

Authority, Obedience and Hierarchy in Christ: Christian Marriage and Postmodern Challenges

Bassam NASSIF

*Assistant Prof. PhD, DMin
St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology
University of Balamand, LEBANON*

Abstract:

The state of family dysfunction has produced various complications in understanding and experiencing love, freedom in spousal relationships. Gender roles of husband and wife have been, to a large degree, transformed. Human weakness and various inherited social traditions, customs, and norms biased the role of men and women in society and prevented the full enactment of the Christian doctrine concerning hierarchy in the family. In fact, the social objectification of women and the utilitarian view on sex had obstructed the success of the equal rights movement, and further weakened the man-woman relationship, especially in the marital context. However, marital life in Christianity is a negation of individualism, and a longing for a life of fellowship in a Christian spirit of complementarity. Moreover, equality without sincere, self-sacrificial love is devoid of its essence. This paper examines postmodern voices about hierarchy, headship, obedience, and submission, leading to a happier marriage. In return, it attempts to present ancient and contemporary Patristic approaches to these marital roles, showing that these approaches are divinely inspired for all times and cultures, and experienced as a mystery in Christ. If properly practiced, these approaches lead, to what postmodern voices initially aspire, that is to a blessed, joyful, and prosperous marital life.

Keywords: *postmodernism, Orthodox Church, equality, obedience, submission, hierarchy, marriage, St. John Chrysostom*

*“Obedience is good, but (only) if it is done for God's sake”
(Chadwick 1958: 155) (Saying of the Fathers).*

*“Equality of honor does many times lead to fighting”
(St. John Chrysostom 1991a: 511; PG 60: 615C).*

*“Hierarchy within can alone preserve egalitarianism without”
(Lewis 1986: 20).*

Introduction

Contemporary political and economic developments in society have yielded major social and cultural changes, leading to an increasing chaotic state found in households. The state of family dysfunction has produced various complications in understanding and experiencing love, freedom in spousal relationships and gender roles. The serious attempt to abolish the perceived oppression of the “traditional” hierarchical structure and to affirm gender equality in marriage has become a popular social and religious trend. Thus, the hierarchical roles of husband and wife have been, to a large degree, reconsidered and redefined, as a spirit of individualism became pervasive (Coontz 1992: 77-96).

In fact, human weakness and various inherited social traditions, customs, and norms biased the role of women in society and prevented the full enactment of the Christian doctrine concerning the role of woman. Further, the social objectification of women and the utilitarian view on sex had obstructed the success of the equal rights movement, and further weakened the man-woman relationship, especially in the marital context. Ideas offered up by Hollywood for popular consumption, portraying marital love in terms of bodily appetites failed to inspire. Seeing the contemporary moral failures within the institution of the family in postmodernity, there are serious doubts today about the actual success of this movement in creating meaningful human relationships and happier marriages.

Originally, marital life in Christianity is a negation of individualism, and a longing for a life of fellowship in a communal spirit. Moreover, equality without sincere, self-sacrificial love is devoid of its essence. Are the words of St. Paul (1 Cor. 11: 3-12; Eph. 5: 22-33; Col. 3: 18-19), as well as St. Peter (1 Pet. 3: 1), about marital hierarchy, headship, and submission culturally conditioned, or divinely inspired for all times and cultures? Do these scriptural counsels appropriate this postmodern trend of marital equality, leading to a blessed and prosperous marital life, experienced as a mystery in Christ?

Postmodern Voices on Feminism and Equality

Inspired by ideas from the Enlightenment, and from the French Revolution and its secular motto, “liberty, equality, fraternity,” a feminist movement sparked women’s inclination to unlimited freedom and self-independence, whether from their husbands as married wives, or from their parents as daughters. The call to equal rights in gender has intensified, since the inception of the Suffragette movement and its demand for women’s right to vote. This liberation movement has reinforced the individualistic tendencies in society, making the self as the authority and reference for all definitions of goodness, truth, equality, and justice. Even marriage has been looked upon as a place for one’s selfish fulfillment of individual happiness. As families became smaller in number, more women started working in the wage economy. The calls for social equality between spouses resulted in more education for both spouses, “less control of extended family over the conjugal couple,” higher rates of divorce, premarital childbirth, and cohabitation (Browning 2003: 8). These circumstances gradually have opened the door for the rise of free love, sexual revolution, and “radical feminism.” This contemporary state of the family has been described as a “post-familial family” era? (Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 9, 85).

In the name of human rights, equality became a primary gender motto. However, the equal right for both men and women to education and employment has incited gender conflict and amplified instinctive autonomy. Most relational issues turned legalistic, that is based on private rights and devoid of any ethical implications of love and concern for the other individual (Delikostantis 1995: 35). Today’s legal and human rights concepts focus on gender justice and egalitarianism. An extreme example is the work of Judith Butler, a feminist sociologist influenced by French postmodern theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva. Butler’s *Gender Trouble* critically challenges the notion of gender difference based on biologically assigned sex or sexuality. In a famous interview, Butler dared to claim that, “gender is an impersonation, that becoming gendered involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits...” (Butler 1992: 85). She calls for the elimination of linguistic terms, which socially construct the reality of gender, such as father and mother, husband and wife, etc. Butler’s words are but a reflection of the social development in the understanding of gender [The Canadian

government announced in 2018 the official use of “a gender-neutral language or gender-inclusive language,” which means the elimination of the use of mother and father appellations.] (See Freiburger 2018).

There is a popular trend that some consider to be the newest anthropological “heresy” related to the human body. It views the physical and psychological distinction between the male and the female as incidental and irrelevant to one’s existence, since gender is just a social construct. Thus, the pressing social inclination today is to consider that the body shape has no relevance to gender identity, and to view gender roles as “pansexual” instead of “complementary.” Unisexism (which is inclusive of what is also known as the “transgender movement” and the experimentation with gender reassignment as a medical/surgical “therapy” for “gender dysphoria”) creates “great confusion about what it means to be human... with the result that men and women, and boys and girls are considered to be not simply equal in nature, dignity and honour, but also essentially interchangeable” (Ford 1989: 12).

In modern Western studies, headship is compared to socio-political rule or power, which includes use of force to implement submission to authority, sometimes called the suppression of freedom related to *kratos* (κράτος) or power. It is rather an abuse and an intentional misuse of authority. These understand hierarchy as based on a subverted order, a loss of centralized control, a fragmentation due to inequality (Butler 1990: 3-44). The latter is a Marxist conflict theory, whereby a mediation or conflict occurs between one who is in the higher social status and one who is in the lower status, a kind of Hegelian binary. Thus, in order to eliminate hierarchical oppression and abuse, social thinkers have attempted to eliminate or simplify gender, male-female, differences, while overlooking the known anatomical and procreative gender complementarity.

Furthermore, modern society has reconceived *kephale* (κεφαλή) or headship with *kratos* (κράτος) or *might*. On another level of analysis, Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, thought of political power as a relation, not a thing. It is a hierarchical structure and a discursive method whose purpose is to control the other. Derrida clearly understands this power as *kratos*, as he says:

Whether as *eleutheria* or *exousia*, this freedom can of course always be understood as a mere figure, as another figure, turn, or rum of phrase for power (*kratos*). Freedom is essentially the faculty or power to do as one pleases, to decide, to

choose, to determine oneself, to have self-determination, to be master (Derrida 2005: 22).

People take offense at the request to obey, to fear, to submit and to sacrifice for the other. Headship is seen as a pressing superiority, and obedience as an underminable inferiority.

Headship and Obedience in Christianity

The Orthodox Church's perspective on marriage is foreign to today's postmodern demands for individual happiness and legalistic concepts of justice and egalitarianism. St. John Chrysostom's timely writings express the Orthodox ecclesial views. Chrysostom emphasizes that Eve's creation from Adam's rib signifies an existential relationship and a shared nature, implies the equality of man and woman, and reveals male and female are both the human norm (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 43-44; PG 62: 135). Adam sees Eve as "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh" (Gen. 2: 23, Eph. 5: 30), that she is ontologically one with him. Adam and Eve were so close that they were seen as "one," so God appeared in Paradise speaking to the two as if he spoke to one (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 43-44; PG 62: 135). St. Porphyrios speaks of Genesis 2: 23 as expressing this great mystery of unity in God: "This is the greatest mystery of our Church: that we all become one in God... This is the Church. This is the Orthodox faith. This is Paradise" (Kafsokalyvitis 2005: 180).

St. Paul calls for the obedience (*ὕπακοή*) of women to their husband. The exegesis of Chrysostom clarifies that in Christ there is a new approach to this obedience. It is not a subjection (in terms of subordination or submission) of woman to man. For St. Paul, headship and submission have as a model Christ's obedience to His Father, and Christ's submission of His will to the Godhead. For this reason, the Apostle calls for both husband and wife, as spirit-filled believers, to acquire the mind of Christ (Phil. 2: 5-8, 1 Cor. 2: 15-16).

Such an obedience is far from the model of a military setting or a passive submission to higher authority. It requires cooperation and synergy. This cooperation begins in voluntary honing the listening skills of both husband and wife, since it takes self-denial to truly listen to others. Obedience is sacrifice, and it involves the acts of believing in the Divine promises, waiting upon God, and loving as Christ loved us. It always

appeals to human freedom and affirms human dignity, far from any malicious act of manipulation and coercion. This kind of obedience brings into a household an atmosphere of peace and joy. Thus, obedience shows both faith and love when it is lived out, whether in the home or before God.

In his exegesis of the passage on the Fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3: 1-20), Chrysostom describes the consequences of woman being created equal to man, the woman's betrayal of this equality and her breaking of this communion by deciding unilaterally. He blames Eve for the original transgression because she first heeded the words of the deceiver, took the initiative and fell into individualism and pride, "puffed up as she was with the hope of being equal to God and evidently dreaming of greatness" (St. John Chrysostom 2010: 213; PG 53: 127). Eve, in "choosing" to converse with and listen to the evil one, turned her cooperation as *synergos* into submission to a master (St. John Chrysostom 2010: 240-241; PG 53: 147). For this reason, according to Chrysostom, man's headship after the Fall is a *diakonia*, and man is looked upon as a servant-head, who sacrificially instructs and protects the woman against harmful actions leading to her loss. In other words, man acquires this leadership role by being a role model of servanthood, teaching, and communication. Thus, he calls the husband to "Instruct [ῥόθμιζε]" his wife, and the "whole household will be well-disciplined" (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 57; PG 62: 143A). It is this kind of rhythm that is desired in life, a Divine rhythm or mode of existence. This rhythm of prayer and work leads to a healthy lifestyle. Although rhythm involves a certain routine, it directs one's life into a wholesome kind of living; it is a peaceful rhythm in a frantic social environment. Putting time to "holy use" leads family members to spiritual growth and fills the family with a refreshing spiritual atmosphere of Divine love.

In fact, the headship of man is deduced by St. Paul from the act of creation, whereby Adam is created first, then Eve (1 Tim. 2: 11-15). Commenting on Col. 3: 18-19, and especially on the words "as is fitting to the Lord" (Col. 3: 18), Chrysostom says that the submission of woman lies within the larger context of mutual submission to God in freedom. It is done for God's sake, for the peace of Christ (Col. 3: 15) to rule in one's heart.

Educationally, there is a need for the headship and submission for the raising the children and for the daily running of the family affairs. He explains: "[W]hen harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the

household is kept in order, and neighbors, friends and relatives praise the result” (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 44; PG 62: 136).

Moreover, what does this submission (ὑποταγή) entail? Does this submission give social or religious license for man’s utilitarian benefits as has been culturally incited, and for a man to reprimand and subdue his wife by exercising coercion? To illustrate, Chrysostom, commenting on 1 Cor. 11: 3, gave an important clarification of the Pauline analogy between the headship of God and that of man, as follows:

For had Paul meant to speak of rule and subjection, as you say, he would not have brought forward the instance of a wife, but rather of a slave and a master. For what if the wife be under subjection to us? It is as a wife, as free, as equal in honor. And the Son also, though He did become obedient to the Father, it was as the Son of God, it was as God (St. John Chrysostom 1991c: 150; PG 61: 214B).

First of all, Chrysostom clarifies that the wife submits to or fears her husband as a free human being, equal in honor to him (ὁμοτιμία), and in a relationship of love to him. The same applies to her husband. This mutuality is a mutuality of love and sacrifice, and not a legal one based on rights and obligations. Also, this mutual relationship is based on being co-heirs (συγκληρονόμοι) of God’s grace.

How difficult it is to have harmony when husband and wife are not bound together by the power of love! Fear is no substitute for this. That is why he speaks at greater length about the stronger force. So, if you think that the wife is the loser because she is told to fear her husband, remember that the principal duty of love is assigned to the husband, and you will see that it is her gain (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 54; PG 62: 141).

In this sense, he explains the verse “let the wife see that she respects [fears] (φοβῆται) her husband” (Eph. 5: 33). Fear (ὁ φόβος) is a psychological state, which has various dimensions depending on circumstances: terrifying fear or anxiety from death, poverty, shame, punishment, illness, or any danger against one’s life. When this fear is centered on guilt as a consequence of sinfulness, one is taken by the fear of divine punishment. Rather, it is a fear not to love enough, not to care enough for the other, and not cherish enough the other, in imitation of Christ. As for the fear that derives from hatefulness as from a slave to his master, or the fear of hell, it is accursed and carries enmity.

Accordingly, when St. John the Theologian exclaims, “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4: 18), he makes a connection between this fear and

love (*agape*). It is a connection of caring, and St. Nektarios makes the analogy with the mother's fear to disturb her sleeping infant after putting him in his bed (St. Nektarios 1902: 19). So, it is a fear that secures the bond of married life. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9: 10). Quoting from St. Basil the Great, St. Nektarios equates fear and love, and also fear and respect. The Wonderworking Saint concludes that one of the causes of divorce is the lack of this kind of sacred fear (St. Nektarios 1902: 19).

Chrysostom asserts that although the woman is called to fear her husband, the latter being a slave to Christ, is ordered to suffer for his wife even all his life and will have to give an account to His Master. The head has a responsibility that will be asked about in the day of judgement. Also, if the man wants his wife to be obedient, he needs to "be responsible for the same providential care of her, as Christ is for the Church" (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 46; PG 62: 136). The issue of taking responsibility of one's behavior is essential in the thought of Chrysostom.

In the context of marriage and marital love, Chrysostom asserts that submission is fitting for servants, whose destiny is to escape if they are too pressured. However, the saint explains, "one's partner for life, the mother of one's children, the source of one's every joy, should never be fettered with fear and threats, but with love and patience" (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 47; PG 62: 137). So, this submission or fear spoken about by St. Paul is not related either to a kind of marital slavery, or an exploitative submission and degradation of women. Thus, Chrysostom advises the wives not to be elated and the husbands not to be puffed up, as follows:

Let neither the husband's love elate the wife, nor the wife's subjection puff up the husband. For this reason, He has subjected her to you, that she may be loved the more (St. John Chrysostom 1999: 304; PG 62: 366C).

Chrysostom is clearly against spousal abuse. To the contrary, the relational structure is lived in mutual trust, freedom and love, as is fitting to the Lord, since they need each other and could not be self-sufficient, as some feminist ideology claims today.

Commenting on Col. 3: 19, "Husbands love your wives, and do not be bitter toward them," Chrysostom emphasizes the reciprocity of the relationship in the husband loving his wife. In his homily on Ephesians, he emphasizes through lengthy explanations that, "there will be no need for

fear; love itself will accomplish everything” (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 56; PG 62: 142). This kind of love embraces forgiveness, reconciliation, and the call for peace in conflict and resolving differences. This system of mutual self-sacrificing is not in any way “consistent with” the sociological power structure or psychological workings that postmodern culture applies to human beings.

Thus, Chrysostom sees this relationship of husband and wife in an absolute *aporia*, or tension, between unity and diversity, love and fear, and headship and obedience. Thus, he considers that the marriage of man and woman makes the two being no longer two. So, this cleaving in unity and love in diversity transfigures the call for the wife’s submission and the husband’s headship. It is a reciprocity well experienced in human relations.

St. Gregory the Theologian relates each action done by one of the spouses as done to Christ Himself and the Church Herself. He said: “It is good for a wife to reverence Christ through her husband, and it is good for a husband not to dishonor the church through his wife” (St. Gregory the Theologian 1980: *Oration 37.7*; PG 36: 292A). In this perspective, sociologist, psychoanalyst, and philosopher Erich Fromm is right when he proposes that love is not an emotion or infatuation; it is rather “a decision,” “a judgment,” and “a promise” (Fromm 2000: 51). However, in Christianity, this decision, judgement or promise ought to take Christ’s commandments and the Church’s teaching into consideration. Love has a Divine dimension. Love, with the example of the Cross, of life through death, of love for enemies, is paradoxical for humanists. Love is a Person: Christ Jesus experienced by generations of faithful, and not a philosophical contemplation of ideas and abilities.

Hierarchy and Equality

Hierarchy is not about human power and domination, but about submission to the Divine power, which humanly involves kenotic love and humility, a reciprocal and harmonious relationship of understanding and acceptance of the other, and a communion whose ultimate goal is unity in Christ, in Whom all things are held together (Col. 1: 17).

It may seem puzzling that in that particular homily on Genesis 2 concerning the place of husband and wife *vis-à-vis* each other Chrysostom seems to contradict himself and expresses both hierarchical and egalitarian

views. This tension arises because modernity confuses essence and energies, nature and functions, and understands equality in human nature as meaning oneness in energies or functions. Chrysostom is not thinking about the modern or late modern sociological issues, but rather presenting the revelation of God's words, seeing them in this case as the divine establishment of proper order or *taxis* (τάξις) in the house, which is a negation of chaos, disharmony, superiority or inferiority. It is a pattern of order seen in all created animals and nature as well. This outward *taxis* reflects an inner state of being, and not just an outward form of structure (Golitzin 2013: 164-172). *Taxis* is about holiness of life, leading to justice and love. This is not based on social norms of "equality" or on a religious "construct." It is rather fundamental for the harmony (ομόνοια) of the marital relationship and for the stability of the family. Otherwise, conflict could reign because of power struggles: "Where there is equal authority, there never is peace. A household cannot be a democracy, ruled by everyone; the authority must necessarily rest in one person" (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 53; PG 62: 141). Thus, this inequality is a "godly subordination," a subordination made by God. The one who contends against these "many forms of subjection" contends against God, for He is the supreme ruler, Who made these laws; otherwise, anarchy and confusion would reign, as Chrysostom explains. He additionally clarifies that the order that God intended in the household is not a democracy, but rather a monarchy or a hierarchy whereby the husband, the chief-servant, is a lieutenant, and the wife joins him as a co-lieutenant, then the children are third, and the servants are fourth. This system, if applied in an atmosphere of love, as he said, brings good order and concord (St. John Chrysostom 1991c: 204; PG 61.289-290). In other words, equality of honor and rights most often does away with justice and morality, however, sacrificial love is the agent of unity and the factor of harmony.

What are the relational aspects that exhibit this equality of headship and submission? Is this equality applicable to all situations? Chrysostom points out intimacy as one case of mutual authority or *exousia* (ἐξουσία). In the passage of 1 Cor. 7: 1-2, however, he remarks that there is only an equal authority of both husband and wife in terms of mutual fidelity and faithfulness.

In an elaborate study on Chrysostom's teaching on headship and submission, *first* there are two areas (intimacy and finance) which Chrysostom considers to be ruled or regulated outside of man's exclusive headship and woman's submission, but both are granted mutual authority, and both could be fields of conflict in daily relations of husband and wife, since they are "two of the greatest loci of 'power' within marriage" (Schroeder 2000: 61).

St. Peter sees the spiritual influence a wife could have on her husband (1 Pet. 3: 1-2). Chrysostom, however, presents complete mutuality between husband and wife in the spiritual life, and matters that concern salvation, acquiring virtues, and ethical life, even in martyrdom for Christ. Chrysostom describes the courage of several women while facing martyrdom as a manly courage, having the same boldness as men, especially in his homilies about the martyrdom accounts of the Antiochian women saints Pelagia (St. John Chrysostom 1862b: PG 50: 585), and Domina and her daughters Bernice and Prosdoae (St. John Chrysostom 1862b: PG 50: 635). Their lives typified the words of the Lord, "For *whoever* desires to *save his life will lose it*, but *whoever* loses *his* life for *My* sake will find it" (Mat. 16: 25).

Also, in this *second* area about spiritual exhortations, he advises the man and his wife to listen to each other and benefit from each other's spiritual experience: "But at home, let the husband hear of these things [exhortations] from the wife, and the wife from the husband" (St. John Chrysostom 1994: 379; PG 49: 80A). In this spirit, he advises, "Pray together at home and go to Church. When you come back home, let each ask the other the meaning of the readings and the prayers" (St. John Chrysostom 2003a: 61; PG 62: 117). This "quality time" of togetherness, of praying and eating together, and speaking with each other, is being missed in today's consumer and fast-paced society. However, it needs to be recovered as an essential characteristic of *being* a family.

Moreover, there is a *third* area for Chrysostom in which the equation of headship and submission is flipped. In the realm of spirituality, Chrysostom brings up the power of praying together, since the prayers of the man and his wife bring the presence of Christ (Mat. 18: 20). He tells both the man and his wife to kneel down together and pray to the merciful Lord at night, asking forgiveness for their sins. The couple are invited to

do this spiritual work together and as he said, “Let the house be a Church” (St. John Chrysostom 1991b: 172-173; PG 60: 201-204). It is an “embodied” spirituality, a characteristic of the Orthodox Church.

At times, the woman may take up the position of headship for the purpose of her husband’s spiritual salvation (1 Cor. 7: 16). Headship is a means towards the goal of salvation of souls. The goal is not headship, subordination, or a kind of gender roles set in themselves. Chrysostom notes,

Frequently, however, it is possible to see the opposite occurring, that the one who is supposed to be in the position of head doesn't even keep to the position of the feet, whereas she who is in the position of the feet is installed in the position of head (St. John Chrysostom 2010: 242; PG 53: 146).

It is noteworthy to mention the example of St. Nonna, the mother of St. Gregory the Theologian. During the funeral oration of his father Gregory, St. Gregory extols his mother as she became not just a co-worker of his father, but his leader and teacher of piety, “drawing him forward to the highest excellence by her influence in word and deed” (St. Gregory the Theologian 1980: *Oration* 18.8: 256-257; PG 35: 993B). His father who had a high civic rank surrendered his patriarchal privileges in administering their properties to his mother, since he saw that she excelled in this as well and was a faithful steward (St. Gregory the Theologian 1980: *Oration* 18.21: 258; PG 35: 1009).

A *fourth* area, which is shared by both, is the raising of children. The formation and education of children is an art, according to Chrysostom. The saint uses professional art terminology to describe the rearing labor of fathers and mothers. They are artists fashioning their paintings, or as sculptors beautifying their statues. “Like the creators of statues, give all your leisure to fashioning these wondrous statues for God” [St. John Chrysostom, *An Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Raise their Children* 22 (Laistner 1951: 96; SC 188: 107)].

Thus, for Chrysostom, this headship and submission is not ontological, but has a purpose of order, which serves the unity of the one body. It is a responsibility to be accounted for in the Last Judgement. In holiness and spiritual life, both husband and wife have the same responsibility (St. John Chrysostom 2003b: 87-88; PG 61: 223). God did not appoint external social status for man and woman, but He made

everything for their spiritual growth and the salvation of their souls. Authority in the ecclesial context is essentially the gift of love in freedom.

As can be seen, for Chrysostom the words of Scriptures are prescriptive and not culturally specific statements. This differs from the descriptive words of the postmodern scholars who assert equality and refuse hierarchy on the basis that it always leads to an oppressor and an oppressed. The issue here is not legal but relational and communal. Salvation comes through this relational channel between God and man, and between husband and wife. It has a teleological purpose: the unity of the husband and wife in Christ.

The husband loves and the wife yields, and the wife becomes more loving. This makes her more in assent with her husband. In turn, her assent makes him more loving. In order to live this tension in a successful and balanced way, one needs to have the right faith, since right faith in Christ waters the seed of sacrificial, incarnate love. In the *Gerontikon*, Abba Agathon illustrates his view on love as follows: "Love is to find a leper, to take his body, and gladly give him your own." This means that one sees the other as part of oneself and one's own flesh, and freely, without expecting reciprocity, suffers for the other to the point of giving his or her own life. With God's grace, love and freedom together bring equality, reconciliation and healing. It is this ultimate vision of love, unity, and equality that St. John Chrysostom was advocating, as the way to heal the disunity and alienation that have fallen marital relations.

Timeless Examples

Many hagiographical, narrative stories from the *Synaxarion* present shining models of marital headship and submission spoken about above. One who reads detailed stories of many married saints notices the strength of the wives in supporting their husband to remain steadfast in the faith, and taking the lead in the salvation of their family and the whole empire. Many famous examples are found in history. Empress St. Placilla of the fourth century Constantinople, for example, took on the role of continuously counselling her husband Emperor Theodosius. St. Gregory of Nyssa extolled her spiritual wisdom and saw her exhortation to her husband as an icon of love. The persistence and faith of Saint Empress Theodora (+867) changed her iconoclast husband Theophilus on his deathbed. St.

Olympia the Deaconess (+408), for example, was the main advisor of St. John Chrysostom. The wife and mother of St. Jacob the Persian (+421), commemorated on November 27, threatened to sever ties with him if he renounced his faith. He was later martyred by being cut into pieces. These women lived in an era of standardized social patriarchy and male headship, but were able “in Christ” to transcend social and gender stereotypes.

Conclusion

It is true that in modernity and late modernity, men and women have aspired to a higher level of equal opportunity in terms of education, career, and society. Social researchers claim that egalitarian relationships are possible in a reflexive way. However, Chrysostom calls for a deeper equal opportunity between spouses, an opportunity for spiritual renewal, and deep love born out of faith and humility, a paschal love that tramples down death, giving a deep meaning to marriage. This opportunity calls for a deep encounter with Christ in which a renewal of the authority of love incarnate (John 15: 13) in synergy with obedience until death (Phil. 2: 8) is fulfilled. This authority is creative and life-giving since it is directed by Divine grace. It is this personal freedom in the Holy Spirit that is the source of obedience an authority alike. This is what the feminist movement was unable to reach, while always seeking to undermine established gender roles for the purpose to eliminate tyranny and abuse of authority.

This loving relationship between husband and wife is more than compatible personalities and chemical attractions. Marital life is characterized by a dialogical reciprocity in which the Divine grace heals what is lacking and weak. It is also a complementarity beyond the dialectic of authority and obedience, whereby “the one becomes a presence, a living reality, in the heart of the other... My husband, my wife, is a part of my being, of my flesh, of my soul. He or she complements me” (Aimilianos 2015: 120). These are the words of Divine revelation spoken by the visionary Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetras in the twentieth century. These thoughts echo the words of the fourth century St. John Chrysostom who admired this marital relationship in great awe as the “wise counsel of God at the beginning divided the one into two [opposites], and desiring to show that even after the division they are still one human [ἄνθρωπος]... Do you see the mystery of marriage?” (St. John Chrysostom 1999: 318;

PG 62: 389). Truly, a marriage that reveals truth, life, beauty, and joy, is indeed a great mystery in Christ, as St. Paul (Eph. 5: 22) affirms in the first century.

References:

- Aimilianos of Simonopetra, Archimandrite. 2015. *The Church at Prayer: The Mystical Liturgy of the Heart*. Athens, Greece: Indiktos.
- Beck, Ulrich and Beck-Gernsheim, Elizabeth. 2002. *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*. London: Sage Publications.
- Browning, Don S. 2003. *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What Should be Done about it*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- Butler, Judith. 1992. "The Body You Want: Liz Kotz interviews Judith Butler". In: *Artforum*, vol. 31, no. 3, November: 82-89.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Chadwick, Owen (ed.). 1958. *Western Asceticism*. Library of Christian Classics XII. London: SCM.
- Coontz, Stephanie. 1992. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Delikostantis, Konstantinos Z. 1995. *Τα δικαιώματα του ανθρώπου: Δυτικό ιδεολόγημα ή οικουμενικό ήθος; (Human Rights: Western Ideology or Universal Ethos?)*. Thessaloniki: Greece: Kyriakidis Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2005. *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ford, David Carlton. 1989. *Misogynist or Advocate? St John Chrysostom and His Views on Women*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International.
- Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, London: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1990a. *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*. Vol 1, Translated by Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage.
- Freiburger, Calvin. 2018. "Canadian gov't agency bans 'mother' and 'father' to be more gender inclusive". In: *LifeSiteNews*, Web. 21 March 2018, www.lifesitenews.com/news/service-canada-bans-mother-and-father-to-be-more-gender-inclusive. Accessed 20 October 2018.
- Fromm, Erich. 2000. *The Art of Loving: The Centennial Edition*. New York: Continuum.

-
- Golitzin, Bishop Alexander. 2013. *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita*. Edited by Bogdan G. Bucur. Kalamazoo: MI: Cistercian Publications.
 - Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian). 1980. "Orations". In: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF 2-07). Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (185-477).
 - Jean Chrysostome. 1973. *Sur la vaine gloire et l'éducation des enfants*. Sources Chrétiennes, no. 188 (SC 188). Edited by Anne-Marie Malingrey. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.
 - Kafsoakalyvitis, Porphyrios. 2005. *Wounded by Love: The Life and the Wisdom of Saint Porphyrios*. Denise Harvey: Limni.
 - Laistner, Max Ludwig Wolfram. 1951. *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
 - Lewis, Clives Staples. 1986. *Present Concerns: Ethical Essays*. Edited by Walter Hooper, London: Collins.
 - Nektarios, Metropolitan of Pentapolis. 1902. 'And the wife see that she reverence her husband' 'Ἡ δὲ γυνή ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα.' *A Theological Commentary on Ephesians 5: 33*. Athens, Greece: Parrisia Editions.
 - Schroeder, C. Paul. 2000. "The Mystery of Love: Paradigms of Marital Authority and Submission in the Writings of St. John Chrysostom". In: *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 2: **143-168**.
 - St. John Chrysostom. 1991c. "On 1 Corinthians". In: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF 1-12). Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1-270).
 - St. John Chrysostom. 2003a. "On Ephesians". In: *On Marriage and Family Life*. Edited and Translated by Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
 - St. John Chrysostom. 1905. "On the Gospel of St. John". In: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF 1-14). Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1-332).
 - St. John Chrysostom. 1991a. "On Romans". In: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF 1-11). Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (329-564).
 - St. John Chrysostom. 1991b. "On the Acts of the Apostles". In: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF 1-11). Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1-328).
 - St. John Chrysostom. 1994. "Concerning the Statues". In: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF 1-09). Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (331-489).

- St. John Chrysostom. 1999. "Homilies on Colossians". In: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF 1-13). Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (257-323).
- St. John Chrysostom. 2001. *Homilies on Genesis. Fathers of the Church*, vol. 82. Translated by Robert C. Hill. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.
- St. John Chrysostom. 2003b. "Sermon on Marriage". In: *On Marriage and Family Life*. Edited and Translated by Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- St. John Chrysostom. 2010. *Homilies on Genesis. Fathers of the Church*, vol. 74. Translated by Robert C. Hill. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.
- Άγιος Γρηγόριος ο Θεολόγος. 1857. *Patrologia Graeca (PG)*. Vols. 35 and 36. Edited by Jacques Paul Migne. Paris: Bibliothecae Cleri Universe.
- Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος. 1862a. *Patrologia Graeca (PG)*, vols. 49, 50, 53, 54, 60, 61, 62. Edited by Jacques Paul Migne. Paris: Bibliothecae Cleri Universe.
- Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος. 1862b. "Ομιλία [Homilies 2 on St. Pelagia and 4 on Sts Bernice et Prosdouce]". In: *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 50 (PG 50), cols. 579-584, 629-640. Edited by Jacques Paul Migne. Paris: Bibliothecae Cleri Universe.

