

## Biobible

### Biblical Provocations to Biocapital in the U.S. Culture Wars

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#### Abstract

This paper considers how a newly emergent biobible radically invests bodily functions, bodily matter, and bodies in and as capital. In conservative Christian family-values commentary on marriage, sexuality, and reproduction, reference to biology is on the rise. Biblical arguments for heterosexual marriage and sanctity of life are supported by biological language and imaging. These discourses reflect, respond to, and contribute to what scholars have called biocapital, that is, the increased commodification of biological materials and technologies. Biology is biblically elevated and given increased value, feeding biocapital. Indeed emphasis on biology has come to edge out or make subordinate more traditional religious language of interiority, spirituality and emotional life, making them unimportant, or provisionally important, displaced onto the future wellbeing of biological children raised in heterosexual, white families. These developments are traced in conservative Christian discussions of same-sex marriage, assisted reproductive technology, abortions, and prison ministry.

#### Keywords

Biobible; biocapital; biological family; children; marriage debates; assisted reproductive technology; abortion; prison.

#### The Emergence of the Biobible

In the summer of 2016, *Christianity Today* ran an article arguing that monogamous marriage protects women's "biological interests." The author, economist Bruce Wydick, asserts that women are biologically programmed to produce one child at a time and men are biologically conditioned to "reproduce their genes by producing many offspring at a time." Marriage is said to be a justice issue, mediating the competing interests of the sexes: "The biological interest of women is in quality of sexual relationship; in men it is the quantity of sexual relationship." A Christian version of men and their wild oats, the argument is notable for its focus on biology and, in particular, biological interest. Speaking in the economic language of interest, Wydick says that women must be protected from theft: "sex devoid of genuine male-to-female commitment is a form of stealing ... [and] an injustice against women and their deepest biological interests" (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wydick critiques a widely held neoliberal view in economics that says people will act according to their own self-interest in ways that will benefit the whole. More pessimistic about men's biologically conditioned interests, Wydick attempts to motivate men into a kind of Christian social-

The biological stakes are high, he suggests, because children need their biological fathers: “Children who grow up without their biological fathers do worse in school,” and “display higher levels of both shyness and aggression.”<sup>2</sup> The play book for guarding the biological interests of women and children, is of course the Bible: “Follow the advice of Scripture, and you are more likely to have a happier life, remembering that healthy relationships require considerable effort and commitment to the well-being of others over self.” The male self protects others—women and children—with his sexual fidelity.

Wydick draws on an all too familiar set of family values and fears that include scripture, patriarchy, gender roles, procreation, and children’s wellbeing; yet his essay also exhibits a way of connecting the Bible to biology that has dramatically crescendoed over the last twenty years. The language of biological interest and its possible theft point to the economic register of biocapital that theorists have argued is increasingly restructuring our notions of economy, sociality, and political subjectivity. Biocapital is the capitalization of life itself in the development of biotechnology since the 1970s, a phenomenon tracked by Sarah Franklin and Margaret Lock (2003), Kausik Sunder Rajan (2006), Nikolas Rose (2009), Kalindi Vora (2015) and others.<sup>3</sup> In biocapital, “life itself [is being transformed] into commodities, markets, and strategies for accumulating wealth” (Franklin and Rose 2003, 6). As Rose elaborates, a new bioeconomy has emerged in which biological elements are detached from their points of origin, so that, “organs ... elements of reproduction ... tissues, cells, and DNA can be rendered visible, isolated, decomposed, stabilized, stored in ‘biobanks,’ commoditized ... moved from place to place, from organism to organism, from disease to disease, from person to person” (2009, 15). Biocapital is the brave new world in which biological elements and information are sold for profit.

Given these developments of biopolitical economy, the degree to which biological discourse has entered Christian family values discourse is worth tracking. As Franklin (2001) and Hayden (1995) recall, in the mid twentieth-century, anthropologist David Schneider (1968) argued that kinship in the U.S. has typically (if simplistically) been understood as biological, or at least genetic.<sup>4</sup> In

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sexual contract, an “exchange of sex for commitment, commitment on behalf of the man to the welfare of the woman and any resulting children.”

<sup>2</sup> Wydick cites a sociological study (McLanahan and Percheski 2008) in a way that completely omits its central argument about the impact of *income inequality* on family structure.

<sup>3</sup> For an intellectual history of the development of the concept, see Helmreich 2008; for a critique of the economic elaboration of biocapital thus far, see Birch and Tyfield 2013. Franklin and Lock (2003) were the first to call the various commoditizations of biological materials “biocapital,” a term further popularized by Sunder Rajan’s book of the same name (2006). Sunder Rajan looks at the use of human genome data in biotech, pharmaceutical development, and venture capitalism in the U.S. and India; he considers how “the ‘fundaments’ of life as information ... could be commodified and could operate as currency” (2006, 78). Taking up the question of the capitalization of reproduction, Vora looks at global practices of surrogacy, including traditional labor, the commoditization of biological products, and further, the affective labor that is added to the work of surrogates. For more on the commoditization and global outsourcing of surrogacy, see Twine (2011). For biblical scholarship that compares the etiological elements of the human genome project with biblical etiologies as they relate to ethnic identity, see Stone (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Franklin (2001) points out that despite Schneider’s critique of biology as sufficient for understanding kinship, he still leaves the category in place, whereas feminist thought has argued that “biological fact” is always already socially constructed.

conservative Christian insistence on heterosexual family and sexuality, as James Brownson points out, the anatomical processes of intercourse and procreation have been emphasized via the language of “gender complementarity” and linked to “nature” and natural law through scriptural texts like Romans 1 (2013, 20). On the rise in Christian family values discussions of marriage, sexuality, and reproduction, however, is the language of *biology* and the attention to physical processes. In fact, as I will show, emphasis on biology has come to edge out or make subordinate more traditional religious language of interiority, spirituality and emotional life. Although the biblical interpretations and prooftexts I discuss are culturally conservative, the turn to the biological is quite radical, pushing past interest in spirituality or more wholistic stances that unite body and spirit, to prioritize physical life; there are, however, significant exceptions—namely in children and the incarcerated. To make this argument, I examine how conservative Christian teachings about life bring the Bible into the constellation of biocapital by intertwining (interpreted) biblical truths with (interpreted) biology, each used as proof of the other. I trace these dynamics by looking at biobiblical teaching about marriage, abortion, and assisted reproduction, showing how concerns for interiority and spiritual well-being are displaced onto the future, via the children of normative (i.e., white, heterosexual) families; I conclude by comparing these to the rather different approach—a full focus on interiority—taken toward people in prison, bodies that are fully capitalized.

The prevalence of the Bible in arguments for heterosexual biological families and “sanctity of life” in the U.S. feeds into biocapital by investing and increasing the “vitality” that Rose suggests is fundamental to the value of biological products (2009, 6-7, 14-76). To be sure, the Bible is used, in part, to resist the dehumanization of biological material; but the way it is cited simultaneously contributes to the valuation, commoditization, and management of biological life. From the perspective of biopolitics, these conservative arguments are radically forging the way for biocapital, at points moving beyond matter to information, an even more saleable asset. Thus, even as the sacredness of life is proclaimed, biology is biblically elevated and given increased value, feeding biocapital. If Yvonne Sherwood (2008) has shown the emergence of the Liberal Bible and James Crossley (2014) the Neoliberal Bible, I suggest that what we see in conservative Christianity in the U.S. is the increasing formation of the Biobible, that is, a set of biblical interpretations that inadvertently work to cultivate life itself as capital and for biocapital, as ever, hierarchizing race and gender.

### **Biobiblical Marriage**

In the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case on marriage equality, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. (2015),<sup>5</sup> conservative arguments moved radically toward biologism and away from the (now) more traditional liberal arguments for marriage used on the same-sex side. While the attorney for the same-sex petitioners, Mary Bonauto, emphasized human dignity, as well as “mutual support ... legal commitment, responsibility and protection” (*Obergefell*, transcript of oral arguments, 4), on the other side, attorney for the respondents John Bursch told the

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<sup>5</sup> The case ruled that all 50 U.S. states had to recognize same-sex marriages, based on the due process and equal protection clauses of the fourteenth amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Court that marriage was not about love, it was about biology. He said, “changing the meaning of marriage from [being] based on that biological bond to [being] based on emotional commitment ... adults could think, rightly, that this relationship is more about adults and not about the kids” (*Obergefell*, transcript of oral arguments, 66). Should the definition of marriage change to focus on emotional commitment from that of an emphasis on biological bonding, Bursch argued, even heterosexual couples might be more likely to abandon their biological children (*Obergefell*, transcript of oral arguments, 48). While this definition of marriage might come as a surprise to many, especially those in the thrall of engagement and wedding planning, the argument was, of course, meant to emphasize heterosexual procreation as the main reason for marriage.

Bursch’s reasoning was consistent with other conservative rhetoric around the legal challenges for same-sex marriage. In many conservative responses to *Obergefell*, spiritual and emotional life were radically de-emphasized, while production and control of physical life were central. In contrast to liberal arguments which emphasized love, rights, and dignity, the conservative arguments focused on procreation and the regulation of material life. Take for example the statement of the Ohio court quoted in the Hodges’ brief: “marriage was adopted, ‘not to regulate love *but to regulate sex*, most especially the intended and unintended effects of male-female intercourse” (Brief for Respondent 2015, 4-5; emphasis mine). Even children—highly prized in family values discourse—are reduced to biological “effects of intercourse,” perhaps along with embryos, fetuses, and STIs. An almost identical statement appears in the amicus brief submitted by the Kentucky Family Trust Foundation (2015): “Marriage is an institution which has as its genesis the biological ability of a man and a woman to procreate. Because of that, traditional marriage laws serve a legitimate and compelling State interest of regulating the *intended and unintended natural effects of male/female intercourse: children*” (emphasis mine). Conservative marriage, as it turns out, is all about the “natural” and “biological” production of children.

In a reversal of a more familiar conservative suspicion of science, such arguments support the biblical view with science (loosely speaking).<sup>6</sup> For conservative Protestants, biology has become the mode of adding secularity to touchstone biblical texts such as, “male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27), “God blessed them and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’” (Gen. 1:28), and “a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). These verses are interpreted to mean that marriage is an arrangement specifically designed to produce and care for children, and to argue that gender complementarity is a natural biological requirement for procreation and childrearing. Conservative Catholics, too, secularize their views through biology, sometimes based on scripture, but also drawing more philosophically on natural law and theological tradition. Notably this turn to biology is only used when it supports the heterosexual family. For instance, as Anthony Petro (2015) argues, the biomedical explanations for AIDS and AIDS

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<sup>6</sup>For intellectual histories of evangelicals and science, see Noll 1(994, 2002); M. Roberts (2008). Evangelicals were not always so suspicious of science as many have been in recent years. In the eighteenth-and nineteenth centuries, evangelical thinkers “adopted, promoted, and exploited the language of science as their own language” (Noll 2002, 268).

prevention were consistently rejected by conservative Christians during the AIDS epidemic (and beyond) in favor of moral arguments.

Conservative amicus briefs substantially reinforced counsel's arguments for the material, rather than emotional nature of marriage. For instance, the brief submitted by "Organizations that Promote Biological Parenting" argued, "Natural parents have access to childrearing advantages that non-biological parents lack" (2015, 11). Several defense-of-family organizations submitted a brief that debated "the unsupported *assumptions* that the essence of marriage is a loving, committed relationship between two adults" (Brief of North Carolina Values Coalition et. al, 4).<sup>7</sup> The brief accuses the petitioners of trying to "manufacture new 'rights' that *defy the nature of reality*" (2015, 34, emphasis added). Likewise, the amicus brief of Robert Bentley, Governor of Alabama, argued that the limiting factor for marriage could not be love, since many different kinds and numbers of people could love each other (2015, 25). Rather, for Bentley, the limiting factors should be "fidelity and permanence ... [and] legal and cultural bonds between children and their biological parents ... and thereby, to the well-being of the children and the States in which children live" (27). Throughout Bentley's brief, the term "natural marriage" and "biological family" are paired, arguing that "States cannot afford to ignore the reality of natural marriage and the biological family" (21).

These arguments reflect and intensify those made by one of the most influential conservative Catholic voices on marriage, Robert P. George—Princeton law professor and one time member of the Council on Bioethics under G. W. Bush.<sup>8</sup> George has been making arguments about biological marriage over the last ten years. Prior to *Obergefell*, he does acknowledge the interior and emotional aspects of marriage, but makes them dependent on the biology of sex with reproductive potential. As he writes, "The bodily union of spouses in marital acts is the biological matrix of their marriage as a comprehensive, multilevel sharing of life: that is, a relationship that unites the spouses at the bodily (biological), emotional, dispositional, and even spiritual levels of their being" (2006, 151). In a more recent book, he and his co-author Patrick Lee make an almost Pauline ecclesial argument about the biological nature of marriage:

Just as an individual's different organs ... perform not as isolated parts but in internally coordinated unity to carry out a single biological function of the whole individual ([e.g.] circulation of oxygenated blood), so too in coitus the sexual organs of the male and those of the female function in a coordinated way to carry out a biological function of the couple as a unit—mating. (2014, 100)

The authors' conception of the "multileveled reality" of a marriage posits that emotional and spiritual relations are predicated on biological union (Lee and George 2014, 45-7, 50-3, 67-8, 84-5, 101-2). Notably, George's rhetoric shifted in the run up to *Obergefell* when it came to making the legal argument, perhaps indicating that the complete rejection of emotion was shaped in part by the legal

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<sup>7</sup> These words are a citation of the Connecticut Judge Zarella, dissenting in the case *Kerrigan v. Commissioner of Public Health* 957 A.2d 407 (Conn. 2008).

<sup>8</sup> David Kirkpatrick, writing for the *New York Times Magazine*, calls George "this country's most influential conservative Christian thinker," with whom powerful Roman Catholic bishops confer (2009).

need to find “state interests” for marriage. His comments about the *Obergefell* suggested that historically, U.S. law did not understand marriage as “simply a form of sexual-romantic companionship or domestic partnership” but rather as “relationship shaped by the needs of children for mothers and fathers” (2015).

The legal demand to prove state interest in the matter of marriage certainly facilitated an emphasis on biology as a foundation for social order. In many of the *Obergefell* documents, biology is given credit for creating social stability through children’s wellbeing. For instance, the Family Research Council’s brief is upfront about its “Judeo-Christian world view” (1),<sup>9</sup> linking it to the benefits of biological parenting for children. It contends that state bans on same-sex marriage are “related to multiple legitimate state interests, including promoting *responsible procreation* and channeling such procreation into *stable family relationships* where the children so procreated will be *raised by their biological mothers and fathers*” (19-20, emphasis mine). Social stability through biology becomes something of a refrain in the traditional marriage discourse, and, as we will see, in the sanctity of life literature as well.

A connection between biology and stability was also being made outside of the legal frame—but with an eye to it—as in the op-ed of *Christian Post* contributor, Frank Turek, “Natural Marriage is not Bigotry, It’s Biology” (May 13, 2014). Like the conservative respondents and their supporters in the case, Turek argues that the state’s recognition of marriage is not about love or romance, rather it is about stability based on biological ties. He wrote:

The main reason the government is involved in marriage is not to recognize that two people love one another or have a romantic affinity for one another ... Why should the state care about just romantic feelings? The real reason governments have an interest in promoting natural marriage is because only natural marriage perpetuates and *stabilizes society*. Strong marriage laws encourage men and women to procreate and then stay together to mother and father their children. That benefits children and all of society because children raised in biological two-parent homes tend to do better and *cause society much less trouble than children raised in other situations*. (emphasis mine)

Obscuring the fact that democratic states and laws are shaped and contested by people who do seem to care about who loves whom, Turek imagines an impersonal state on the side of biology. State interest relies on material biological structures for stability.<sup>10</sup>

Turek’s discourse points to some of the racialized, gendered fears and beliefs about family structure and children *that cause society trouble*, which circulate with biobiblical arguments for marriage. Given that societal “trouble” is highly racialized in the U.S., with the criminalization of African Americans and

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<sup>9</sup> Brief of the Family Research Council (2015, 1, 19-20). One has to go no farther than the Family Research Council’s brochure, “The Bible’s Teaching on Marriage and Family,” to find Genesis 2:24 cited as “set[ting] forth the biblical pattern as it was instituted by God at the beginning: one man is united to one women in matrimony” (Köstenberger 2011).

<sup>10</sup> For similar non legal arguments, see also Sider 2013, and the anonymous article on *Discussing Marriage*, available online <http://discussingmarriage.org/the-argument-from-child-welfare/#.V3bZnDWJGUI>.

immigrants, these statements may hide a racialized fear, as well as a bias against African American single mothers.<sup>11</sup> In the background are, perhaps, the kind of statistics given by the well-known and influential family values organization Focus on the Family about children raised without fathers: “Children in families without fathers are two to three times more likely to *abuse drugs*; 70 percent of *long-term inmates* grew up fatherless; girls without a father ... are more likely to get *pregnant before marriage*” (2014, 19, emphasis mine). The fear of children raised without fathers may also be animating the legal arguments in *Obergefell*. As Mr Bursch said in the oral arguments, if the link between biological parents and children were broken, “You’ve got more kids being raised without their biological mom and dad. You have more kids being raised without both parents, you know, typically without a father, though that’s not always the case. And it’s not unreasonable for the people in thinking about possible consequences of changing a definition [of marriage]” (*Obergefell*, transcript of oral arguments 2015, 70). Are these “consequences” prison sentences, drug use, and single mothers about which Focus on the Family worries? Further, what is implied here is what happens to children *once they grow up*, thereby subtly infantilizing the eventual adult children of racialized families considered to be non-normative.

These sorts of arguments exemplify what Ann Burlein has identified as the way that conservative love of children often encodes “highest religious ideals and deepest hopes” in ways that “cross into a politics of aggression, exclusion, and fear” (2002, 20). Perhaps we should not be surprised by the role of biology and the Biobible in this racializing, sexist, and homophobic phenomenon, since as Ken Stone suggests (2003), biological arguments are often etiological arguments, and like biblical etiological arguments, are about patrolling the borders of (sexualized) ethnic and gender identity.

Conservative Christian arguments in defense of heterosexual marriage thus center biology as an organizational force in society. Whether intended or not, they inflate the importance of biology in a way that can only, ultimately, align with the aims of biocapital by elevating the value of biological material. The interior life of adults is displaced by the biological demand to protect the future life of children, especially as it is seen to impact their functioning in society. As ever, reproductive futurity is used to legitimate raced, classed, and gendered conservative political positions (Berlant 1997; Burlein 2002; Edelman 2004); here we see how the “conservative” future of the Child biblically invests a more radical form of capital.

## **Biblical Responses and Provocations to Assisted Reproductive Technologies**

As it turns out, control of biological reproductive material is very much connected to biobiblical beliefs about marriage. Arguments about the biological unity of the couple, such as George’s discussed above, also appear in response to reproductive technologies and the possibility for same-sex couples to engage in them, specifically through assisted reproductive technologies (ART), such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), surrogacy, and embryo storage and adoption. Biology in the sphere of assisted reproduction does not require married heterosexuality, thus for

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<sup>11</sup> For the ways that African American families have been pathologized and negatively sexualized because they are not always patterned in nuclear male-headed households, see Ferguson (2004).

some making it unbiblical and therefore unnatural. As Franklin (2001) has argued, the new developments in biotechnology are in fact denaturalizing biology and notions of kinship with it, so it is not surprising that the Bible is used to shore up notions both of biology and kinship.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the theologically amplified value placed on biological children in the fight against same-sex marriage undoubtedly contributes to a market for reproductive technologies. Although arguments against such technologies are often framed as concern over the health of families, as well as over the commoditization of children and biological materials,<sup>13</sup> they cannot but help contribute to an emphasis on biological products that is a feature of biocapital. Put another way, arguments for biological marriage may be *both a response and a provocation* to the growing use of non-coital forms of reproduction.

For example, hints of a wider conservative Christian anxiety about the effects of reproductive technology on traditional marriage appear in the anti-gay marriage discourse of Ron Sider, an evangelical known to take stands on social justice issues, but unable to extend his inclusive principles to same-sex marriage. In Charisma News, he chastises churches for creating the culture of discrimination that created the immoral demand for marriage equality. As he sets up this backhanded acceptance of LGBT sinners, reproductive technology is briefly mentioned to prove the importance of biology:

If any state is to survive, it requires an ongoing supply of babies who grow up to be good citizens. Even with modern technology, you need a “mother” (even if she is only a surrogate) and a “father” (even if he is just an anonymous sperm donor) to produce a baby. And every civilization has known what contemporary sociologists now demonstrate: Children grow best into wholesome adults when they live with their biological mother and father. (2013)

Sider’s main point is the importance of biology to marriage and social stability, but the invocation of reproductive technology leaves his argument dangerously open to demonstrating that marriage is actually *unnecessary* for biological reproduction. His seemingly incidental comment indicates that reproductive technology is on the radar of evangelicals and may be one of the impetuses for the biological definition of biblical marriage. Unlike others, Sider is not clear about his stance on the technologies he mentions, and he leaves open the possibility for Christians to engage in such technologies, as long as biological ties are maintained in marriage.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Franklin urges study not only of the way kinship will be transformed by the new biologies, but also how changing notions of kinship are connected to a “wider set of issues, such as how knowledge is produced, how capital is accumulated, and how identity categories are transformed” (2001, 319). In a lovely and tangentially relevant line, she writes, “Like the biblical, the biological is diminished by literalism” (2001, 320).

<sup>13</sup> For examples, see Pope 2013; *Discussing Marriage*, available online <http://discussingmarriage.org/the-argument-from-child-commodity/#.V5kFlzWJGU>.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly Sider calls a surrogate a mother, language which many would avoid after the famous New Jersey supreme court law suit *Baby M*, 537 A.2d 1227, 109 N.J. 396 (N.J. 1988). In that case, the surrogate, who under contract with a couple had been artificially inseminated with the husband’s sperm, refused to give up Baby M, once the child was born. The contracting couple sued. Although the court ultimately gave custody to the couple, the case has changed the way most people approach surrogacy. Now most people opt for “gestational surrogacy” through in vitro

Certainly there is increasing Christian demand for such technologies. The emphasis on the biological family no doubt puts additional pressure on the already existing norm that biological children are desirable. Christian agencies for reproductive technologies do exist, despite the counter discourse against these technologies. To give some examples: Christian Surrogacy helps women to become surrogates (compensation is \$20,000, plus expenses, \$25,000-35,000 for repeat surrogates). It also helps couples to find a surrogate (for a price of \$65,000-75,000).<sup>15</sup> Christian Surrogacy International also offers couples surrogacy (for a notably lower price of \$16,000-25,000).<sup>16</sup> Nightlight Christian Adoptions runs the Snowflakes Embryo Adoption Program, allowing people to donate embryos so that “life” is not destroyed, or to adopt frozen embryo (for a price of \$42,000).<sup>17</sup> One of the ways these processes are marketed to Christians is, of course, through the authority of biblical quotations. So for instance, Christian Surrogacy uses the words of Hannah, mother of the prophet Samuel, on their website header, “‘For this child I prayed ...’ ~1 Samuel 1:27.” Nightlight Christian Adoptions cites the prophetic call trope in Jeremiah 1:5—a verse that is also frequently cited to argue against abortion—“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.”<sup>18</sup> Another secular agency, Modern Family Surrogacy, caters to Christian sensibilities with page that points to the surrogacy practiced by Sarah and Abraham with Hagar (although a perhaps ill-advised choice, if advertisement is the aim).<sup>19</sup>

Such positive Christian stances toward ART are less usual, however, than those responding to it negatively. There is much Protestant and Catholic conservative Christian teaching that calls all ART unnatural because it is assisted; unethical because it is destructive of embryos (understood as life begun at the moment of conception); and even exploitative because of the treatment of women in surrogacy (joining the concerns on the left over justice issues).<sup>20</sup> These arguments are often interwoven with arguments about biological marriage and procreation. Many reject practices like surrogacy and IVF completely, while others find at least IVF to be acceptable, as long as no embryos are destroyed. Catholic teaching considers all ART immoral if it substitutes for the sexual act.<sup>21</sup> Many conservative Protestant circles consider embryo adoption to be acceptable (see

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fertilization, so that the surrogate is not genetically connected to the child, thus limiting openings for a legal challenge.

<sup>15</sup> Christian Surrogacy agency website, available online <http://www.christiansurrogacy.com>.

<sup>16</sup> Christian Surrogacy International website, available online <http://christiansurrogacyinternational.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> Snowflake Embryo Adoption Programme website, available online <https://www.nightlight.org/snowflakes-embryo-donation-adoption/>.

<sup>18</sup> See also *Surrogacy by Faith* website, available online <http://www.surrogacybyfaith.com/home.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Modern Family Surrogacy agency website, available online [http://www.modernfamilysurrogacy.com/page/christian\\_surrogacy](http://www.modernfamilysurrogacy.com/page/christian_surrogacy).

<sup>20</sup> The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention argues that surrogacy is unethical in part because it exploits women financially; available online <http://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/issue-analysis-surrogacy>. For a feminist critique of international surrogacy see Twine (2011).

<sup>21</sup> Catholic teaching on reproductive technology is found in the 1987 document *Donum Vitae*. For an overview of the Vatican’s position see Haas (1998).

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Focus on the Family 2014; Pruitt 2016), thus creating a market for the biotechnologies of cryopreservation and for embryo implantation.

In conservative Protestant discourse especially but also in Catholic discourse, the Bible is used both as philosophical context and statement of fact about when life begins and how that life should be preserved at all costs (without loss of any embryo). Biological details are used to confirm scripture. The biblical texts cited include prophetic texts of divine calling that use the trope of being known before the womb (as in Jer. 1:5 and Isa. 49:1), as well as poetic texts about the Psalmist's relation with God, such as "I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5), and "You knit me together in my mother's womb ... I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:13-14).

Nonetheless, the norm of the biobiblical family is necessarily confronted with the concerns of the infertile; these are acknowledged in ways that further prioritize children, as well as faith. No doubt a source of emotional tension for believers, marriage is understood as religiously grounded in having biological children, yet those unable to have children are discouraged from biotechnology. The painfulness of infertility is frequently acknowledged, but couples are told that children are a *gift* from God, not a right, often citing Ps. 127:3: "Children are indeed a heritage from the Lord" (e.g. Mitchell 2003).<sup>22</sup> To urge reliance on God, texts about biblical women's barrenness are cited (e.g. Sarah's gift of a child in Genesis 18, and Hannah's in 1 Samuel 1) (e.g. Haas 1998, Mitchell 2003, Pruitt 2016). Sometimes infertile couples are encouraged to adopt, which is considered a kind of redemption of children (Mitchell 2003). Biological life and its potential future wellbeing is considered more important than the emotional well-being of the infertile couple. Their emotional suffering, although very real especially in light of the subcultural emphasis on children, is considered a burden to be borne for the sake of God's word and will (e.g. Lahl 2013).

Biblical provocation to the biological continues in the negative responses to ART. Scriptural ideas are interwoven with biological details to insist on the sacredness of life itself, thus increasing the value of biology. As an example, the Focus on the Family's "Sanctity of Human Life Guide," which discusses ART and abortion, begins with a section on the "Beginning of Life," comprised of two pages of scriptural proof texts (2014, 8-9),<sup>23</sup> followed by a detailed timeline of embryonic development, and a page of quotations from scientists saying that human life begins at conception. Scripture, science, and expert opinion are aligned through juxtaposition. This tactic of argument through association is common. For instance, Shane Pruitt writes in the *Christian Post*, "As pro-life Christians, we believe that life begins ... when the union of the sperm and egg generate a new human embryo. 'For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb'" (2016). The citation of Ps. 139:13 does not actually mirror

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<sup>22</sup> For further use of Ps. 127:3, see the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, available online <http://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/issue-analysis-surrogacy>; and the discussion about surrogacy on gotquestions.org, available online <http://www.gotquestions.org/surrogate-mother.html>. For the related Catholic teaching about the child as a gift, not a right, see Lahl 2013; and the Catholic Catechism, available online <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/catechism/index.cfm?recnum=6201>.

<sup>23</sup> Exod. 4:11; 20: 1, 13; 21:22-25; Deut. 24:16; 30:19; Ps. 100:3; 127:3; Isa. 44:24; 45:9-11; Ps. 139: 13-16; Jer. 1:15; Lk. 1:41, 44; 2:6-7; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 1:3-4, 7; 1 Cor. 1:27, 6:19-20.

Pruitt's biological claim,<sup>24</sup> but by its presence it signifies as "scientific fact." Or again, Ben Mitchell, Senior Fellow at the Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity argues:

An important biblical reality is the sanctity of every human life. At the moment human egg and sperm unite, a unique genetic individual is created. Individuals receive half their genetic identity from their biological mother and half from their biological father. Every human individual is created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) and is vested by God with inestimable value. (2003)

In a series of biblical and scientific non sequiturs, Mitchell simultaneously cites scripture, invests genetics with human worth, and emphasizes biological gender complementarity. Thus even while Christian conservatives speak out against economic biocapitalist initiatives, the increased biblicizing of the biological implicitly valorizes biological materiality by calling it human.

Inevitably these biobiblical arguments lead back to heterosexual marriage as the best place to raise children. Mitchell, for instance, argues that children can only flourish without trauma in the "biblical ideal for the family ... one man, one woman, a one-flesh kind of union, for life" (2003). He contends that while embryo adoption might be an option, surrogacy is not, because children require the "very best environment for nurture, even *in utero*. Surrogacy fails to meet important criteria for compassionate child rearing." In these arguments, children's health and wellbeing depends on being cultivated first in the biological mother's womb and then in a heterosexual marriage. Writing for *Christianity Today*, Jennifer Lahl, President of the Center for Bioethics and Culture Network and an outspoken critic of ART, argues:

In Scripture, God affirms that what happens *in utero* matters and cannot be casually or disrespectfully dismissed. The womb, where God first knits us together (Ps. 139:13-14), is not an arbitrary place for a child to grow and develop. In fact, modern science has proven just how important those 9 months are—for both mother and child. (2013)

Like Mitchell, Lahl connects scripture and biology to make an argument about the well-being of children. She continues by affirming heterosexual marriage as the place ordained by God for procreation.

As in the arguments against same-sex marriage, children's (future) well-being is foregrounded, often argued with reference to social scientific studies. A case in point, less scripturally inclined Catholic academic Melissa Moschella—writing on Public Discourse, a web publication of the conservative think tank Witherspoon Institute<sup>25</sup>—argues that same-sex marriage and reproductive

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<sup>24</sup> In fact, as pro-choice advocate Marlena Sobel (1994) noticed over twenty years ago, the text continues in vv. 15 with, "my frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth." A literal reader would have to concede, Sobel quips, that "the Psalmist came from the ground, not his mother's womb."

<sup>25</sup> Culture warriors associated with The Witherspoon Institute in Princeton, include Robert P. George, Ryan T. Anderson, W. Bradford Wilcox and Sherif Girgis. The institute has come under criticism for its involvement in a study by Mark Regnerus about the negative impacts of children raised by same-sex parents. The Witherspoon Institute provided financial, academic, and media support for the study; see [glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org/tags/witherspoon-institute), available online <http://www.glaad.org/tags/witherspoon-institute>.

technology both erode biological ties in ways that make a difference to children's educational and emotional health, as well as parental authority to bring children up in the "spiritual womb of the family" (2015). She makes the argument about the biological family and reproductive technology through theological teaching (Aquinas) and by referring to a study by The Commission on Parenthood's Future, titled *My Daddy's Name is Donor* (Marquardt, Glenn, and Clark 2010).<sup>26</sup> Moschella positively cites the findings of the study, which surveyed donor-conceived, adopted, and biological children about their mental health and identity, to claim that children raised with their biological parents fare better in every way.<sup>27</sup> The Center for Bioethics and Culture also cites *My Daddy's Name is Donor* in a study guide on reproductive technology. It states that "donor offspring are much more likely ... to struggle with substance abuse and depression than children raised by their biological parents." Notably, the claimed difficulties of donor-conceived children are linked to same-sex families, as the guide continues, "While films like *The Kids are All Right* [2010, dir. Lisa Cholodenko; about a lesbian couple and their donor] might portray children conceived through such arrangements as unharmed and happy, the data tells a different story" (2010-2014, 15).

As reproductive technologies develop, the Christian response has reinforced the argument for heterosexual marriage as the only place for biological reproduction. Yet even as ART is resisted, the focus on marriage as a site for the production of biological children has created the situation in which ART has become an emerging theo-ethical issue for conservative Christians. In some ways these arguments are a self-sustaining system: teaching about marriage has fed an already existing yet increasingly emphasized societal consensus that people want and need biological children, contributing to the desire for ART, which then must be condemned.

### **Biblicizing Fetal Images in the Pro-life Movement**

The scripturalized focus on biological materials and the displacement of emotion and interior life onto future children is intensified in Christian antiabortion discourse, and augmented through the biblical veneration of ultrasound technology. As we will see, these amplified dynamics push more radically in the direction of the posthuman, the circulation of biology as information, and the fetishizing of biological materials in ways that are consistent with the logics of biocapital.

Many of the biblical anti-abortion arguments are similar to those made about ART. The focus on biological, embryonic life as the sacred beginning of human life is at work in arguments to protect fetuses, using many of the same prooftexts discussed above (especially prophetic call narratives using the trope of being known before birth, such as Jer. 1:5, Gal. 1:15). What is different is that the

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<sup>26</sup> The Commission on Parenthood's Future claims to be nonpartisan, but is made up of well-known family values proponents, including Robert P. George, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Amy Wax, W. Bradford Wilcox and many others.

<sup>27</sup> The study asked respondents the degree with which they agreed or disagreed with leading and romanticized statements such as, "I sometimes wonder if my sperm donor's family would want to know me," or "It bothers me that money was exchanged in order to conceive me," or "It hurts when I hear other people talk about their genealogical background" (Marquardt, Glenn, and Clark 2010, 113).

“life” is made visible through ultrasounds. As Janelle Taylor has so brilliantly detailed in her book *The Public Life of the Fetal Sonogram* (2008), ultrasounds have been used over the last three decades as part of the activist strategy against abortion. The images are taken as proof of the sacredness of life from its inception and they are said to create a bond between mothers and their babies. Ultrasounds used in pregnancy crisis centers are not intended to be part of medical care; their main purpose is to convince women to keep their babies.<sup>28</sup>

The feminist critique points out that the pro-life movement puts the well-being of the fetus ahead of the well-being of the woman. As feminists have long been saying, ultrasounds fetishize the fetus (Petchesky 1987, Taylor 2008). Through ultrasound imaging, the fetus becomes “separate and autonomous from the pregnant woman.” Any notion of the fetus’s full dependence on the woman is lost. Further, as Taylor puts it, the fetus comes to stand in for life itself, “as if this were a property magically inhering in the fetus all along, in a manner that obscures the fact that the continued vitality of any actual fetus depends utterly and completely upon its continued sustenance by the woman who carries it” (27-8). If there is any thought of the pregnant woman’s interior life, it is focused on preserving the fetus and purchasing services, commodities, and entertainment centred around the biological life she is producing, understood as totally separate from her and more important than her.

When scripture is used alongside ultrasound imaging as motivation or as marketing, more often than not Psalm 139 is cited, to the extent that the psalm has come to be especially associated with ultrasounds (Taylor 2008, 162-3, Van Biema 2012). The connection between ultrasounds and Psalm 139 (especially vv. 13-15) was popularized by prolife motivational materials, such as Christian sonographer Shari Richard’s 1990 video, “Ultrasound: A Window to the Womb.”<sup>29</sup> The video shares ultrasound images and Richard’s story of moral awakening to the humanity of fetuses, as well as her plea to others to make a moral choice.<sup>30</sup> The language is not religious, but the soundtrack is by Christian singer Sandi Patty. The song “Masterpiece” (1989) plays over the closing credits, beginning with a recitation of a version of Psalm 139. Patty’s voice mimics the imagined (cutesy) voice of a fetus: “At that very instant I was given life, I was formed in my mother’s body. My bones grew as I took form in my mother’s body. When I was put together there it wasn’t too long until my heart started to beat. I was made in an amazing and wonderful way” (Richard 1990). The original version of song (and the psalm) have been modified to describe the poet, and with him all fetuses, growing and developing a heartbeat.

By now it is common to call ultrasounds a “Window to the Womb,” for which Psalm 139 has become something of a tagline.<sup>31</sup> So for example, the

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<sup>28</sup> A recent study shows there is very little correlation between viewing an ultrasound and maintaining a pregnancy, see Gatter et al. (2014). I am grateful to Lyndsey Godwin and Jennifer Koosed for pointing me to this study.

<sup>29</sup> Notably, the video borrows the very same title of an earlier training video, produced by the University of California San Diego school of medicine (Venne et. al., 1986).

<sup>30</sup> For analyses of the video, its questionable interpretation of ultrasound images, and its impact, see Boucher (2004); Taylor (2008), 44-9.

<sup>31</sup> For antiabortion uses of Psalm 139, see Menees (2009); Aggieldand Pregnancy Outreach agency website, available online <http://pregnancyoutreach.org/scripture-references/>; Coastal Pregnancy

Southern Baptist Convention (ERLC) runs the Psalm 139 Project, which provides ultrasound machines for pregnancy crisis centers. Similarly, Judy Roberts, a correspondent for the National Catholic Register writing in 2001, calls the ultrasound “A whole new ‘window into the womb’ that *confirms* the psalmist’s words, ‘I am fearfully, wonderfully made’ [Ps. 139:14]” (emphasis mine). Technology and biology are called on to confirm scripture.

Several observations might be made about the connection between Psalm 139 and ultrasounds. First, it inverts a common, often devotional, reading of the Psalm as assurance of God’s knowledge of human interior life (e.g. Hossfeld 2011, 542, 546).<sup>32</sup> An ultrasound does not view a spiritual interior, but only *material* life that is then read back as proof of interiority. Further, it is not the woman’s spiritual interiority that is of interest, only her biological interiority. The emotional and/or spiritual life of the woman is made subordinate to biological processes, which are assumed to have interiority. To be sure, the ultrasound experience is meant to work spiritually and affectively on women to bond with and protect the fetus.<sup>33</sup> But the fetus is paramount. As Lauren Berlant puts it, “the pregnant woman becomes the child to the fetus” (1997, 88).<sup>34</sup> As in the opposition to same-sex marriage, adult emotional life is not as important as the biological production of children.

Further, we might consider the effects of pairing biological images and knowledge with scripture. The use of ultrasounds has allowed for a detailed focus on the biology of emergent life that further fetishizes the biological. Ultrasound imagery has produced a high level of Christian literacy about the stages of pregnancy. As with Focus on the Family’s “Sanctity of Human Life Guide,” discussed above, many pro-life organizations provide a week by week detailed description of development, most often with images of fetal development. Wall charts and DVDs are sold. Biological data is thus privileged in the process of making the fetal body proof of interiority and human personhood.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, scriptural education about fetal development begins early. Kansans for Life provide a lesson plan for seventh graders, suggesting that students study Psalm 139 and watch the DVD *Live from the Womb Baby Steps*. Scripture and biological

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Center website, available online <http://www.coastalpregnancycenter.org/>; Gift of Hope Women’s Health Center website, available online <http://www.ourgiftofhope.com/>; *A Life of Ministry* website, available online <http://www.lifelinecpc.org/services/ultrasound/>.

<sup>32</sup>For devotional readings that focus on God knowing believers intimately, see *Short Daily Devotions* website, available online <http://shortdailydevotions.com/psalm-13923-24-search-me/>; *Life Daily Devotional* website, available online <http://lifedailydevotional.com/bible-studies/psalms-139-a-person-of-worth/>.

<sup>33</sup>See Taylor for a discussion of the questionable “science” of ultrasound bonding (2008, 77-115). She also points out the ironies and contradictions in the way that ultrasound offers “reassurance” that a child is normal, feeding into fears that it may not be normal or viable (thus showing pregnancy to be tentative), even as it is said to create bonding with a human person (thus suggesting that pregnancy is absolute) (2008, 53, 62-9).

<sup>34</sup>Berlant goes on to argue that the fetus is “made more *national* [than the pregnant woman carrying it], more central to securing the privileges of law, paternity, and other less institutional family strategies of contemporary American culture” (1997, 88, emphasis original). With the fetus, biocapital is sutured to the nation.

<sup>35</sup>For further examples of scripture combined with fetal timelines, see California Right to Life organization website, available online <http://www.calright2life.org/fetal.htm>; *Save the Babies* (blog) homepage, available online <http://savethebabies.blogspot.com/2007/08/fetal-development.html>.

knowledge are studied together.<sup>36</sup> More striking still is the Diocese for Kansas City resource for children, “Fetal Development,”<sup>37</sup> which intersperses ultrasound timeline images—captioned by scriptural verses—with letters from the Virgin Mary to Jesus while he is still in the womb—accompanied by images of Mary. The letters are conversational, with lines like, “My Dear Son, I have just gotten back from a wonderful time with Elizabeth” (to describe the fourth month), and “My Dear Son, I can feel you moving and kicking!” (to describe the fifth month). The ultrasound images of the fetus remind children that Jesus was a fetus too (although his missing biological father is not held against him).<sup>38</sup> Biology and biological knowledge are raised to the status of scripture and incarnation.

Secular educational sites align with these interests as well. Such is the case, for the Endowment for Human Development (EHD), a seemingly secular organization that is devoted to “improving health science education and public health,” and ostensibly “committed to neutrality regarding all controversial bioethical issues.” The EHD’s home page embeds a video image of the fetus and advertises a DVD documentary titled, “The Biology of Prenatal Development.” Another tab, “Prenatal Timeline,” offers a detailed, scientific week by week summary with hyperlink images and videos for each stage.<sup>39</sup> Despite the organization’s purported neutrality, its resources are cited approvingly by many pro-life organizations. The CEO and Chair of the board Brian J. Stillwell is interviewed in a podcast of the Christian Medical and Dental Associations’ audio magazine *Christian Doctor’s Digest*, along with other pro-life personalities, such as Ginna Jessen, who has become famous in the pro-life movement for her claim to be the survivor of a saline abortion.<sup>40</sup> Further, as reported in the pro-life publication *Pregnancy Help News*, the EHD has released a Little One Pregnancy Guide App for iPad, which “offers detailed development milestones for each week of pregnancy” and “audible prenatal heart sounds ... [so that] pregnancy caregivers really can show each pregnant woman what is going on with her baby in seconds, and do so with a high degrees of scientific accuracy” (Stillwell’s words, cited in Comeaux 2015).

Thus valued, biblically enhanced ultrasound images are highly tied into consumption in the U.S. As Taylor argues, ultrasound images are themselves commoditized, in ways that feed consumer desire, such as shopping for gendered clothing or other baby items. As Taylor points out, this kind of consumerism is not alienating, as some materialist analyses might have it, but rather contributes to the “humanizing” of the fetish (2008, 116-43). Along these lines, one can find

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<sup>36</sup> Kansas for Life educational organization Grade 7 lesson plans, available online [http://kfl.org/Grade\\_7\\_Pro-life\\_Lesson\\_Plans.pdf](http://kfl.org/Grade_7_Pro-life_Lesson_Plans.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Diocese for Kansas City, “Fetal Development” teaching resource, available online [https://kcsjatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/TI2\\_Fetal-Development\\_Presentation.pdf](https://kcsjatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/TI2_Fetal-Development_Presentation.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> A similarly themed ad campaign ran in 2010 at Christmas time in Britain showing “an ultrasound picture of Unborn Jesus with the words, ‘He’s on His way: Christmas starts with Christ.’” See Unborn Word of the Day, available online <https://unbornwordoftheday.com/2010/06/12/new-ad-campaign-hes-on-his-way-christmas-starts-with-christ/>. Thanks to Caroline Blyth for pointing me to this advertisement.

<sup>39</sup> *Endowment for Human Development* website, available online [https://www.ehd.org/science\\_main.php?level=i](https://www.ehd.org/science_main.php?level=i).

<sup>40</sup> Christian Medical and Dental Association website, available online <https://cmda.org/resources/publication/christian-doctors-digest-january-2013>.

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numerous ultrasound “studios” that sell sonogram images of different stages of the pregnancy as mementos, wall decorations, or on CD and DVD as entertainment. Many of them quote Psalm 139 on their websites or on social media, signaling that they are doing double duty as a business and a conservative activist project.<sup>41</sup> By way of example, Womb’s Window, in Wilmington, North Carolina, features Psalm 139 on its webpage banner, presumably as moral approval and motivation for the services offered. Package deals include The Big Debut (\$195) with video and color prints, the Gender Reveal Party, for couples and friends to learn the sex of the child while eating cheese and crackers and having nonalcoholic beverages (\$225). They also have mobile services that bring the ultrasound to the home, for gender reveal or baby showers (\$299-\$399).<sup>42</sup> Participants can visually ingest life while eating and drinking. Independently of ultrasound centers, one can shop online for picture frames for ultrasound photos inscribed with verses from Psalm 139 (on Amazon.com or Christianbook.com). When a biblical text presumed to be about creation of life is cited, consumption takes on a sacred quality, thereby biblically assisting the fetishizing of the fetus. As Taylor puts it, “the fetus increasingly is construed as a consumer product, at the same time that it is construed more and more as a ‘person’ from the earliest stages of development” (2008, 76). Put another way, biological matter and biotechnology has been biblicalized to such an extent that its value increases and its commoditization becomes as sign of human life. This kind of detachment of the fetus from the mother, and the valuation of it, could be said to model the kind of detachments and valuations of biological material that is characteristic of biocapital, even as there is insistence on the humanity of the fetus.

Finally, intended or not, the scripturalized value on ultrasound technology and imaging prepares people for other biotechnology, such as ultrasound gene therapy and gene transfer, as well as bioinformatics and biomedica. There is of course Christian worry about the morality of these kinds of biotechnologies,<sup>43</sup> but despite such worries, the strong approval of ultrasound technology may favorably dispose people to accept it in other contexts. We might consider with cultural studies scholar Patricia Clough that the circulation of biological data in digital form pushes beyond the biological to the informational (2008, 2-3). Clough (who is certainly open to non-capitalistic theorizations of the posthuman) is aware of the dynamics that Sunder Rajan points out, that even if the primary applications are medical, the body as information can be and is sold and manipulated for marketing, especially in the pharmaceuticals industry. In Marxist terms, Clough calls this a kind of real subsumption (14),<sup>44</sup> in which productivity is increased through technology. Digitizing the biological creates openings for bodies to be invested as capital in a whole new way.

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<sup>41</sup> E.g. *Ultrasound in Motion* website, available online <http://www.ultrasoundinmotion.com/>; Woman Care medical practice website, available online <http://www.woman-care.org/>; Colbert Ob-Gyn clinic website, available online <http://www.colbert-obgyn.com/>.

<sup>42</sup> *Womb’s Window* website, available online <http://wombswindow.com/>. See also *Ultrasound in Motion website*, available online <http://www.ultrasoundinmotion.com/>.

<sup>43</sup> As for instance Ray Bohlin (2010) writes, using troubling examples: “The problem will arise when gene therapy will be sought to alleviate a condition that is less than life-threatening and perhaps considered by some to simply be one of life’s inconveniences, such as a gene that may offer resistance to AIDS or may enhance memory.”

<sup>44</sup> Clough follows Parisi (2004) on this point.

## The Re-Interiorization of Captured Life

What I have tried to show so far is the way that scriptural arguments for life and against gay marriage have, in recent years, used the language of biology in a way that both reacts to and stimulates biocapitalism. Pulled into the orbit of biocapital, conservative Christian discourse responds to and provokes its proliferation. Scriptural truth and scientific truth are made commensurate by combining biblical quotation with scientific fact, discourse, and imaging. In these rhetorics, the materiality of bodies displaces a more traditional focus on spiritual and emotional interiority. Further, the arguments for the patriarchal biological family end up hierarchizing and moralizing social life so that mostly white reproductive heterosexual couples are considered a central pillar of social stability.

By way of conclusion, I wish briefly to contrast these elements of the prolife movement with Christian teaching in and about prison. The U.S. has the highest prison population in the world, with over 2 million people in prison. In terms of biopolitics, prisons control bodies, especially the socially marginalized: black and brown people, those without great financial prospects, and those who are mentally ill. Prisons are perhaps the epitome of biocapital, as bodies are fully captive and forced to labor. As Henry Giroux puts it, “Biopolitics combines with biocapital in one of its most ruthless expressions as the carceral state increasingly runs for-profit prisons and uses inmates in prison jobs that provide profits for private contractors” (2009, 173). Given that prison labor is a form of slave labor, with prisoners typically making between \$0.25 and \$1.15/hour, their bodies are fully capitalized.

In the last 15 years, prisons in many U.S. states have encouraged privately funded faith-based groups to run programs in prison. Conservative Christians are anxious to do this work, because of Jesus’s words equating discipleship with prison visitation, “I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt. 25:36). After 2001, under the leadership of Jeb Bush in Florida and George W. Bush in Washington, the faith based prison movement grew exponentially. Michael Hallett and Byron Johnson (2014) call it a shift to a new American Penitentiary. Now prisons in many U.S. states have allowed privately funded faith-based groups to run faith-based programs; these often have separate housing units with better food and more freedom. Florida has at least four full faith-based prisons. One of the largest ministries is Chuck Colson’s Prison Fellowship, which runs the InnerChange Freedom Initiative. They currently operate in Minnesota, Texas, and Kentucky. These initiatives are attractive to states because they are largely funded by religious groups and staffed by volunteers, so they cut state costs by almost 60-75%. They also help to maintain order. In saving the state money, they lessen any motivation for states to reduce the prison population and so keep prisons going as an industry. Critics say that faith-based programs are part of a neoliberal move to privatize prisons and privatize social programs (see Royster 2012, 155; Clarkson 2014).

What makes prisons an interesting comparison point to the use of the Biobible in the family values, pro-life movement is that the focus of concern is not on the body, but on spiritual life. While this may perhaps be a result of dissimilar circumstances and uses of scripture, the difference in focus is marked. Materiality becomes subordinate to spiritual concerns. Prison ministries focus on repentance and restoration. They include substantial amounts of Bible study, accountability, and spiritual work and little of the vocational or educational programming that

would help with material (bodily) circumstances on re-entry into society. A 2011 Department of Justice sponsored study illustrates this point. The study, which surveyed 48 faith based correctional and re-entry programs, found that despite any given social goals of the programs, the top ranked outcome was “deepening personal spiritual commitment” (44% of programs), as contrasted with the more obvious social outcomes like “finding steady employment” (4.4% of programs), “improved life skills” (2.1 % of programs), or “attaining education” (0% of programs; Willison, Brazzell, Kim 2011, A-9, Table 6).

In descriptions of faith based programs by states and corporations that use them, “criminals” are described as internally flawed, lacking proper moral and ethical foundation. To give an example, Prison Fellowship’s “Biblical Basis for Reentry Ministry” webpage describes crime this way: “Crime is fundamentally a moral problem and a result of man’s rebellion against God. It is secondarily a socioeconomic problem. The solution is in the person of Jesus Christ. It begins with repentance and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is accomplished through His power to sanctify and transform individuals and the community.”<sup>45</sup> Likewise, according to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice website, describing Prison Fellowship’s InnerChange, the mission “is to create and maintain a prison environment that fosters respect for God’s law, the rights of others, and to encourage the *spiritual and moral regeneration* of offenders” (emphasis mine).<sup>46</sup> The Corrections Corporation of America (one of the two largest private prison corporations in the U.S.) say this about their faith-based programs:

Cultivating and nurturing the spirituality of inmates is a proven way to help *reawaken or develop* a moral and ethical foundation. Faith-based programs can extend hope and lead to changes in thinking patterns, thereby helping inmates serve their time in productive ways as they prepare to lead meaningful lives upon release (emphasis mine).<sup>47</sup>

There is a sense that morals and ethics are missing in incarcerated people. While the focus on Bible study, accountability, and spiritual work may be therapeutic, it clearly emphasizes personal culpability rather than systemic issues. As journalist Kay Whitlock (2014) points out, when morals and ethics are the focus of change, structural causes of crime and incarceration are left unexamined.

Remarkably then, when bodies are fully invested as captive labor, human interiority is considered to be of great importance. Perhaps this is because the work of bodily stratification is already finished; or perhaps it is because a focus on interiority perpetuates the prison industrial complex by emphasizing the failures of the incarcerated without providing the material, structural changes that would provide support for people. This contrast between family values and prison ministry is in some way reminiscent of David Chidester’s findings about the colonization of southern Africa. Chidester (1996) shows that when colonialists came to southern Africa, they considered African peoples to be without religion;

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<sup>45</sup> *Prison Fellowship* website, available online <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/training-resources/reentry-ministry/ministry-basics/biblical-basis-for-reentry-ministry/>.

<sup>46</sup> “Rehabilitation Programs,” on Texas Department of Criminal Justice website, available online [https://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/divisions/rpd/rpd\\_inner\\_change.html](https://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/divisions/rpd/rpd_inner_change.html).

<sup>47</sup> “Faith Based Programs,” on CCA website, available online <http://www.cca.com/inmate-services/inmate-reentry-preparation/faith-based-programs>.

but as colonial control increased, so did the perceived religiosity of the colonized. While the contemporary situation is not exactly parallel, it is notable in these examples I have been outlining that when bodies are not yet fully invested as capital, interiority and spiritual life are less important than the materiality of bodies; but when bodies become a full conduit for capital, as in prisons, interiority becomes a site of discipline.

Outside of prisons, the Biobible is hard at work investing biological life by controlling and protecting its creation (through marriage and reproduction). Interior life is either unimportant, or provisionally important, pressed into the biological future of the Child. While there is a radicalism in this approach, the racialized and homophobic ways in which it plays out alert us to the real violences, which are hardly new at all. It is, after all, a conservative form of radicalism.

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