

## Marriage in the Eschatological Perspective: Implications on Gender and Marital Intimacy

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**Abstract:**

*This research revisits the patristic views on the Divine economy for marriage and the human body in both the protological and the eschatological settings. It analyzes Saint John Chrysostom's views on marriage and the body, and the implications of Saint Maximus the Confessor's eschatological perspectives on gender. It studies how these views and perspectives are applied in Christian living throughout the centuries. To show this, it looks into the lives of several Christians who are living prototypes of this Christian eschatological vision of the body and marriage. While leaving in Christ, these saintly models have reflected the beauty of God's image in both male and female, whether in marriage or in celibacy. In conclusion, the research upholds that the power of the Holy Spirit working synergically with humanity transfigures both man and woman without losing their natural gender identity, and renders them earthly angels, while opening the way towards the mystical marriage with Christ.*

**Keywords:**

*Orthodox Church, Anthropology, Gender, Marriage, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, Eschatology, Body, Soul*

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“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created *him*; male and female He created *them*” (Genesis 1: 27).

“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are *like* angels in heaven” (Mark 12: 25).

“Marriage is... an orientation of the self toward the *eschaton*... a journey, an ascent toward the *perfection* of paradise” (Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra).

### **Introduction**

In the twenty-first century, the rising popularity of various ideologies about gender fluidity and genderlessness is seeking to eliminate difference in gender and refashion gender roles and identity. The core of these ideologies proposes that it does not matter what gender a human being was born with: what matters is how he or she identifies himself/herself. Various gender related lobbies are imposing their ideas through legislations in many countries, regardless of its rightness, psychologically, biologically, or even religiously [1].

Traditionally, there are two genders in human nature: male and female. In this gender binary, human beings are expected to always align with the physiological differentiations found at birth. They conform with their social, cultural, and religious expectations regarding gender expressions, linguistics, and roles, including motherhood, fatherhood, sisterhood, and brotherhood.

The Holy Bible declares that gender is made by God, as stated in Genesis 1: 27, 5: 2 and Mark 10: 5-6. In Orthodox theology, the God-given roles, qualities, and functions of human beings ought to lead to one essential purpose: holiness of life and unity with God (Leviticus 19: 2, 20: 7, 20: 26, 21: 8; Exodus 19: 6; 1 Peter 1: 16; 1 Thessalonians 4: 7). Diverse living experiences of human beings, married and single alike, point to a greater mystery beyond cultural and social differences and technological advances. All Christians, regardless of their gender (male or female) and status (married or single), are invited to become “partakers of Divine nature” (2 Peter 1: 4), being adopted as sons by the glorious Grace, living in a mystical union with God. Deification or theosis is the

main goal of every believer. How does the eschatological meaning of human gender help us understand our life today? Further, how is the relationship between married man and woman lived in eschatology?

For this, this study revisits Christian anthropology, and the essential meaning and purpose of gender. First, it returns to first principles by reviewing the Christians understanding of the body and gender, particularly in the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers and Saint Maximus the Confessor. The original and various understandings given by these holy Fathers open the way to see the picture of the protological intent and eschatological vision of gender. Second, it analyzes how the male female distinction constitutes a natural distinction for humanity. Third, it presents various living models of Christian gender, whether male or female, as icons reflecting Divine beauty and glory, and partakers of Divine nature.

### **Patristic Views of Gender**

#### *The New Adam*

The foundation or starting point for the Christian thought about anthropology is the God-Man Jesus Christ. Christian anthropology is Christocentric. Christ's Incarnation is the basis of this anthropology in giving true life and meaning to humans and their life in Christ (For a further discussion on this topic, see Nassif 2022, 59-64). The effect of His Resurrection is witnessed and experienced every day in the rays of beauty reflected on the faces of holy people. The words of Saint Paul about Christ the "New Adam" being the "image of God" (2 Corinthians 4: 4) are hermeneutic keys for understanding the creation of human beings "*in the image* [το κατ' εικόνα]" (Genesis 1: 27). Humans are Christ-Image (2 Corinthians 3: 18). Saint Irenaeus of Lyon contemplates creation as *in the image of the Logos, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, Who is the radiance of God's glory, His perfect Image (Heb. 1: 3), the Divine Logos, and the Prototype and the Archetype of the Father (Saint Irenaeus of Lyon 1994 527. PG 7: 1123A).*

The fact that many Christological debates have focused on the Person of Christ and His two natures indicates the significance of the Christocentric anthropology and its impact on orthopraxy. Heresies that

denigrate the body did not accept the Incarnation of Christ as a bodily incarnation, nor the Resurrection of Christ as a bodily resurrection [2] (Carter 2011, 35-55) [3]. As Saint John of Damascus, the champion of the icon, clarifies, it is in the body that God has chosen to find humanity in its fallen state and redeem it through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, since the glory of God has become the “glory of the human body” (Ιωάννης Δαμασκηνός (Saint John of Damascus) 1866, 12; *PG* 96: 564BC) As a result of Christ’s resurrection, death is trampled by death, and life is given to those in the tombs. In the last days, all will be raised incorruptible, but not all will be raised to glory. Some will rise unto punishment, and others will rise unto glory (Saint John Chrysostom, *Homily V on Romans*; *PG* 60: 125).

Indeed, the eternal Son assumed, redeemed, transfigured, and glorified human nature. In order to save His Creation, He appropriated the totality of human existence, thereby affecting its healing and re-opening the way to eternal life: “What has not been assumed has not been healed [τὸ ἀπρόσληπτον καὶ ἀθεράπευτον]” (Saint Gregory the Theologian, Epistle 101, *To Cledonius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2*, vol. 7, 440; *PG* 37: 181C). This task of appropriation that Christ undertook in His Incarnation has been for “that He may both save the image and make the flesh immortal” (Oration 38.13; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2*, vol. 7, 349; *PG* 36: 318). The call is for humans to “become like Christ since Christ became like us. Let us become God’s for His sake, since He for ours became Man. He assumed the worse that He might give us the better,” as Saint Gregory the Theologian revealed (Oration 1, 5; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2*, vol. 7, 203; *PG* 35: 397A).

#### *Human Being as Angel-Likeness*

Christ’s act of renewing human existence is not about a return to a previous state but a forward-looking fulfillment. This fulfillment necessitates to clarify several theological and practical issues. If Saint Paul declares in Galatians 3: 28 that there is “neither male nor female” for we are all one in Christ, does this mean that gender is then obliterated in Christianity? Does this entail the disuse of male-female sexuality? What truth about gender does Christ teach when asked by the Sadducees about

the state of marriage in the resurrection, that “they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels of God in heaven [ὡς ἄγγελοι ἐν οὐρανῶ]” (Mark 12: 25; See also Matthew 22: 30 and Luke 20: 35, 36)? Does this state of angel-likeness (ἰσάγγελοι) mean biological death and the extinction of the physical body? [4] (*On Virginity* XIV.6.70-71; *Sources Chrétiennes* vol. 125, 142). Practically, is this encouraging celibacy as an anticipatory participation in the resurrection, since as some would claim, marriage is a postlapsarian state? Will the state of being married before the eschaton be carried onto the eschaton?

#### *Gender in the Eschaton*

In order to answer these critical questions, we humbly ask God to enlighten our minds and open our ears to hear the divinely revealed teachings of the saints on these issues. The eschatological dimension of marriage and its heavenly destiny is ushered by a liturgical movement in the wedding ceremony. The bride and the bridegroom give their hands to one another, and the priest takes hold of them both, and leads them round the table dancing and singing. In fact,

Marriage, like monasticism, is a longing for the infinite; it is not the satisfaction of a biological drive, but an orientation of the self toward the eschaton. Marriage is a journey, an ascent toward the perfection of paradise (Aimilianos of Simonopetra 2009, 355).

Saint Maximus the Confessor, a high defender of Christology, affirms that the body carrying the marks of gender difference will endure in the eschaton, even though the glory of the last days will overshadow this difference: “The result [of theosis] is that God alone shines through both the soul and body, when their natural identifying marks are overcome by an excess of glory” (Saint Maximus, *Chapters on Theology* 2.88; 170-171; *PG* 90: 1168AB). His affirmation is based on his view that gender difference is made by God Himself, and this difference, which is also biological, is made by God “very good” (Genesis 1: 31) [5]. Thus, since it is made very good, this property of nature as male and female will not be obliterated, abolished, or destroyed, but “shaken off” [ἐκτινάσσω]. Again, the need is to define the use of the verb “shaken off” [ἐκτιναξάμενος]. The

latter verb as used in the New Testament (Mat. 10: 14, Mark 6: 11, Acts 13: 51, 18: 6) points to removing dust from garment, or figuratively the feeling of contempt for others, which is perhaps here the consequences of the fall on the relationship between male and female. Could this “shaken off” action spoken by Saint Maximus mean the change of the human body from natural to spiritual in the eschaton as spoken about by Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: 44? (Maximus, *Ambiguum* 41 PG 91: 1304D-1305B) [Saint Maximus the Confessor 1996, 156-157] It is the case, and it leads to the following conclusion: that the male-female division, which became conflictingly divisive after the fall because of sin, is completely healed in the eschaton in order to bring about the union of everything with God. In *Ambiguum* 41, Saint Maximus offers a cosmological history in which God creates the world through five primordial divisions beginning with the division between creator and creature and terminating in the division between male and female. The human being’s vocation in Christ to unite these divisions (uncreated and created, intelligible and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and the inhabited world, male and female) by his own deification. This unity is performed by Christ as the New Adam. Thus, all creation is brought together in Christ (Saint Maximus, *Ambiguum* 41; PG91: 1305D) [Saint Maximus the Confessor 1996, 157] [6] (Vlachos 2007, 305)]. The human being (*anthropos*), both male and female, is made again completely whole, united harmoniously together with and in Christ. This way of unity, holiness, and transfiguration is effected through Christ’s mediation which elevates the earth to heaven and eliminates all divisions throughout all creation.

What is the state of humans then? It is a state of wholesomeness: a relationship free from fallen passions (in *apatheia*), filled with true freedom and knowledge of God. In this sense, humans are *equal to* angels, as Christ points in Mark 12: 25. They are not angelic species or bodiless, but *like* the angels in terms of purity, service, and praise to God, always beholding the face of God the Father in heaven (Matthew 18: 10): “nor can they die anymore” (Luke 20: 36). While approaching the Light, they are filled with eternal Light, and reflect this Light as a mirror.

In this way, reflecting as the mirror does, when it submits itself to the purity of God, it will be formed according to its participation in and reflection of the prototypal beauty (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, PG 46: 364; *Ascetical Works...*, Vol. 58, 41).

The imagery of reflection involves participation. This participation is the result of the mystical union with God, which can be lived from today, by way of crucifixion “with him and living with him and sharing his glory and his kingship; offering yourself to God means transforming human nature and worth into the angelic” (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, PG 46: 405; *Ascetical Works...*, Vol. 58, 74).

What is the destiny of human gender in this angelic state? The male and female property will remain forever as an imprint, since it is made, blessed, and given by God as “very good” (Genesis 1: 31). This distinction or difference in human nature is fully revealed in the eschaton as a harmonious icon of glorious beauty. Saint Maximus affirms that the unity in Christ between male and female is not as a fusion into one, but as a unity of both according to their primal principle of existence as being human and sharing the one human nature (*Ambiguum* 41; PG 91: 1309CD). This unity is formulated in a wholesome relationship of holiness, peaceful friendship, and undivided concord (*Ambiguum* 41; PG 91: 1313C). It is in *apatheia*, that is without fallen passions, and by abiding in the communion of divine love that the glorious icon of the *anthropos* shines [7] (Saint Maximus the Confessor 1985, 108-110) [8].

How is this *apatheia* accomplished and manifested while gender persists? The words of Saint Maximus about gender being not abolished but transfigured because one reaches the perfection of love and the “summit of dispassion” is explained by the saintly Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra in his interpretation of Saint Maximus’ *Chapters on Love* 2.30, related the verse of Galatians 3: 28, as follows:

He knows no difference between male and female. He has no particular awareness of gender, which he has moved beyond, because all men and women to him are like angels. This lack of awareness, this effective ignorance, is itself freedom from the passions (Aimilianos of Simonopetra 2018, 177).

Few centuries before Saint Maximus, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, while commenting on Genesis 1: 27, notes that differences in dominance between male and female are abolished in the new creation in Christ. Since in Christ there is no male or female, the tension between male and female humans has been abolished, and they both have reached a state of complete harmony (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 16: 9; *PG* 44: 183C). Being angel-like requires that one imitates the purity of angels, which includes *apatheia* (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginit* 14.4).

In the same line of thought, Saint John Chrysostom has already clarified how, in the resurrection, men and women will be *like* angels in heaven, in terms of possessing the impassability of angels, as follows:

For when bodily passions are henceforth undone and tyrannical desire has been quenched, there will be no hindrance in the next world to prevent man and woman from being together, for every evil suspicion is removed and all who have entered the Kingdom of Heaven can maintain the way of life of those angels and intellectual powers (Saint John Chrysostom's treatise "On the Necessity of Guarding Virginit", in Clark 1999, 248; *PG* 47: 514).

The most prominent human icon of this state of *apatheia* in the Church is the Theotokos, the "woman" Mother of God, who is "more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim." She is so glorious than the highest ranks of angels because she was given the glory to give birth to God in her womb, nourished and embraced Him with her hands, while the cherubim carry only the throne of God. She is present as mother and guide of the all-male monastic communities of Mount Athos. The author of Her Akathist expresses the Theotokos' life of unity and harmony, healing all divisions, as follows:

Rejoice, Flower of incorruption. Rejoice, Crown of continence... Rejoice, thou who showest forth the life of the Angels... Rejoice, thou who makest things that differ to agree. Rejoice, thou who yokest together motherhood and virginit (From the Hymn Called *Axion Estin* in the Liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church) (The Third Stasis of the Akathist Hymn in: *A Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians* 1995, 223-224).

Christian anthropology sees the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary as the type and example of what it means to be human, displaying a perfect



synergy between her human will and divine grace, and fulfilling the goal of deification. The glorious Mary is seen as a model for human responsiveness in total freedom and consent to God's call, co-operating "with the economy" (Saint Irenaeus of Lyon 1994, *Against Heresies* 3.11.7; PG 7/1: 953B).

From the experiential life of the Church, one finds another example of how gender division is overcome in this world through ascetic labor leading to purification, illumination, and deification. This example is found in the life of Saint Mary of Egypt, and especially her encounter with Abba Zosimas. Turning away from the slavery of the fallen flesh, Saint Mary endured the harsh labor of asceticism that surpassed not only her powers as female, but also any human power. She became

like an angel in human form. Carnal lusts were transformed by the intensity of longing for God and wholly dedicated to Him. Because she was living in a state of deification, although her body was naked she was not ashamed. She had attained to the condition of Eve in Paradise before the Fall (Vlachos 2007, 304).

Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos notes that even though Saint Mary of Egypt reached an advanced state of holiness, when she met Abba Zosimas, she asked to be covered by a rag before getting out of her hiding place and taking his blessing.

By the power of Christ, both of them had transcended the 'divisions' and were living as persons. Their experience reflected in some respect the life of Adam and Eve in Paradise, but, because they were still subject to corruption and mortality, they behaved soberly, modestly, and without boldness (Vlachos 2007, 304).

Though the power of Christ, and in ascetic labor, the state of *apatheia* can be achieved in this life and natural body to a certain high degree, but not fully. For this reason, both Saint Mary and Abba Zosimas, "since they had not yet discarded the garments of skin – bodily corruption and mortality – and were afraid of being too bold, they behaved with mutual respect" (Vlachos 2007, 306). The state of *apatheia* will be fully achieved in the eschaton when the earthly natural body will be changed to a spiritual, incorruptible body (1 Cor. 15: 44) through the indwelling of the Divine grace [9].

The call to angelic life in Christianity is not that of an escape from our human state of male or female, or from the state of being single or married. On the contrary, it is a model of wholeness of life. The life of Saint Macrina the Younger is a clear example of this model. In her human body and throughout her daily life she proleptically participated in the angelic life of the resurrection. Saint Macrina's angelic transcendence of the flesh overcame, if only spiritually (that is, not—yet—corporeally), the oftentimes oppressive division between male and female and reached gender healing and reconciliation. Describing her life in Anisa with the other virgins living with her, Saint Gregory of Nyssa exclaimed:

For just as souls freed by death from their bodies are freed at the same time from the cares of this life, so too their life was far removed from these things, divorced from all earthly vanities and attuned to the imitation of the angelic life (*Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God*, 121).

Also,

living in the flesh in the likeness of the incorporeal powers, they were not weighed down by the drag of the body, so that their life was borne aloft to the skies and trod on high with the heavenly powers (*Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God*, 122).

Another contemporary example is from the Elder Joseph the Athonite Hesychast. Elder Joseph presents to his spiritual disciples his personal experience in reaching a high state of *apatheia* at an early age of thirty-two:

This is why [in love for the Theotokos] I fought against the flesh more than any other passion. And I was given the gift of purity: the gift of not differentiating between women and men. The passion is not roused within me at all. By the Lord's grace, I received the gift of purity, in full knowledge of what I was receiving (Ephraim 2016, 178).

#### *The Human Body in the Eschaton*

In continuity with the explanation of the gender identity in the eschaton, clarifying the Church's views on the resurrected state and the future transformation of the human body is of great pastoral consequence for today's society which labors to limit the effects of the aging process.

The key for understanding the nature of the resurrected body is to understand that the earthly natural body is raised “a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15: 44). In his five pastoral homilies on 1 Corinthians 15, Saint John Chrysostom maintains that the resurrected human body has both a continuity with the present fallen bodies and a discontinuity. He explains that in the resurrection the earthly body is transfigured by the grace of God, but not put away. Chrysostom draws on the state of Christ’s body after the resurrection. Christ’s body clearly bears the nail prints from His Crucifixion. Since the mortal body was “swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5: 4). This is the victory over death. How does this transfiguration or transformation take place in the body? Chrysostom teaches that the sameness is a sameness of essence, but that essence will be more glorious, beautiful, and improved (Chrysostom, Homily XLI, *on 1 Cor.*; PG 61: 356). The future glorious body is a “habitation which is from heaven” (2 Corinthians 5: 2). It is a permanent abode of the soul, which possesses a great superiority to our present one since it shall receive imperishability and immortality, free from fallen passions, for “everything will be joy, everything peace, everything love, everything happiness, everything that is true, unalloyed and stable” (Chrysostom, *Exposition on Psalm 114*; PG 55: 319). Chrysostom reveals that this resurrected body will be “lighter and more subtle” (Chrysostom, Homily XLI, *on 1 Cor.*; PG 61: 359). Thus, the eschatological human shall be an embodied angel, that is having a body but sharing the angelic freedom from bodily necessities (*apatheia*) (Chrysostom, Homily XLI, *on 1 Cor.*; PG 61: 359).

Chrysostom states that our hope as Christians is not escape from the body but transformation, which means being delivered from the corruption that is in body [10] (See: Homily XLI, *on 1 Cor.*; PG 61: 363). How will this take place? Chrysostom uses the image of

the iron when placed in fire becomes fire without losing its own nature so the flesh of believers, who have been given the Spirit. In this way, the crucified [crucifying of passions] and risen body [in the eschaton] will fly with the same wings of the souls (Chrysostom, Homily XIII, *on Rom.*; PG 60: 518).

The carrying of the cross and denying oneself leading to spiritual labor for Christ in the body begins in this earthly life but primarily awaits

the coming Resurrection. It begins in the Baptismal font, when the Christian walks voluntarily on the path of deification, and using his or her unconstrained free choice to live in virtue and achieve *theosis*.

Interestingly, Saint Gregory of Nyssa is convinced that, in the angelic life of the Resurrection, the resurrected body, which includes the male and female distinction as gender distinction, will remain part of the eschatological destiny. However, he objects to the restoration of the sexual organs since they are of no use for procreation (*On the Making of Man* 18: 9, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2, vol. 5, 399; PG 44: 196AB*), since the eschatological restoration to the original, paradisiacal state does not include procreation in the mode known today [11] (*On the Making of Man* 17: 2, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2, vol. 5, 407; PG 44: 187D*). Sexual activity will cease in the eschaton (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XVI: 9, *PG 44 181: 29*). Expressing these thoughts to his sister saint Macrina the Younger, Macrina rightly appeals to divine mystery:

The true rationale of these things is still laid up in the hidden treasures of Wisdom [*cf.* Sirach 1: 25, 4: 18; Proverbs 8: 21] and will not come to light until we are taught the mystery of the resurrection by the deed (Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 238).

This new creation in Christ still has each human being characterized by his or her natural distinction in property or sign of male and female.

Another Saint, Jerome of Stridon, author of the *Vulgate*, writing at the end of the fourth century to a widowed Theodora (Saint Jerome, *Letter 75 To Theodora*, 2) affirms that Matthew 22: 3 is not understood as that the natural and real body will be taken away. Human body and gender difference will both remain, as he indicates: Mary will remain the female Mary and Paul will remain the male Paul. He affirms in another place that, "If the woman shall not rise again as a woman nor the man as a man, there will be no resurrection of the body for the body is made up of sex and members" (Saint Jerome 1983: 1-295). The resurrected ones will not cease to be human in terms of relationships. The difference in gender will also remain, However, the "corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15: 53). Relationships, according to Jerome, will have the spirit of *apatheia*. Thus, he reminds

Theodora that if she had already lived in continence with her husband on earth, then how much more will this be possible in the world to come.

This new angelic-like state in the eschaton has, again, both a continuity with the present state and a discontinuity. Chrysostom affirms that the present form (σχήμα) of this world, including the present form of marriage, is going to pass away in the eschaton (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 7: 31). So, it is not that marriage will be annihilated, but will be changed [Chrysostom, Homily LXX on Matthew, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 1, vol. 10, 410. [12] (On Virginity 11.1)*]. For Chrysostom, all the fasting and spiritual efforts are made in order to prepare all for this newness of life (Chrysostom, Homily LXX on Matthew, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 1, vol. 10, 413*). In fact, marriage is a way of preparation to this angelic life or *apatheia*, same as monasticism, where the flesh is subjected to the spirit. As St. Cyril explains, Christians, whether married or celibate, while practicing Christian virtues, in their daily work of kenotic sacrifice, their fleshly lust is taken away. They “resemble the holy angels, fulfilling a spiritual and not a material service suitable for holy spirits. They are at the same time counted worthy of a glory like the angels enjoy” (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke, Homily 136.31*). Both men and women are called to active participation in the dynamic transfiguration and renewal, not only of themselves, but also of the whole world. This participation begins in this earthly life and continues in the future life, and guarantees for both the male and the female, a true relation, and a real distinction.

In the eschaton, human sexuality, which embodies a drive towards ecstasy and a deep longing to fully realize unity with the beloved one, will be carried passionately towards unity of love with Christ, the Bridegroom of all, Who unites all in Him. The Book of the Song of Songs reveals this truth about the eschatological expectation of growth in an eternal movement of Divine intimacy. This is celebrated in the eternal heavenly banquet of the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19: 6-9). As we chant in the Bridegroom Liturgical service in Holy Week, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night, and blessed is that servant whom He

shall find watching; and again, unworthy is he whom He shall find heedless" (*The Lenten Triodion* 1994, 511-512).

Furthermore, Saint John Chrysostom teaches that there is an eternal aspect of earthly marriage in Christ, which endures into the Kingdom. Eternity of marriage bond as expressed in earthly marriage is depicted in Chrysostom's *Letter to a Young Widow*. Love itself, since it is eternal, is the power that is able to unite those who have been separated by death. How then will this eternal union of two souls express itself in the Kingdom? The answer Chrysostom gives to this is first negative, that is, how it will *not* express itself: All the worldly necessities of providing for the house will go away (Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 4.63-68); a man and woman will behold each other in heaven and rejoice in Christ.

Chrysostom describes with boldness and conviction that the veil separating this life from next has been made very thin by Christ. Married couple will joyfully experience blessed reunion in the next life. This restoration to each other will not be to an earthly kind of marriage, but to something even better: "For this [earthly marriage] is only a bodily kind of association, but then there will be a union of soul with soul, which will be more perfect, and of a much more delightful and nobler kind" (Chrysostom, *Letter to a Young Widow*, 7, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series*, Series 1, vol. 9, 128). Therefore, the widow will be led to dwell with her beloved for infinite and endless ages. She will receive her husband back robed in glory in an eternal union of soul. This union began in marriage on earth and will reach a far more sublime condition in the eschaton (Chrysostom, *Letter to a Young Widow*, 7, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series*, Series 1, vol. 7, 460-461).

Certainly, the future mode of existence for humans will differ from that of this temporal world. What constitutes the precise nature of this difference remains a veiled mystery. The mysterion of marriage will reveal itself even more fully in the eschaton. However, the heart of the marriage memory will remain.

### **Pastoral Implications of Christian Anthropology**

Far from today's postmodern views of gender and egalitarianism, Saint John Chrysostom emphasizes that Eve's creation from Adam's rib signifies an existential relationship and a shared nature. It implies a pattern of equals with differences (male-female). It also reveals that male and female beings are both the human norm (Chrysostom's Homily on Ephesians in: John Chrysostom 2003, 43-44; *PG* 62: 135). Adam sees Eve as "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh" (*cf.* Genesis 2: 23, Ephesians 5: 30), conjoining her as equal 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 (Chrysostom's *Homily on Ephesians* in: John Chrysostom 2003, 43; *PG* 62: 135). Saint 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" (Saint Porphyrios Kavsokalyvitis 2005, 180).

The Church turns toward the living experience of many men and women whose spiritual reason governs their passions, and their soul governs their bodies. These holy people have experienced this transformation and liberation in body and soul through ascetic labor, repentance, purification, illumination, and deification in Christ. In fact, the logos or principle of human nature is the divine *project* which God has prepared for all human beings. This principle or logos is unchangeable (ἀκίνητος) (Saint Maximos, *Ambiguum* 7; *PG* 91: 1101C). The logos of the human nature is for the human, whether male or female, to become "god" by grace.

Saint Basil the Great provides a stunning icon of how there is no male or female in Christ. It is the martyric icon of the holy Julitta of Caesarea. Overcoming all earthly desires of the flesh, she accepted martyrdom with manly strength of spirit, showing, as a woman, no weakness of nature as an excuse:

[...] for we are from the same compound, as men. We are made according to the image of God just as they are. The female is made by the Creator equally capable of virtue as the male. Indeed, are we not cognate with men in all things? For it was not flesh alone that was taken for the fashioning of woman, but bone from bones [Gen 2.5]. Hence,

firmness and vigour and endurance are as equally due from us as from men to the Master. When she had said these things, she was taken to the fire, which enveloped the body of the holy woman like some luminous inner chamber, and sent her soul to the heavenly country, even to the portion that befitted her (Saint Basil the Great, *Homily on the Martyr Julitta* in: Sunberg 2017, 158).

Saint Basil the Great asserts in his exposition of Genesis 1: 27, that God has instilled in both man and woman the same and equal power of soul [13] (Ephraim 2016, 178) (For a patristic survey on the soul, see also the work of Cabe 1021), since this power reflects the fixed image of God in them. He concludes that both man and woman are equally strong in the life of virtue, in sacrifice, and love, but the weakness lies in the molded “delicate body” (Saint Basil the Great 2005, 45-46; *SC* 160: 210-12). Furthermore, Saint Gregory the Theologian explains that in his or her freedom, the human being has the ability to choose a direction, to be drawn after God’s likeness, towards the path of transfigured life, to deification in Christ (Saint Gregory the Theologian, Oration 38.11, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2, vol. 7, 348; PG* 36: 324A). Thus, the soul is called to educate the body. Instead of remaining a slave, the body comes to labor alongside the soul in serving God, and then God will unite both as a unified entity to Himself in the age to come (Saint Gregory the Theologian, Oration 2, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2, vol. 7, 206-207; PG* 35: 430-432). Educating the male or female body uses the same spiritual tools of prayer and *askesis*.

### **Conclusion**

This research has reemphasized that both man and woman are of one human nature. Being male and female is a defining aspect of God’s creation, carrying a unique “perichoretic,” or self-emptying complementarity, and beauty in the image of Christ. Thus, the patristic phronema does not minimize the reality of male-female natural differences or antinomies, since it finds their origin in the design of God, in the eschatological perspective, and not as a consequence of postlapsarian state. In fact, this difference is a gift from God, creating unity of love in diversity. This is joyfully expressed by Adam in the account of creation, after discovering his state of loneliness and God’s creation of Eve:



“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis 2: 23). The marital relationship will also continue in the eschaton, but will be renewed with much joy, beauty, glory, and honor, according to God’s perfect design.

There is one human nature which is created by God, and within this human nature there is an ontological distinction of male and female as biblically expressed in Genesis 1: 27, Matthew 19: 4, and Mark 10: 6. The call for humanity is to harmonize *hypostatically* with the natural robe of beauty created by God, so as to be crowned with the eschatological glory (For further elaboration on this fundamental understanding, see Loudovikos 2017, 106). We can see this experienced *hic et nunc* in the life of many saints. While living holiness in the human body, these saints reflect the glorious beauty of angels. In this regard, some contemporary writers use a misleading terminology, especially when applying an analogy between the mode of existence of the Holy Trinity (*τρόπος υπάρξεως*) and the male-female distinction. “Mode of existence” applies to the personal or hypostatic existence of the Holy Trinity, while the male-female distinction constitutes a natural distinction for humanity and is not about a mode of existence (Hopko 1976, 56: “The differences between men and women are real and irreducible. They are not limited to biological or physical differences. They are rather different “modes of existence” within one and the same humanity; just as, we might say, the Son and the Holy Spirit are different “modes of existence” within one and the same divinity, together with God the Father”).

The purpose of this life is the next life. The true greatness of man is not found in his being the highest biological existence, but in the fact that he is given to become a god (Nellas 1987, 30). Constant, free, and dynamic growth in love toward deification is what constitutes the greatness of humans and the ineffable beauty of the manner in which God created humanity to be earthly angels. Humans cooperate with God’s grace and freely choose to live a virtuous, angelic life, so as to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1: 4). The body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit is deified, and shines with eternal light in which the soul dives in an eternal love for God. However, we must acknowledge that this new creation

remains a mystery to be unveiled at the end times. Everything revolves around the mystery of God's love, freely given to humans to grow on the likeness of Christ. As Saint Paul reveals, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3: 18). The words of King David in Psalm 8 acknowledge this mystery:

What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?  
For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him  
with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of  
Your hands; You have put all *things* under his feet... O LORD, our Lord, How  
excellent is Your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8: 3-9).

### Notes

- [1] Gender ideologies are biased by the influence of surrounding culture and society and by historical circumstances and growing technological changes. Article 14 of the European Istanbul Convention requires state parties to include in schools' curricula teaching material on issues such as "non-stereotyped gender roles," among other things. In other words, it encourages younger generations to reexamine their *gender identity and spread gender dysphoria among children*
- [2] One of the manifestations of these heresies is the view that Jesus Christ did not save the entire human nature. Apollinaris the Younger, Bishop of Laodicea in Syria, thought that Jesus did not assume the *nous* (the rational human soul), but the latter was replaced by the Divine Logos. Thus, he denied Christ's humanity, and Christ's assumption of the totality of human nature. He thought of the rational soul as related to sinful inclinations, which is not fitting for the Divinity of the Person of Christ. Otherwise, there would be two persons of Christ in one, as he claimed. So, he used interchangeably the words *hypostasis* and *ousia*. In other words, Apollinaris argued against "dioprosopic and diophysite christologies" and opened the path to *monophysitism*.

- [3] This minimalist view of man, held by Apollinaris, called for the nature-will division in the human being which impacted the thought of personalism.
- [4] In the thought of the Old Testament, there has been always a link between marriage and death: marriage and procreation are needed in order to overcome death by continuity through progeny. Chrysostom very clearly teaches that the earthly form of marriage is the offspring of death. Once death is abolished, so will this form of earthly marriage be abolished as well. Since the purpose of earthly marriage is two-fold: to suppress man's licentiousness and to procreate, and since these two purposes will be irrelevant in the Kingdom, then earthly "marriage is no longer useful or necessary."
- [5] *Ambiguum* 41.1-2. Genesis 1 provides Hebrew terms for "male" (זכר) and "female" (נקבה) which are nothing but euphemistic terms for difference in humans, and especially in their physical body, directed related to procreation.
- [6] Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos clarifies how Christ had overcome the divisions between male and female, and the human being in Christ's image can also labor to achieve this by growing Divine likeness: "The Word of God has become man through His incarnation, and through His conception without seed by the Holy Mother of God He has overcome the division between male and female".
- [7] In some other writings, Saint Maximus speaks of male and female in Gal. 3: 28 in a figurative way, making them metaphors for the fallen passions of anger (θυμός) (being a masculine characteristic) and desire (ἐπιθυμία) (being a feminine characteristic). In this way, Saint Maximus illustrates the state of *apatheia* attained through freedom from fallen passions. This freedom cements the unity in and with Christ. Thus, married man and woman are freed from corrupted passions. He does not however talk about genderless human being, but a virtuous one.

- [8] (“Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer” 4, trans. [modified] George C. Berthold). The fallen or irrational passions include pleasure, anger, gluttony, and greed. Being in the state of *apatheia* belongs to those who no longer have any desires of the flesh.
- [9] The body of the Lord after the resurrection was such that He entered through the closed doors without difficulty.
- [10] For Chrysostom, the statement of Saint Paul that flesh and blood does not inherit the Kingdom is related to the corrupted flesh and blood. Saint Paul does not refer here to the human body.
- [11] The exact quote goes as the following: “Ἡ δὲ τῆς ἀναστάσεως χάρις οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἡμῖν ἐπαγγέλλεται ἢ τὴν εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον τῶν πεπτωκότων ἀποκατάστασιν [Now the resurrection promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state]”.
- [12] Chrysostom also describes the virgins as being angelic in two respects: first, they “neither marry nor are given in marriage” and, second, they continuously stand before God and serve him.
- [13] St. Joseph the Hesychast asserts that “for the soul, there is no such thing as a male or female soul, nor a young or old soul; only the grace of Christ overall,” which means that the soul is without gender. However, the flesh is gendered forever.

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