Divine Freedom." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 1978, 219–40.
- Reid, C.J. "Marriage in Its Procreative Dimension: The Meaning of the Institution of Marriage Throughout the Ages ." In *Augustine and Modern Law*, 481–512. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Rouwendal, Pieter. "The Doctrine of Predestination in Reformed Orthodoxy." *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, 2013, 553–90.
- Schaaf, Mark E Vander. "Predestination and Certainty of Salvation in Augustine and Calvin." *Reformed Review* 30, no. 1 (1976).
- Sherif, G., R. P. George, and R. T. Anderson. "What Is Marriage." *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* 34, no. 1 (2011): 245–88.

- Smedes, Taede Anne. *Chaos, Complexity, and God: Divine Action and Scientism*. Vol. 26. Peeters, 2004.
- Sproul, R.C. *Chosen by God*. Cambridge: . Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. , 2011.
- Stanton, Graham D. “A Theology of Complexity for Christian Leadership in an Uncertain Future.” *Practical Theology* 12, no. 2 (2019): 147–57.
- Tebbe, Nelson. “Religion and Marriage Equality Statutes.” *Harv. L. & Pol’y Rev.* 9 (2015): 25.
- Thinane, Jonas S. “Missio Dei’s Complexity Prefaced in Synergism.” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 2 (2023): 8611.
- . “Missio Dei through Complexity Theory: Complexity to Total Salvation.” *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 56, no. 1 (2022): 8.
- Thinane, Jonas Sello. “Missio Politica on Coalition Governance: ‘better Devils’ in SA Coalition Politics.” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 2 (2023).
- Wetzel, James. “Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge.” *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 2001, 49–58.
- Wierenga, E.R. *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press., 1989.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Dr. Jonas Sello Thinane is a researcher at the University of South Africa (UNISA), College of Human Sciences (CHS) within the Research Institute for Theology and Religion (RITR). With a PhD in Theology, specializing in Missiology, he has dedicated his entire career to the study and research of missionary work. Since then, he has published numerous scholarly articles in prestigious journals, covering a wide range of theological topics, but particularly Missiology topics. In addition to his publications, Dr. Thinane continues to actively participate in local and international conferences, seminars, and webinars. As such, his academic contributions continue to make a mark both in South Africa and internationally.