

Why Male and Female?

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In our modern society, human sexuality and the roles of men and women are "hot topics" of discussion. The media is full of this and we are assaulted with such things as a television talk show featuring women impregnated by transsexuals or a current popular song by The Bloodhound Gang that says, "You and me baby ain't nothin' but mammals, so let's do it like they do on the Discovery channel." Many modern religious "debates" are also concerned with issues of human sexuality - sometimes referred to as "pelvic" theology. For the Orthodox Christian, these questions must also be asked and explored. So begins this discussion that seeks to answer the question of "why male and female?"

It is necessary to begin the answer to this question where any theological dialogue must begin - with the Bible. In the Genesis creation account, one reads that God made mankind with the sexual bipolarity from the very beginning. Genesis 1:27 states, "[s]o God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female* he created them" (emphasis mine). In Matthew 19:4, Jesus answers the Pharisee's questions on divorce by quoting this Genesis account. Jesus also goes on to quote the second creation account (Genesis 2:18-2:24) thus linking the two creation accounts. Thus, according to Jesus Christ, man and woman were created as such from the very beginning with the idea that the two would become "one flesh." He then goes on to state that though the old Law allowed divorce, it was not so from the beginning and that divorce and re-marriage actually constitutes adultery. This statement is difficult for the Pharisees and Jesus adds that not all men can receive this revelation and that those who do make themselves "eunuchs", i.e. perpetual monogamists¹, for the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:7-12).

In the writings of St. Paul, the notion of the unity of man and woman in marriage is also

¹This is a debatable concept, but such an interpretation is implied by St. John Chrysostom in his Homily on Matthew 62.2

found. St. Paul, in I Corinthians 7, refers to the fact that man and woman in marriage do not rule over their own bodies, but rather the spouse rules over the other's body. In I Cor. 7:5-6, St. Paul allows as a concession only, the separation the "oneness" of husband and wife for prayer - only prayer. This concession appears to be only for those who can not focus on their prayer life and their married life, i.e. for those who can not "walk and chew gum" at the same time. After this temporary separation, husband and wife must be "re-joined" to prevent the temptations of the devil.

So, as the reader sees, male and female is from the beginning of creation and the unity of male and female, their status as "one flesh," is also part of the plan from the beginning. Why is this so one might ask and what exactly does it all mean? These are the questions that will be answered next.

One aspect of the male/female union is to be understood as reflective of the covenants between God and His people. Throughout the entire biblical story, God is the faithful husband, Israel is the harlotous wife. In the New Testament, it is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who comes in the flesh to secure and consummate the marital bond in the new covenant where Jew and Gentile come to worship the one God. Now, the marital bond illustrates the union between Christ and His Church. In the "wedding epistle"² read at an Orthodox wedding service, St. Paul states, concerning marriage, that "This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church..." (Eph. 5:32).

Another important aspect of marriage, according to Gregory of Nyssa is that of *symbiosis*. In his treatise, On Virginity, Gregory of Nyssa argues against a marriage between man and woman that is based on the acquisitions of the pleasures of this world. He states, "[y]ou wish that we begin from the most pleasant things? Well, then, the chief thing that interests one in marriage

²Ephesians 5:20-33

is the attaining of a gratifying companionship."³ Gregory of Nyssa is against a co-dependent relationship where the person lives through and for the other person producing a relationship where

[w]henever the husband looks at the beloved face, the moment of fear of separation accompanies the look. If he listens to the sweet voice, the thought comes into his mind that some day he will not hear it. Whenever he is glad with gazing at her beauty, then he shudders most with the presentiment of mourning her loss.⁴

Thus, Gregory is against this type of co-dependent marriage where one not only suffers with the other, but even dies "spiritually" when the other dies.⁵ Rather, Gregory of Nyssa advocates a marriage with a proper *symbiosis* where "... one is not passionately attached to others out of fear."⁶ The proper attachment for the married persons is to God and to that life of incorruptibility. Gregory of Nyssa states that this is the proper way of life "...because of its passionlessness it is always present with the powers above; never separated from aught that is divine, it never touches the opposite of this."⁷ The task of the "virgin marriage" is to shift one's quest from the possession of material things (including the spouse) and to re-direct our attention to God. So, in the proper context, marriage is an exercise in non-attachment to worldly things; that is the "virginity" that Gregory of Nyssa speaks of.

In this proper context of a godly *symbiosis* within a marriage, then certain other aspects of marriage come to light. One aspect is that of spiritual maturation. Returning to the Genesis account of the creation of man and woman, one sees that God commands Adam and Eve to

³Gregory of Nyssa, On Virginity 3.2

⁴Gregory of Nyssa, On Virginity 3

⁵Mark Hart, "Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage," Theological Studies 51 (1990) pg. 455.

⁶Ibid, pg. 456.

⁷Gregory of Nyssa, On Virginity 2

"increase"⁸ and multiply. In the Greek, the word that is translated as "increase" is the word *auxanesthe*. This is derived from the verb *auxano* which means "to grow" or "to increase." Theophilus of Antioch reflects this understanding that Adam and Eve were first created as "children" and that they were to grow when

God transferred man out of the earth from which he was made into paradise, giving him an opportunity for progress, so that by growing and becoming mature, and furthermore having been declared a god, he might also ascend into heaven....⁹

Irenaeus of Lyons also reflects this ideology stating

...in paradise 'they were both naked and not ashamed', inasmuch as they, having been created for a short time previously, had no understanding of the procreation of children: for it was necessary that they should first come to the adult age, and then multiply thenceforth.¹⁰

So, male and female were created for the spiritual maturation of mankind. Upon the intended attainment of spiritual maturation, then Adam and Eve were to have procreated.

This brings to light the next purpose of male and female and that is procreation. This was intended to be procreation free of the sinful passions (lust, etc.) that we associate with human sexuality today. Rather, Adam and Eve were to learn a holy love first "...without comprehension or understanding of what is evil; and thus (...) kissing and embracing each other in holiness as children."¹¹ After passing through this stage, only then could Adam and Eve conceive children in a state of holiness. There is no suggestion in Irenaeus that sexual reproduction was an added fact after the Fall. Rather, procreation is part of the growth put forth before man. Clement of Alexandria reflects this idea when he states

...if the serpent took the use of intercourse from the irrational animals and persuaded Adam to agree to have sexual union with Eve, as though the first

⁸in the Septuagint (LXX) version of the Old Testam

⁹Theophilus of Antioch, To Autolyucus 2.24

¹⁰Irenaeus of Lyons, Against the Heresies 3.22.4

¹¹Irenaeus of Lyons, The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching 14

couple did not have such a union by nature, as some think, this again is blasphemy against creation.¹²

Rather, Clement sees the Fall as representative of the immature use of sexual activity and that "...they were impelled to do it earlier than was proper because they were still young and had been led away by deceit."¹³ So, Clement did not want to link the Fall directly to the act of sex itself, but rather he linked it the failure of Adam and Eve to do so at the "right time."

In addition, male and female were created to transform their married life into one that is a public work, *leitourgia*, or a liturgy. Gregory of Nyssa states,

...while the pursuit of heavenly things should be a man's first care, yet if he can use the advantages of marriage with sobriety and moderation, he need not despise this way of serving the state.¹⁴

In the proper marriage, God is the *choregos*, the provider. Mark Hart states, "[b]y calling marriage *leitourgia* and God *choregos*, Gregory is suggesting that married life bears a greater resemblance to divine life than celibacy in its role as benefactor and provider for the community."¹⁵ In this capacity, married life allows man and woman to exercise *philanthropia*, to take on communal service for the benefit of society. Contrary to this life for Gregory of Nyssa is that of *ateleia* which suggests both not paying taxes and incompleteness. It is this type of a celibate life - running out into the desert to be a solitary monk - that is incomplete and that Gregory of Nyssa criticizes.

In conclusion, man and woman were created from the beginning to function together in life in various capacities. First, with God's help and love, marriage can be a functional *symbiosis*

¹²Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 3.17.102.4

¹³Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 3.17.103.1

¹⁴Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 8

¹⁵Hart, pg. 471

where man and woman live a life of non-attachment to the world while being attached to God. Second, man and woman are to function together for spiritual maturation. Third, man and woman are to procreate. Lastly, man and woman are to take the married state and transform it into a public service (liturgy) of philanthropy. Thus, man and woman were created so that they may work together to attain the promised salvation through Christ in whose image and likeness they are made. That is why male and female.