



St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality (Selections from the Fathers of the Church)

Elizabeth Clark

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Augustine of Hippo (b. A.D. 354) is considered the single most influential theologian in the history of the Church in the West. Among his many contributions, Augustine developed a sexual ethic that became decisive for all later teachings in the Christian West on issues of marriage, reproduction, and sexuality. Some of the most significant and representative passages on marriage and sexuality from his works are presented here. They recount Augustine's own struggle with sexuality, and stress the important role it played in his conversion to Christianity as well as its influence on his theological principles later in life.

The passages in this collection are divided into four chapters which document the chronological development of Augustine's sexual ethic. The first chapter includes passages that pertain to Augustine's own life and illustrate some of his positive and negative models of marital relation. The second chapter recounts Augustine's responses to the Manichean teachings on the body, reproduction, and marriage, mostly from his early years as a Christian. The third chapter contains passages marking Augustine's reaction to the ascetic debates within late fourth-century Latin Christianity. And, finally, the fourth chapter illustrates Augustine's mature sexual and marital ethic, which he elaborated in the midst of—and in reaction to—arguments with Pelagian writers.

In a separate introduction, Elizabeth Clark sets the development of Augustine's thought within the context of his own intellectual biography and views it against the background of related issues and movements in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, such as Manichaeism, Jovinianism, and Pelagianism. The selections she presents here offer a comprehensive and uncommonly well-balanced picture of Augustine and his work.

St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality is the first in a projected series of volumes on various themes found in the writings of the church fathers.

ABOUT THE EDITOR:

Elizabeth Clark is John Carlisle Kilgo Professor of Religion at Duke University. She is a past president of the American Academy of Religion and the North American Patristic Society, and a member of the editorial board of the Fathers of the Church series.

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