

Angel's Redemption in Francine Rivers' *Redeeming Love*

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the main female character, Angel's, redemption in the Christian Romance novel, *Redeeming Love*. This article will discuss Angel's perception of her body before her marriage and how that perception changes after her marriage to Michael. To analyze Angel's concept of her body, I will use biblical verses in the books of Genesis, Corinthian, John, and Luke. I find that Angel regards her body as an empty vessel before her marriage to Michael. By finding Angel's perspective of her body before her marriage, I found that Angel uses her body and soul separation as a strategy to deal with her pain. Once she is married, Angel regards her body as the temple of God and uses her knowledge of her body as the temple of God to help others like her receive God. At last, I can conclude that the Christian romance genre can be used as tool to spread the Christian perspective about the body.

Key words: Redemption, Guilt, Christian Romance, Temple of God, Empty Vessel

Christian Romance is the subgenre of *Redeeming Love*, by Francine Rivers. Even though Christian Romance is not as popular as Harlequin Romance, but it is a very effective media to teach about the Christian values such as the Christian belief that no matter what horrible things a human did in the past, the future will get better with time and second chances will come, along with other things such as purity and forgiveness such as what is portrayed as the major issue in most of Francine Rivers' published works.

This particular novel, *Redeeming Love*, tells a story about a young girl, Sarah, who is the illegitimate daughter of a businessman and his mistress who raised Sarah as a single parent. After the death of her mother, Sarah found herself in the hands of a wealthy pedophile, Duke. She was immediately given a new name in accordance to her appearance, Angel. After years of living with the pedophile, she finally managed to escape to the ports of San Francisco; as she arrives with no jobs or shelter, she is to accept that there is nothing else she could do to get money or shelter except by being a prostitute until Michael Hosea, a farmer, who loves her, buys her out and marry her. During her time being a prostitute, Angel suffers from guilt because of her inability to escape her life in which she has to "sell" her body and after her marriage to Michael who is described as pure, she also suffers because she is not pure. Thus I will analyze Angel's perception towards her body before she was married and how her perception of her own body is changed after her marriage to Michael.

To analyze Angel's perception of her body before her marriage, I will use the verse from the book of Corinthian to emphasize the four points of sexual immorality.

The Body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, . . . Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? . . . Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." . . . Flee from sexual immorality . . . Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit . . . (1 Corinthian 6: 13-20 New International Version).

I will use verses from the Holy Bible to analyze Angel's perception of her body after her marriage to Michael. The verse I will use to analyze Angel's perspective of her body after her marriage is derived from the book of John concerning a Samaritan woman who drew water for Jesus to point out that a sinful woman came to Jesus and is accepted by Him and what similarities Angels' ministry has with the women in the bible.

ANGEL'S PERCEPTION OF HER BODY AS AN EMPTY VESSEL

The concept of the body in the Christian belief is that a human being is beautiful in every way because every human being is created according to the image of the Lord God himself as it was said in the Holy Bible. Thus it is crucial for humans to keep their body clean, holy, and pure just as it was intended to be by God during creation. This concept of the creation in Christian perspective includes the concept of the body as believed by Angel in *Redeeming Love*. I will focus on Angel's perception of her body as an empty vessel

The Separation of Angel's Body and Soul

Being a lonely, desperate woman with no real survival skills and ample amount of hunger for basic human needs in this world, Angel is completely helpless and incapable to change her condition. Her helplessness and hatred of her condition can be seen in the quotation below:

Angel hated her life . . . She hated her own wretched helplessness. Most of all she hated the men for their relentless quest for pleasure. She gave them her body but not a particle more. Maybe there wasn't anymore. She didn't know. And that didn't seem to matter to any of the men. All they saw was her beauty, a flawless veil wrapped around a frozen heart, and they were enthralled. They looked into her angel eyes and were lost (Rivers, 1997).

Angel suffers that she has to give her body to please the men who use money to buy pleasure from her body. Aside from her body to sell, Angel feels that she has nothing left, no feeling, no emotion, and no soul. This clearly shows that Angel separates her body from her soul, so that she does not feel any remorse when she has to sleep with men, that she builds a gap between her soul and her body so that she is able to survive through the night and conceal any kind of feelings she might have deep within.

The only thing that ever comes close to her actually feeling any emotion at all is her hatred towards men, her weariness of life, and her fear of death, which can be seen in this quote:

What did it matter? She had nothing left. She didn't care. An even stronger force than the hatred that feasted on her was the weariness that sucked her soul dry. At eighteen she was tired of living and resigned to the fact that nothing would ever change. She wondered why she had even been born. For this, she supposed. Take it or leave it. God's truth. And the only way to leave it was to kill herself. Every time she faced that fact, every time she had the chance, her courage failed (Rivers, 1997).

This quotation clearly shows Angel has got to the point of her life where she questions the purpose of her existence in the world as a result of experiencing her walk of life. She considers herself as an empty soulless being, who lives with neither hope, nor feelings. Merely an empty shell, an empty container, a human body contaminated with the filth of weariness, sin, lust, and hatred of men. Angel's thought of her whole life purpose is to be a life size toy for a man to play with for half an hour in bed. She sees herself as a woman without a way out, the will to live, or even hope. Her only hope is death or escape alone and as stated in the quote above, even death is merely a dream.

Angel's Separation Strategy to Survive

Angel's use of the body and soul separation strategy can be seen in her attempt to use alcoholic beverages as a way out to lose herself, just as she saw her friend and fellow prostitute, .

Lucky was full of laughter and fun when she was drunk, which was most of the time. The woman could lose herself in a bottle of whiskey.

Angel had tried drinking with her once to see if she could lose herself, too. Lucky poured and she tried to keep up. Before long, her head swam and her stomach lurched. . . . She [Lucky] said some people could hold their whiskey and some couldn't, and she guessed Angel was one who couldn't (Rivers, 1997).

Lucky is drinking to get herself able to be what Angel sees to be "full of laughter and fun" (Rivers, 1997).

In the meantime Angel's needs to be able to live without pain, guilt, and sinful feelings leads her to see that this successful strategy that Lucky is using could probably work for her. However, Angel's effort of losing herself failed miserably because her body could not handle the amount of alcohol intake she was forcing into herself the way Lucky's body is able to take whiskey. This also

means that Angel is in desperate need of another way to make herself able to keep living the way she does in the brothel without feeling any type of emotion.

Another confirmation that Angel is actually using the body and soul separation as a strategy to survive comes when she met Michael, a new guest at the brothel, for the first time and he was asking for the reason why the people at the brothel called her Angel.

Her lack of subtlety put him on firmer ground. “Why the name Angel? Because of how you look? Or is that your real name?” Her mouth tightened slightly. The only thing she had left was her name, and she had never told anyone what it was, not even Duke. The only person who had ever called her by her name was Mama. And Mama was dead. “Call me whatever you want, mister. It doesn’t matter.” Just because he didn’t want what he paid for, that didn’t mean she was going to give him anything else (Rivers,1997).

From the way Angel answers the question, she is preserving what she thought to be the only thing left in her normal life, her name, to herself. Angel thinks that since her name is the only thing that is left from her normal life, it would mean that she needs to keep it to herself because the only person who calls her by that name is her beloved mother who has pass away and to keep the memory of her mother alive within her. The fact that Angel says it does not matter what Michael calls her and that he can call her anything he wishes proves that Angel is already numb and she does not care about what people say or thinks about her. She believes that as long as she is doing her job, she would not have any trouble and she would be able to keep what is left of her inside and not give it to anyone else because she thinks that it is the only thing that she is able to keep as the remainder of her own true self.

The next affirmation on how Angel uses the body and soul separation strategy is when Michael ask her about what she wants from her life and questions Angel about the chance to change her current situation.

“You’re telling me this is they life you want?”. . . “This is my life.” “It doesn’t have to be. If you had a choice, what would you want?” “From you? Nothing.” “From Living.” A bleakness settled inside her. Living? What was he talking about? She felt battered by his questions and defended herself with an aloof, cool smile. . . . “I have everything I need right here.” “You’ve got a roof, food, and fine clothes.” “And work,” she said tightly. “Oh don’t you forget my work. I’m real good at it.” “You hate it.”. . . she closed her eyes and fought for control. What was wrong with her this evening? What was it about this man that got to her? She preferred numbness to this stirring of emotion. Hope was torment; Hope was an enemy. And this man was a thorn inside her (Rivers, 1997).

Michael’s question triggers some feelings that Angel is trying hard to forget. She is in danger of having to face all the feelings that she has to face. And when Angel is able to feel again, then it would be resulting in her suffering a whole lot of pain and guilt than she does right now, and she is unsure of the thought if she would be able to take the pain or not.

Angel’s Guilty Feelings

As a girl who is brought up by a religious mother, Angel should feel guilty as this kind of work is considered to be sinful as seen in the Holy Bible teachings of sexual immorality in the book of Corinthians below:

The Body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. . . . Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”. . . Flee from sexual immorality Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit . . . (1 Corinthian 6: 13-20 New International Version).

From the verse above, there are four points that regulates sexual relations in the Christian point of view. The first point is the fact that the human body is not meant for sexual immorality. Angel clearly disobeyed and violated the first point in the law of sexual immorality since the young age of eight when she was taken and forced to serve herself as if she was a piece of meat in the child prostitution market. Although sexual immorality is forced on her, her body is no longer pure and holy; in Angel’s perspective her body is no longer able to delight the Lord because it is seen as dirty, unholy, and contaminated. The second point is that the human bodies are members of Christ

Himself. If Angel wants to stay pure and holy, then she is expected to stay united with the Lord in spirit. Angel herself is unholy in sight of Christ the Lord, even if she was brought up in a Christian teaching, she could no longer be united with the Lord because the sin of adultery she has committed as a prostitute. This means that Angel's entire collection of customers or the male that has committed an immoral sexual relation with her has been consigned to the world of ungodliness, impurities, and sins because of how they treated their bodies as the members of Christ's body. The third point dictates that the human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. This means that Angel's body is supposed to be a filled space containing her soul, emotion, and the Holy Spirit. In Angel's case, as a child she was raised by a Christian mother, and she is very much qualified to be considered as pure and holy because she was thought the right teachings and values. However as she gets older and uses her looks as a commodity, her body is not filled by the Holy Spirit any longer, instead, her body is a container filled with contaminations such impurities, immoralities, unhappiness, and sins. The last point is the command to flee from sexual immorality. The Holy Bible states that the only solution is that they should leave and get rid of the conduct which makes them sinful and Angel is a violator of this rule for staying in the brothel. Despite her desire to keep her body as a temple of God, Angel's body is no longer a "Temple of God" (1 Corinthians 6: 20 New International Version). Angel feels she has lost what is required to be the temple of God, she feels unworthy that she could not be a holy temple of God.

ANGEL'S PERCEPTION OF HER BODY AS THE TEMPLE OF GOD

The concept of the body in the Christian belief is that the human bodies are the location where God dwells on earth as it was said in the Holy Bible in the book of Corinthian chapter six as it is "the temple of God" (1 Corinthians 6: 20 New International Version). Humans should see their body as the pure and holy place where God dwells on earth. This concept of the human body as the temple of God by the Christian perspective is the concept used by Angel in viewing her body after her marriage to Michael.

The Unification of Angel's Body and Soul

Although Angel is determined to consider her body as an empty vessel, as discussed, her determination to leave the brothel gives an indication that she is no longer able to regard her body merely as an empty vessel.

Pain exploded in Angel's head, and she groaned. . . . One of them spoke to her. "I want to marry you before we leave together." . . . Someone took her hand. . . . "Just say yes." She would agree to wed Satan himself if it would get her out of the Palace. "Why not" she managed. . . . Angel wanted to ask who she had married, but what did it matter? The pain gradually receded. She was so tired. Maybe she would die after all. It would all be over then (Rivers, 1997).

The fact that Angel would agree to marry Satan himself indicates her intense desire to leave the life of the brothel. Angel only sees two ways out of the brothel: to marry or to die. This desperation shows that Angel no longer able to regards her body as a mere vessel.

Despite her regarding her marriage as a way out of the brothel, she still sees herself to be unworthy when she compares her tainted self to Michael's purity. Paul, Michael's brother-in-law who knows about her past, also shares her worthlessness over herself. This comparison shows when Angel was introduced to Paul for the first time.

"Paul, I'd like you to meet my wife, Amanda." . . . "Sorry to gape at you, ma'am. Michael said you were beautiful." . . . What was Michael doing married to a woman like this one? Did he know she was a prostitute? He couldn't. . . . He had never had a woman. . . . look what he got for all his purity. *Angel!* What story had the witch concocted? . . . She knew he recognize her, and she was letting him know that she didn't care. And if she didn't care, then it was clear she hadn't married Michael for love. He smiled back. Colder than she (Rivers, 1997).

Michael is an exact description of a man who keeps God's word about his body, but Angel on the other hand is described as the beautiful devil such as those Delilah, Jezebel, and Salome. Even though the communication happens without words, Angel senses Paul's accusation of her as the she-devil who snares on the innocent Michael. This passage also shows her effort to pretend that

she does not care about what Paul thinks of her; her pretense of not caring shows that Angel feels worthless because of her failure in keeping her body as the temple of God.

Paul's negative opinion of her, emphasizes her feeling of unworthiness because she is truly the exact description of the devil when she is compared to Michael. Other examples of how Angel sees herself as unworthy can be seen during her argument with Michael.

"I don't belong here, and you know it." . . . "Look, mister, if you knew even half of what I've done, you'd have me headed back for Pair-a-dice so fast-". . . Angel withered at the thought. She had opened a Pandora's box and couldn't get it closed again. The horrible, grotesque memories rose from the dead. . . Some unknown and unwelcome emotion opened deep inside Angel. Something hard and tight began to soften and uncurl (Rivers, 1997).

Angel's worthlessness shows her thought that she does not belong in Michael's house. Angel still sees herself as a tainted woman who is unworthy for Michael. Angel is afraid that by talking about it, she will open the memories of old wounds she wants to forget. Angel can feel there is something new blooming inside her; something she is not sure of and does not understand which brings fear and makes her to think that it is much better to not feel the way she does. This leads her to her decision to run away from Michael, as she thinks of him as the source of all her new unknown and unwelcomed feelings. This shows that Angel no longer separates her body and her soul, because when she feels unworthy, it would mean that she feels guilty, sinful, and tainted.

The fact that she cannot even do a simple household chore and that she depends on Michael for everything adds to her feelings of unworthiness. By failing to make her own meal, Angel automatically depends on others to make her meals for her.

"it was only a pot of stew, Mara." . . . "How did a saint like you pick me? Are you testing your faith? Is that it?" . . . She wanted to run away but couldn't. Every step hurt. . . she hurt all over; but the physical pain was nothing to her own self-disgust and humiliation. She was stupid! She didn't know anything! How was she going to manage on her own if she couldn't cook a simple meal? . . . *You're going to learn.* "Oh, no, I'm not! I'm not asking for *hishelp*. I'm not going to owe him anything." She clenched her burned hand into a fist. "I didn't ask him to come back. I didn't ask for any of this!" She went down to the creek to soak her hand and nurse her grievances (Rivers, 1997).

Angel learns she is unable to survive without Michael and she attempts to run away. However, Angel's self-built wall that separates her feelings and her body slowly begins to crumble, which makes every step that she takes to escape from Michael feels painful because she no longer sees herself as empty, and she can no longer numb her heart. By saying she does not want to owe him anything means that she does not wish to be grateful to Michael for giving her a new life, the life of freedom she has been longing for. Angel has come to realize that her emotions or feeling is actually united once again by the appearance of denial; otherwise, without the unification of her feelings and her body, she would not have to deny anything or nurse her grievances by the creek. The denial in her life proves that Angel's perception of her body is changing from the way she sees herself as an empty vessel into a human being with feelings.

Despite her belief in her unworthiness, Angel now believes her body to be the temple of God that she should preserve her purity. She feels disgusted with herself when she has to trade her body for a ride to California with Paul, which means that she has tainted the sacredness of God's temple.

"Didn't take you long to fall back into old ways, did it?" . . . Angel could feel the shaking start. She tied her camisole and buttoned up her shirtwaist, shoving it into the skirt. The trembling became worse. She went into the trees where Paul couldn't see her and dropped to her knees. Clammy sweat broke out on her forehead. She felt cold all over. Closing her eyes, she fought nausea. . . . *Pretend it didn't happen.* Her fingers dug painfully into the tree bark, and she vomited. The coldness passed, and the shaking stopped as she stood up (Rivers, 1997).

Before she marries Michael, Angel is able to have intercourse with any man who pays and not feel sinful. After she marries Michael, Angel could no longer commit the act of sexual immorality with her husband's brother-in-law without feeling nauseated. Angel no longer sees herself as an empty vessel, but as a pure human being. By vomiting, Angel is letting out the feeling of guilt from

cheating on Michael, so she would be able to calm down. This also shows the difference between what Angel persuades herself to be true and what she truly believes in. Angel persuades herself that she will be fine after she committed the act of adultery and sexual immorality with Paul, while deep inside, she believes that as a married woman, she should keep her purity and sacredness of God's holy temple.

Angel's Redemption

The real turning point of her life occurs when she is led to redemption by the Axles, a devout Christian family she stays with while she is away from Michael.

"Do you believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of the living God?" the pastor asked her. "I believe," she said with grave dignity and closed her eyes briefly. . . . "And do you give yourself to Jesus now before these witnesses? If so, would you signify by saying *I do*? . . . "Angel?" the pastor said . . . "I do," she responded, smiling radiantly. "I most assuredly do." He laughed. Turning her towards the congregation, he said, "This is Angel. A new sister in Christ. Welcome her." (Rivers, 1997).

Angel has made it official that she wholeheartedly flees from the chain of all her sins such as her anger, fears, hatred, and the sins of sexual immorality. Here, Angel welcomes what can be said as the new beginning in her life, where she wants herself to be pure, holy, and sacred temple of God; which parallels with the forgiveness she has received from God.

"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you have to say?" . . . "if any one of you is without sin, let him be the first one to throw a stone at her." . . . Jesus straighten up and asked her, "Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir" she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8: 3-10).

Jesus does not condemn the woman in the passage; therefore as a former prostitute, Angel has received the same freedom from condemnation as the woman in the verse. Angel is now free to live her life as a pure and holy being in the sight of both God and man because she has been sanctified by her acceptance of Jesus as her savior.

The altar call experience shows Angel would not be able to go back to her old life, and her chance of life comes when she finally realizes what God wants to do with her life, which is help others like her to flee from sexual immorality.

She reached out quickly and stopped Torie. "Have lunch with me," she said. . . . "Me?" Torie was as surprised as Angel. "Yes, you!" Angel said, smiling. She felt as though she would burst with ideas expanding inside her. She knew! She knew what God wanted her to do. She knew exactly what He wanted (Rivers, 1997).

By helping Torie, a fellow prostitute, Angel has done what God wants for her, and therefore Angel is able to walk down the path of righteousness and lead others like her to God. By helping Torie, Angel completes her act of redemption. Angel is able to experience the redeeming love of God; she understands how it feels to be in Torie's shoes and how she can help Torie. Angel's way of serving God by helping Torie escape from sexual immorality parallels with the way the Samaritan woman in the book of John, serves Jesus when He asked for a drink of water from the well.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" . . . He told her, "Go call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." (John 4: 7-17 New International Version).

From these verses it shows that although Angel, just as the Samaritan woman, spent a great deal of time committing sin, it does not affect the fact that they can be forgiven; which enables the two of them to serve Jesus.

The fact that Angel has successfully been able to help Torie and others like her shows that the impurities have been erased by her acceptance of God's forgiveness. By being able to help others, Angel is able to forgive herself and she is able to go back to Michael because she finally feels that by God's redeeming love she is an equal of Michael.

she had gifts to offer him now. She had stood firm against Duke. She had walked the road Michael had taught her. Because of it, people had trusted her and backed her in building the House of Magdalena. She was doing good with her life, and it was all because of him, because of what she had seen in him (Rivers, 1997).

After her long and painful journey of suffering, Angel finally sees herself and her body as the pure, holy, and sacred temple of God. Angel no longer sees her body as an empty container to be used by men for half an hour in exchange for a sack of gold nor does she feel that she is unworthy of Michael because now she sees herself as a pure, holy, and sacred temple of God capable of making the right decisions because of God's love which is portrayed in Michael's unfailing love.

CONCLUSION

The Christian romance genre is frequently chosen to be the object of light reading by the general readers because it contains entertaining content and it can be read by everyone. On the contrary the Holy Bible, is considered as a sacred book filled with commandments on how humans should live their lives. Therefore, it is not often seen as the object of light reading like the Christian romance genre. However, by inserting the Christian teachings or bible verses into the romance genre, a popular fiction is able to be used as a tool to spread Christian teachings to a wider market. Therefore, the strong teachings of the Holy Bible can be received and consumed by the general readers.

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