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CHRYSOSTOM'S COMMENTARIES ON MAN-WOMAN RELATIONS,  
MARRIAGE AND CONJUGAL ABUSE THROUGH THE ORTHODOX  
*PHRONEMA*

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# BEYOND A FEMINIST 'HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION': READING ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM'S COMMENTARIES ON MAN-WOMAN RELATIONS, MARRIAGE AND CONJUGAL ABUSE THROUGH THE ORTHODOX *PHRONEMA*

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper aims to provide a summary of St John Chrysostom's teachings on man-woman relations as pertinent to marriage and the conjugal relationship through the prism of the Orthodox *phronema*, defined here as the experience-based conscience of the Orthodox Church. The aim is to contribute toward a better representation of non-western religious-cultural cosmologies within western academia and specifically within gender and theology/religion(s) studies. The employment of a western feminist analytical/hermeneutical lens in these disciplines has many merits, but it has tended toward transposing presuppositions that emanate from western experience with Christianity and context-specific forms of social sexism to non-western traditions. As a result, eastern traditions such as Orthodoxy have been presented in essentialising terms that do not generally reflect how these have been experienced within their indigenous epistemological frameworks. It is the argument of this paper that this insider's conscience and the unique Orthodox cosmology need to be grasped by scholars of gender and theology/religion(s) who are only now beginning to be exposed to eastern Christian traditions. This cosmology-informed approach can allow a deeper insight into gender and religious issues in these communities and can reveal that commentaries such as Chrysostom's could serve to alleviate pernicious attitudes regarding women and marriage where these exist.

## INTRODUCTION

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The One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the full name of the Orthodox Church, traces its beginnings in the revelation received by the disciples of Christ at Pentecost. Through the Apostles and their followers the Orthodox message was disseminated to peoples in the Middle East, Asia Minor, Mediterranean Europe, Africa and the Indian subcontinent in a short period of time, where Orthodox communities exist to this very day. In the early centuries Christians experienced extensive persecution by different Roman Emperors until Christianity was accepted as the official faith of the Roman Empire. While early Christians all belonged to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, different historical, political and theological factors grew the hiatus between Oriental, Eastern and Western Christians.

Political events had led the Western Church to steadily differentiate itself on important doctrinal/theological matters, which fostered an eventual schism in the eleventh century.<sup>1</sup> The Eastern Church Fathers relied on ancient Greek texts and redefined the philosophy critically to express the soteriological message of the ancient apostolic Church, without adding new doctrine. It is understood within Orthodox conscience that their work was not the product of intellectual exercise and syllogistic philosophy, but rather theology as a result of *ascesis*<sup>2</sup> and enlightenment. St John Chrysostom (original being ‘Chrysostomos’ which means ‘Golden-mouthed’) is considered one of the most prolific theologians/saints in the line of Orthodox Church Fathers.<sup>3</sup> Chrysostom was born in the mid of the fourth century in the city of Antioch, a prominent Roman capital. He studied Greek philosophy under Libanius, a great orator of the time, but he eventually turned to Orthodoxy. After living some time an ascetic life, he was ordained a priest at Antioch’s cathedral, before becoming Archbishop of Constantinople. Chrysostom produced numerous homilies (speeches delivered to the faithful) that commented on or explained the works of the apostles and especially the epistles that the apostle Paul had written to different early Christian converts in the first century.<sup>4</sup> In his commentaries, Chrysostom was driven by the concern to edify his audiences in the apostolic message and to counter the worldliness and licentiousness that he perceived to be thriving in the city of Antioch.<sup>5</sup>

This paper is dedicated to St John Chrysostom’s commentaries regarding man-woman relations in marriage and the conjugal relationship as they emerge from seven homilies. An

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<sup>1</sup> As Fr. John Romanides has aptly put it, the schism was not between Western and Eastern Christians, but between Eastern *Romania* and the Frankish conquerors or the Western Roman Empire who distorted the previously uniform Christian doctrine and tradition for their political ends. See John Romanides, *Romiosini, Romania, Roumeli* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> ‘*ἄσκησις*’; translates in English as ‘practice.’

<sup>3</sup> According to the Greek Synaxarium, about 804 homilies of his have survived. See Ορθόδοξος Συναξαριστής, “Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος Αρχιεπίσκοπος Κωνσταντινούπολης,” <http://www.saint.gr/3021/saint.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Traditionally the Orthodox Church has accepted some fourteen letters/epistles to have been authored by Paul. These are: Romans, First/Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First/Second Thessalonians, First/Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Hebrews. Thirteen of these bear his name while one (Epistle to Hebrews) does not. Notably, modern scholarship has questioned the Pauline authorship for a number of these epistles.

<sup>5</sup> Disagreements as to where different commentaries were produced exist among modern scholars. Nonetheless, there seems to be agreement that the bulk of homilies were spoken in Antioch.

attempt is made to provide a reading of these homilies through the Orthodox *phronema*<sup>6</sup> understood here as the experience-based historical conscience of the Church. The aim is to contribute toward a better representation of non-western religio-cultural cosmologies<sup>7</sup> within western academia and particularly within gender and theology/religion(s) studies. While Chrysostom's commentaries have been available in English<sup>8</sup> and multiple excellent efforts have been made to convey his teachings in their original spirit,<sup>9</sup> these discussions have yet to extend into gender and theology/religion(s)<sup>10</sup> studies which have become increasingly internationalised. In these disciplines, western feminist hermeneutics are employed for the analysis of religious traditions and communities with the aim to redress what are perceived to be patriarchal biases in theology and to give more voice to historically marginalized groups, especially women. This paper aims to problematize the tendency to transpose these hermeneutical methodologies to non-western religious traditions, and particularly Orthodoxy which developed within a distinct eastern epistemology.<sup>11</sup> It will argue the importance of appraising these traditions embedded in their respective cosmological

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<sup>6</sup> 'φρόνημα'; can be translated in English as 'conscience.' It is implicit in this terminology that the *phronema* emanates from one's practice/embodiment of the faith. Why it is also called historical will emerge later in this paper.

<sup>7</sup> Cosmology is defined here as a holistic knowledge system, worldview or belief system. A cosmology is directly linked to epistemology (valid ways of knowing), ontology (ways of being) and ethics (principles governing social relations). This definition departs from a clearly etymological one (cosmogony, ontology, ways the world operates; Ioannis Kyriakakis, "Traditional African Religion, Cosmology and Christianity," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 11, no. 32: 135.

<sup>8</sup> A large collection of his works is available through the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/chrysostom>

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Kelvin Mutter, "John Chrysostom's Theology of Marriage and Family," *BRT/RBT* 6, no. 2 (Autumn, 1996): 22-32; David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. Chrysostom* (Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1996); Catharine Roth and David Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom: On Marriage and Family Life* (St. Vladimir Press, 1997); and P. Cox Miller, *Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts* (Catholic University of America Press, 2012). The series edited by Philip Schaff available through the Christian Classics Ethereal Library is another example.

<sup>10</sup> It is recognised that the disciplines of theology and religious studies have been demarcated within western epistemology. This paper addresses primarily gender and religion(s) studies and extends to the discipline of theology only in view of the fact that feminist critiques by theologians/Church scholars have defined the presuppositions and analytical methodologies of gender and religion(s) studies.

<sup>11</sup> Epistemology is understood according to this definition: "epistemology defines the criteria and sources for valid knowledge as related to a specific cosmology [...] under the understanding that individuals become conscious agents within specific belief systems where they acquire the tools and standards for reasoning" (Romina Istratii, "Mainstream Gender and Development Concepts and Theories at the Interface with Local Knowledge Systems: Some Theoretical Reflections," *The Journal of Development Practice* 3 [2017]: 4).

frameworks.<sup>12</sup> This requires understanding, first and foremost, what counts as theology locally and the conditions that have defined the repertoire of hermeneutical possibilities of a certain faith. Taking this approach in this paper will help to evidence that Chrysostom's commentaries have been understood and deployed to promote the dignity of women within the Orthodox tradition. Moreover, his commentaries could serve as a resource to alleviate pernicious attitudes regarding women and marriage among Orthodox Christians in the modern era.

In order to develop this rationale the paper is organised as follows: A first section highlights the limitations of mainstreamed feminist hermeneutics in gender and theology/religion(s) studies when these are employed beyond the western context. The subsequent section explains what it means to 'read' Chrysostom through the Orthodox *phronema*. This is followed by a methodological discussion, where the importance of engaging with the original Greek language is pronounced. The next section is the main analysis of Chrysostom's homilies and is followed by a discussion on how these teachings could be deployed to alleviate harmful attitudes toward women that depart from the Orthodox *phronema* espoused by Chrysostom and the Orthodox Church. A conclusion summarises the argument and the main points of this article.

## DECOLONISING GENDER AND THEOLOGY/RELIGION(S) SCHOLARSHIP

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The incorporation of gender-sensitivity in theology/religion(s) studies has been premised generally on the belief that women within western Christian experience were historically marginalised and suppressed in a male-dominated society and biblical scholarship, which begot the need to rediscover these female voices and experiences and to reformulate theologies in ways that aligned better with contemporary feminist ideals.<sup>13</sup> Methodological approaches in this discipline have therefore placed emphasis on looking at the historical and societal context in which these traditions developed so as to understand what might have fostered their tendencies. They have been shaped by the influential works of seminal feminist writers in the West who criticised (western) Christian traditions from different angles and include Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), Mary Daly (1928-2010), Rosemary

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<sup>12</sup> It needs to be said that the paper focuses on the Eastern Orthodox Churches and does not engage directly with Oriental Orthodox traditions. John Chrysostom has been equally influential in many of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which are the Ethiopian/Eritrean, Coptic, Syriac, Indian and Armenian Churches. While the fundamental eastern epistemology and Christian cosmology espoused in his commentaries would not differ within these traditions, not all of his works were absorbed in the Oriental Orthodox Churches to the same degree, and those which were absorbed were most likely incorporated or understood through local exegetical traditions, such as the Ethiopian *andämta* commentary tradition in the case of the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahədo Church. A discussion of Chrysostom's commentaries within these communities would need to be provided in reference to the conscience and holy traditions of these respective Churches.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, Darlene Juschka in *Feminism in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (Continuum, 2001) explains that the focus of feminist scholars in theology and religious studies has been to reinterpret sacred texts so as to address biases in what is considered male- and elite-dominated scholarship.

Radford Ruether (1936-) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1938-). Especially influential has been Fiorenza's feminist exegetical approach premised on a 'hermeneutics of suspicion.'<sup>14</sup>

While this paradigmatic approach has made historical contributions to western theology, it can become problematic when it is monolithically transposed cross-culturally. Using such an analytical prism, prominent feminist scholars in gender and theology/religion(s) studies have already shown essentialising tendencies that present all 'Christian theology' as patriarchal,<sup>15</sup> sexist and other such characterisations.<sup>16</sup> Within western feminist literature, Paul and Chrysostom, both historically embedded in an eastern epistemological framework, have been frequently described as misogynists ('haters of women').<sup>17</sup> Other scholars who have studied eastern traditions from a gender-sensitive prism have produced representations that are theologically questionable.<sup>18</sup> Such universalising tendencies seem to emanate from the fact that usually scholars presuppose a feminist hermeneutics in their study of 'other' Christian traditions. Their rationale seems to be that since women were

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<sup>14</sup> In her book *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Beacon Press, 1984), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza presented a systematic approach toward a feminist biblical exegetical approach or what she called 'feminist evaluative hermeneutics.' Fiorenza proposed a paradigm shift from understanding the bible as archetypal myth to conceiving it as a historical prototype. As this historical context was androcentric and biased toward women, a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' was needed to detect the ideological underpinnings and distortions. It should be noted that she did not assume feminist authority over the Bible or truth. This critical reading needed to be combined with a 'hermeneutics of remembrance', a reconstruction of women's history from the perspective of the oppressed.

<sup>15</sup> For example, some feminist writers have expressed issues with a 'male' God or an all-male clergy. However, these apparent 'patriarchal' tendencies need to be placed and appraised in their proper epistemological framework and theology. Regarding the Orthodox tradition, it is understood that the designation 'Father' is not an effort to ascribe anthropomorphic/androgenic qualities to God, which would be considered heretical, but rather to denote that He alone is the Cause in the Trinity. On the other hand, the priestly order follows Christ (or the 'New Adam') who is considered the Archpriest of the Church.

<sup>16</sup> For example, in the seminal volume *Feminism in the Study of Religion* Darlene Juschka cited Mary Daly's critical writings against patriarchal Christianity and suggested that the latter was inherently androcentric without nuancing this statement in view of cross-cultural particularities (Juschka, *Feminism in the Study of Religion*, 163). Fiorenza herself, although careful not to "reify texts and traditions as oppressive or as emancipatory" extended her critique cross-culturally, saying that "in most societies and religions wo/men have been excluded from the authoritative traditions and classic texts not just by historical accident but by laws and custom" (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Method in Women's Studies in Religion: A Critical Feminist Hermeneutics", 224 and 226). Similar tendencies are found in Rosemary Ruether's work. While she reported that her analysis had incorporated Orthodox Christianity, she stated uniformly that "[a]ll of these traditions are sexist." (Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1983], 22).

<sup>17</sup> These criticisms are mentioned in various works, such in Susan Heine, *Women and Early Christianity: Are the Feminist Scholars Right?* (SCM Press Ltd., 1986) and David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. Chrysostom* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Indicatively, the author will point to Kari Elisabeth Børresen's article "Gender, Religion and Human Rights in Europe" in *Pieties and Gender*, ed. L. Sjørup and H. R. Christensen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 55-64. In her analysis, Børresen took a comparative approach in appraising world "religions" and reached general conclusions such as regarding her understanding that "Christian theology" is "redemptive", "sexophobic" and accessible to scientific analysis. While such characterisations may apply to some theological traditions, it is important to recognise that there is no single or monolithic "Christian theology" but many historical, context-specific, embodied traditions. Additionally, the above three characterisations are unreflective of the Orthodox tradition and cosmology.



historically demeaned in most societies, sexism must have also defined the attitudes and discourses of male theologians in all religious traditions (and especially of a Christian theology). This logic would fail to explain however ‘readings’ of Paul and Chrysostom that have promoted the visibility and dignity of females as have been typical in the Orthodox tradition.<sup>19</sup> Mainstreamed feminist paradigms seem to be blind to these specificities, and ultimately result in a ‘reading’ of Eastern Church Fathers, such as Chrysostom, out of their epistemological context which defined their attitudes and perceptions, as well as the meanings of their teachings.

Essentially, the fundamental limitation of feminist paradigms in theology/religion(s) studies is that these are too conditioned to the western cosmological and sociological contexts that begot them in the first place, which limits their applicability and relevance elsewhere. For example, the hermeneutics developed by Fiorenza were motivated by her positionality as an academic in the United States with a German background who had been exposed to a certain tradition of biblical scholarship.<sup>20</sup> This limits considerably the relevance that such exegetical presuppositions and tools can have in non-western theological systems,<sup>21</sup> which are expected to have followed their own progressions and developed unique exegetical traditions. Such epistemological concerns are not new and have been expressed in other contexts by scholars who have concerned themselves with the situatedness of western knowledge.<sup>22</sup> They have also been raised by scholars of Islam and Islamic feminists motivated to provide an alternative perspective into their faith traditions in contrast to

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<sup>19</sup> The messages espoused in Chrysostom’s commentaries will be analysed in detail in this paper. Regarding Paul’s teachings, which have been criticised substantially within western scholarship, the Orthodox tradition considers his teachings to have given prominence to women in the Church and to have redefined conventional understandings of male headship in marriage in terms of altruistic love. Especially the epistles of Paul to Philemon, Romans and Philippians which include references to female figures (Apphia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, Euodia and Syntyche) showcase that female activity in disseminating and strengthening the early Church was equally valued to male activity, so much so that their names were mentioned by the apostle at the beginning of his addresses, often preceding the names of men.

<sup>20</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Biblical Interpretation and Critical Commitment,” *Studia Theologica-Nordic Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (1989): 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> See Tina Beattie and Ursula King, ed. *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 4-9; Rita Gross, “Where Have we Been? Where do we Need to Go? Women’s Studies and Gender in Religion and Feminist Theology” in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Tina Beattie and Ursula King, ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 22; Katherine Young, “From the Phenomenology of Religion to Feminism and Women’s studies” in *Methodology in Religious Studies: The Interface with Women’s Studies*, A. Sharma, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 36; and Elina Vuola, “Patriarchal Ecumenism, Feminism, and Women’s Religious Experiences in Costa Rica” in *Gendering Religion and Politics*, H. Herzog and A. Braude, ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Istratii, “Mainstream Gender and Development Concepts and Theories,” 2017.

western feminist discourses imbricated with political ideologies of the day.<sup>23</sup> While nominally such critiques have been acknowledged within paradigmatic gender and religion(s) scholarship,<sup>24</sup> essentialising and a-contextual appraisals of non-western Christian traditions have yet to be systematically problematized. This explains why in 2004 Tina Beattie found the need to urge gender and religion(s) scholars to avoid universalisms and acknowledge the historicity and contextuality of different religious traditions, including those which share a Christian teaching.<sup>25</sup>

Following this call, this paper aims to present a more systematic critique of universalising epistemological tendencies in these disciplines and to underscore the ethical and practical urgency for prioritising the insiders' cosmological frameworks. It is an imperative to recognise that any 'readings' of Christian theology through the prism of western/feminist hermeneutics remains disproportionately informed by western forms of Christianity and societal experience and succumbs to the same colonial epistemological attitudes that defined early (and strands of later) feminist scholarship.<sup>26</sup> Within the study of religious systems a decolonial approach is one that examines faith traditions through the indigenous theological, doctrinal, hermeneutical and sociological prism as a means to understanding gender issues redressing potential inequalities and injustices.

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<sup>23</sup> Among scholars of Islam one may site the seminal work of Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005). Islamic feminists, for example, in response to many religious leaders' use of classical jurisprudence to enforce gender asymmetries in their geographical contexts, have selected to work within the religious framework, careful not to deviate from perceived divinely inspired tradition and opposing what can be established as manmade interpretations. (Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 [2006]: 629-645; Ziba Mir-Hosseini Ziba and Vanja Hamzić, *Control and Sexuality: The Revival of Zina Laws in Muslim Contexts* [Nottingham: The Russell Press, 2010]; Amina Wadud, "Islam Beyond Patriarchy through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis" in *Wanted: Why Equality and Justice Now*, edited by Z. Anwar [Malaysia: Musawah, 2009], 95-111). In the understanding of this researcher, Islamic feminists by taking this approach have deviated somehow from local/insiders' hermeneutical traditions motivated by certain feminist standards. In contrast, this study suggests a need to approach the Orthodox tradition through the historically valid exegetical framework of this tradition and the faithful.

<sup>24</sup> For example, in the introduction of the aforementioned edited volume *Feminism in the Study of Religion*, Darlene Juschka appeared to be conscious of west-centric feminist interpretations and representations of traditions such as Islam, citing the works of Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi as seminal critiques. In her references to Christian traditions, however, she did not show similar awareness of possible epistemological bias. The discussion was limited to western Christian traditions and no affirmation was made that Eastern Christianities have an ancient history and have differed theologically, ecclesiastically and socio-culturally.

<sup>25</sup> Tina Beattie, "Religious Identity and the Ethics of Representation: The Study of Religion and Gender in the Secular Academy" in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, T. Beattie and U. King, eds. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 65-78.

<sup>26</sup> See for example, Chandra T. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61-88; Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Uma Narayan. "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Woman." In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, edited by S.G. Harding, S.G. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 213-224.



## THE URGENCY FOR A DECOLONIAL STUDY OF ORTHODOX TRADITIONS

This approach is especially vital in regards to Orthodox societies due to the particular nature of this tradition. The Orthodox Church not only has a distinct theology, but historically acted with a missionary spirit, engaging cautiously with pre-existing social and political systems with the aim to transcend them and to consolidate the Christian message among new converts. In some cases, the early Church was accommodating if it was felt that local systems did not hinder the Christian message to develop,<sup>27</sup> or if a non-confrontation approach was necessary to avoid exacerbating risks for the new converts. Consequently, pre-existing social systems did not entirely disappear and vestiges carried into the new Christian communities. Church Fathers who lived in subsequent eras were not oblivious to these customary or normative understandings and attitudes that persisted and condemned them openly, such as when Chrysostom spoke against slavery among his audiences, or other instances.<sup>28</sup>

Such a history-based and context-sensitive approach is pertinent also to subsequent communities of Orthodox Christians and the national Churches that eventually emerged.<sup>29</sup> Socio-cultural, economic and political realities specific to the histories of what have been traditionally Orthodox societies mediated both the ways in which theology was pronounced by Church hierarchies or communicated through the clergy and the extent to which the faithful could embody the Orthodox worldview in everyday life.<sup>30</sup> It should be recognised also that the traditional prominence of the Orthodox Church in these societies deemed religious discourse susceptible to appropriation by different parties for political, socio-cultural and other vested interests, contributing to further distortions. Still, such discursive deployments need to be differentiated from the historical experience-based Orthodox

<sup>27</sup> This tactic is exemplified in the instance where Paul used the Greek inscription of worship 'To An Unknown God' in order to introduce to the Athenians the Christian message of salvation (Acts 17:23).

<sup>28</sup> It is worth citing also Gregory the Theologian who, referring to the asymmetrical law that stipulated punishment for an adulterous woman but no punishment for an adulterous man, said characteristically: "Τι δήποτε γὰρ τὸ μὲν θήλυ ἐκόλασαν, τὸ δὲ ἄρρεν ἐπέτρεψαν; Καὶ γυνὴ μὲν κακῶς βουλευσαμένη περὶ κοίτην ἀνδρός μοιχάται καὶ πικρά ἐντεύθεν τὰ τῶν νόμων ἐπιτίμια, ἀνὴρ δὲ καταπορνεύων γυναικὸς ἀνεύθυνος; Οὐ δέχομαι ταύτην τὴν νομοθεσίαν, οὐκ ἐπαινώ τὴν συνήθειαν. Ἄνδρες ἦσαν οἱ νομοθετοῦντες, διὰ τοῦτο κατὰ γυναικῶν ἡ νομοθεσία." This roughly translates as: "For what reason they punish the woman but they forgive the man? When the woman insults the spousal bed she commits adultery and the law punishes her with heavy sentences; when the man goes with other women why is he left unpunished? I do not accept this legislation and I condemn this convention. Those who created the laws were men and this is why legislation turns against women." See *Patrologiae Graecae Tomus XXXVI: St. Gregorius Nazianzenus. ΛΟΓΟΣ ΑΖ'* (Migne, 1858).

<sup>29</sup> It must be mentioned that while the Orthodox Church is a single ecclesiastical body, demarcations into national Churches occurred as issues of national identity became salient. Currently there are various national Churches that follow the Orthodox tradition and are in communion, such as the Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, and so on. Many of these Churches extend beyond their national boundaries as a result of missionary activity, displacements and immigration.

<sup>30</sup> For example, regarding the historically Russian Orthodox populations, Elisabeth Gassin observed that "[a]lthough these cultures may be considered traditionally Orthodox, given the modern history of these lands—which includes domination by Islamic and Communist forces that often did not allow the Church to educate its children fully—one may question how deeply an Orthodox ethos has penetrated such societies." See Elisabeth Gassin, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Men's Violence against Women" in *Religion and Men's Violence against Women*, A. Johnson, ed. (Springer: New York, 2015), 165.

*phronema* which the Church Fathers/saints consistently embodied and conveyed in their works, despite each having lived in different eras and societal conditions.

It is the proposition of this paper that explications of Orthodox theology as provided in Chrysostom's commentaries need to be given due attention as they could help to alleviate pernicious societal attitudes and norms regarding women and marriage in Orthodox societies. Such attitudes have been reported for tradition-oriented Orthodox communities and these include tendencies to emphasise honour that can lead men to become controlling or abusive with females, exceeding preoccupation with women's chastity but not men's, expectations that women should fulfil household works and meet the needs of the husband at all times, or emphasis on male authority.<sup>31</sup> Such attitudes have also been associated with various forms of conjugal violence in Orthodox societies.<sup>32</sup> These are well-known customary attitudes in tradition-oriented Orthodox societies and may emanate either from lack of familiarity with Orthodox theology or an extreme emphasis on aspects of life that appear to be valued also within the faith (such as marriage or the family).<sup>33</sup> It is the position of this author that resources for alleviating these misunderstandings cannot be cosmologically alien, but must emanate from within these same traditions so that they can speak to the insiders' logic effectively and motivate local attitudinal and normative changes.

This rationale is enforced by the consideration that the large majority of Orthodox believers have espoused an ancient cosmology that has been rather suspicious of western gender norms and modern standards of life. This suspicion is expected to have increased in recent years that western gender metaphysics have steadily moved toward a secular philosophical worldview, some strands of which have predicated gender equality on gender fluidity<sup>34</sup> while other strands have criticised marriage and the family as a locus of female subordination.<sup>35</sup> Contrary to this, the Orthodox faithful, generally speaking, have not only espoused a faith-based cosmology premised on a divinely-instituted gender binary system,

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<sup>31</sup> See also Gassin, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity," 2015, 163-175; Paulette Geanacopoulos, *Domestic Violence: A Training Manual for the Greek Orthodox Community* (New York: Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society, Inc., 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Regarding conjugal violence, physical, sexual and psychological forms of abuse have been reported to affect tradition-oriented Orthodox societies such as Greece, Russia and the former soviet republics, and Orthodox diaspora communities living in the US, Australia, Canada and the UK. See Gassin, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity," 2015, 163-175; Andrew Stickley et al., "Attitudes Toward Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Moscow, Russia, *Journal of Family Violence* 23 (2008): 448; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Violence against Women: An EU-wide Survey," 2014, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

<sup>33</sup> While these attitudes do not emanate from Orthodox theology, they might have been unwittingly enforced through the discourses of Church hierarchies and clergy when the preservation of the family is pronounced without the proper qualifications and clarifications.

<sup>34</sup> These strands appear to have been influenced by theorists who have been particularly influential in gender theory in recent times, such as (but not limited to) the works of Judith Butler [For example, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993)].

<sup>35</sup> See for example, Elizabeth Brake, "Marriage and Domestic Partnership," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/marriage/>; Clare Chambers, "The Marriage-Free State," [https://www.academia.edu/11480382/The\\_Marriage-Free\\_State](https://www.academia.edu/11480382/The_Marriage-Free_State).

but have appraised this through the prism of Orthodox Soteriology that considers this binary a mandatory condition for achieving salvation.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is not claimed in this paper that Chrysostom's teachings as have been understood in the Orthodox tradition would necessarily align with or respond to western feminist critiques of Christian theology.<sup>37</sup> However, they comprise a resource that emanates from within the Orthodox cosmology that can 'speak' to Orthodox populations directly and could 'correct' customary attitudes, especially if premised on distorted religious ideals.

## APPRAISING CHRYSOSTOM'S WORKS THROUGH THE ORTHODOX PHRONEMA

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As it was explained, Orthodoxy pertains to the upright (ortho-) faith or belief (doxa) which was revealed to the disciples of Christ at Pentecost. Part of this faith has been preserved in written form through the Holy Scriptures. However, in Orthodox tradition the unwritten Holy Tradition which was perpetuated through the life of the Church and embodied in the experience of the saints has been equally important and complementary to the written revelations. The Holy Scriptures validate the importance of the Holy Tradition, while the Holy Tradition confirms and reinforces the revelations of the Holy Scriptures. This Holy Tradition was not altered, but has been preserved in its essence as inherited by Christ. It includes the teachings of Orthodox Church Fathers, the Synodical decisions of the Church

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<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, it is recognised that many feminists' concern with issues of gender fluidity are important and need to be considered, especially in Orthodox societies where such issues were traditionally more taboo. The topic of gender fluidity (usually understood among the Orthodox in conjunction with homosexuality since gender identity has been generally perceived to incorporate/determine sexuality in this cosmology) is a subtle one and cannot be possibly addressed here. The emphasis in this paper has been placed on issues concerning women in view of marriage and the conjugal relationship, which Chrysostom's commentaries have been especially influential on. Suffice it to say that the Orthodox Church embraces all humans, but it also accepts the binary gender as a sacred trust not to be violated. Within the Orthodox cosmology, any gender proclivities that deviate from the natural order that was divinely instituted (Mark 10:5-6; Genesis 1:27-1:31) have tended to be understood as comprising temptations/sinful acts like all other in the sense that they emphasise worldly indulgences that do not accord with God's laws, hindering thus continuous communion with God and *theosis*.

<sup>37</sup> It is not denied that western feminist critiques of Christianity are important and merit consideration. Among other things, western feminists have criticised the language used in Christian teachings (such as male headship, female submission, Eve and the disobedience, androcentric perspectives, the prioritisation of patriarchal figures, etc.) for having contributed to foster the development of harmful masculinities and pernicious attitudes toward women. These are serious concerns, and as it was recognised, even among the Orthodox religious discourses might have been enforced in distorted ways for vested interests. However, these concerns do not alter the fact that Orthodox theology developed in a distinct epistemological framework that was neither gender-exclusive nor centred on intellectualism. Since arbitrary interpretation was not encouraged in this tradition, Orthodox theology did not offer the same grounds for sexist 'interpretations.' In other words, the same language and symbolic images were understood within a very different cosmological framework, as will be evidenced below.

Councils<sup>38</sup> and other elements that have defined the liturgical life of the ancient Orthodox Church.

At the core of this Holy Tradition is the very soteriological aim of the Orthodox faith to heal the corruption of the human nature that was incurred following the disobedience of the first-fashioned couple and their expulsion from heaven.<sup>39</sup> In the Orthodox Church, the faithful aim to achieve likeness with God and salvation by achieving uninterrupted communion with God by participating in the Sacraments and living a life of Orthodox *ascesis*. Following St Maximos the Confessor, this therapeutic pathway has been described as purification, enlightenment and *theosis*<sup>40</sup>. As the faithful undergoes purification, she begins to be enlightened and to obtain insight into divine mysteries. This awakening of the *nous*<sup>41</sup> to the grace and wisdom of God is what the Orthodox tradition has identified with 'noetic' theology. In other words, theology in this tradition has not been predicated on reason or intellect, which has been equated to an androcentric perspective within much western feminist critique, but rather on the enlightenment of the *nous*.

The implication of this 'noetic' Soteriology and theology is that women had no reasons to be excluded from this Holy Tradition. In fact, women were as much involved in the preservation and embodiment of apostolic teachings as were men. Readers should not be led to believe that theology was gender-exclusive on the premise that the actual articulation of theology was dominated by males, which has ecclesiastical and socio-cultural explanations.<sup>42</sup> It is undisputed that the Orthodox Church has historically venerated both female and male prophets and saints, with the Virgin Mary being considered the Holiest of all the Holy. In

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<sup>38</sup> This is best exemplified in the Church's Patristic tradition and in the Ecumenical Synods of the Church. The Synodical decisions were considered valid because of the Holy Fathers who participated in them, who were proven to be holy due to being steady in their faith and echoing apostolic teachings. Therefore, Chrysostom's commentaries have been considered Orthodox not because he was a convincing homilist, but because he echoed apostolic teachings through the grace of the Holy Spirit who dwelled in him.

<sup>39</sup> Within this tradition, it is understood that the first-fashioned couple was made in the image and likeness of God. As a result of the fall from heaven, the latter prospect was not fulfilled. The Orthodox are called to become one with God and to fulfil the potential that God had in mind when He fashioned them. In this strife, the Orthodox must face their sin-prone nature which carries the marks of the expulsion from heaven (physical desires, genetic inclinations, idiosyncrasies, temperament, etc.). This struggle is exacerbated by the works of Satan and his fallen angels who are the eternal enemies of God and humanity. Satan may attack the cognitive, emotive and affective functions of the human individual to tempt the latter into sinful acts that ultimately distance the believer from God and His grace. The faithful are called to overcome these attacks and temptations through prayer, *ascesis* and the cultivation of the Orthodox *phronema*. This should ultimately result in the achievement of meekness and love that emanates from a full union with God.

<sup>40</sup> 'θεωσις'; translates verbatim as 'making divine' or 'deification.'

<sup>41</sup> 'νοῦς'; might be thought of as the rational core of the human soul, as differentiated from the intellect. It has also been called the 'eye of the soul.'

<sup>42</sup> This is probably explained by the fact that males already held more prominence in the early societies and women were generally dedicated to the life of the household and child-rearing. In addition, in the Orthodox traditions only men could serve in the role of priests and this provided an additional platform for prolific teaching, such as in the case of Chrysostom. However, it should be noted that while the Orthodox Church has traditionally preserved the priestly order for men, this has been explained in reference to theological reasons that do not suggest an ontological male superiority. This is one issue that has attracted attention in contemporary debates among some strands of Orthodox scholars.

addition, there have been instances where female saints have explicated divine mysteries to male saints with extraordinary theological clarity,<sup>43</sup> and have been considered authoritative to settle doctrinal Church positions among male clergies.<sup>44</sup>

Chrysostom's homilies should be assessed within this comprehensive Orthodox cosmology, which he echoed and enforced through his commentaries. In accordance with apostolic teachings, Chrysostom taught the full spiritual equality of men and women and seemed to grant women a higher capacity to create an environment of spiritual renewal and growth in their homes for their husbands and their families.<sup>45</sup> Simultaneously, as it was cautioned, his commentaries should not be isolated from the context in which he lived and the conditions of the faithful and especially of women in the times during which he spoke his homilies.<sup>46</sup> It is to be apprehended that his pastoral concern led to some concessions or adaptations in the expression and rhetorical strategies of the saint to make himself relevant and convincing to his audience.<sup>47</sup>

To appraise this tradition through the Orthodox *phronema* is to understand that the Orthodox tradition does not consider the saints infallible and understands that there should be *accord* among their teachings, which should echo the apostolic didascalia. For other matters that are not directly doctrinal or theological, the teachings of the Church Fathers are taken as suggestive. It is upon the faithful and their own Orthodox *diakrisis*<sup>48</sup> to decide how these teachings reflect on their own life. Reading through the Orthodox *phronema* means to understand all the aforementioned characteristics of the Orthodox tradition and these

<sup>43</sup> As exemplified in the dialogue that bedridden St Macrina had with her brother Gregory Nyssa on the state of the soul which enforced his steadiness in the faith. Notably, Gregory of Nyssa considered St. Macrina his 'teacher'.

<sup>44</sup> As exemplified at the fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in Bithynia (AD 451) when the final decision about Christology was made by a miracle of the deceased local saint Euthemia.

<sup>45</sup> David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. Chrysostom* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> See for example, Deborah F. Sawyer, *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>47</sup> It is thus not denied that Chrysostom seemed inclined to believe that the female sex was inherently more delicate or weaker, such as in instances where he said that the woman needs more understanding and condescension. (*In Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20). He also seemed to suggest at various occasions that women could be more talkative, frivolous or superficial (*De Virginitate*, Paragraph 40). These comments should be appraised in consideration of women's realities in the early centuries. Since females in the pre-Christian times had been generally treated as lesser than men, it is understood that they had consistently lacked opportunities for education and refinement of thought, which could have made them susceptible to such proclivities, as well as enforced the general idea of them being less intellectual. However, while Chrysostom showed these proclivities, he attributed to men their own share of negative tendencies, such as irascibility, arrogance and abusiveness (*De Virginitate*, Paragraph 40). In speaking this way, Chrysostom was ultimately trying to help females and males recognise commonplace spousal defects and cultivate a Christian ethos in their marriage, which he considered essential to achieve the soteriological ends of the union. (See "Ο Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος και η Οικογενειακή Ζωή του Αρχιμ. Εφραίμ, Καθηγούμενου Ιεράς Μεγίστης Μονής Βατοπαιδίου. Πηγή: Περιοδικό 'Πεμπτουσία' Νο 25," republished by OODE, April 18, 2008,

[http://www.oodegr.com/oode/koinwnia/oikogeneia/xrysost\\_oikog\\_zwi1.htm](http://www.oodegr.com/oode/koinwnia/oikogeneia/xrysost_oikog_zwi1.htm)).

<sup>48</sup> 'διάκρισις'; translates as 'discernment'. It is understood that one cultivates this through prayer and Orthodox *ascesis*.



nuanced hermeneutical particularities, which only personal exposure to the tradition could grant. While the logic of the tradition may be penetrated by reading established Church Fathers or modern Church scholars who have summarised the Orthodox cosmology faithfully, unless this 'reading' is complemented by an insight into the experience-based conscience of the Orthodox Church, the tradition cannot be grasped in full.

This ultimately draws attention to the importance of personal positionality, indicating also the unique intervention that this article can make to the relevant disciplines. It is important to recognise that the author writes from the perspective of an Orthodox insider who has studied and experienced this tradition in everyday life across multiple cultural contexts.<sup>49</sup> While the following presentation is not without shortfalls, it can serve as a modest attempt to provide a delineation of an experiential realm that western gender scholars of religion(s) appear to have had little familiarity with.

## METHODOLOGY

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The analysis in this paper was premised on a careful reading of Chrysostom's commentaries referring to man-woman relations, especially in the context of marriage and conjugal abuse. The author read in full over twenty homilies in the original Greek of which seven were cited in this work.<sup>50</sup> The identification of which homilies to scrutinise was premised on: a) biblical verses that referred to man-woman relations and marriage which usually pertained to the epistles of Paul, and b) on pertinent references made by previous works on Chrysostom written in either English or modern Greek. While the study cannot be considered comprehensive, an attempt was made to summarise what would be considered essential understandings in the Orthodox tradition pertinent to the themes examined here.

As a principle, the original Greek passages or terminologies that were selected for citation were included in footnotes. This was deliberate and emanates from the overall argument of this paper that religious traditions ought to be approached within their proper epistemological frameworks, of which the indigenous language makes an essential component. In general, the English translations that were consulted in preparation of this paper did not make transparent always their logic/method for translating Chrysostom. Translation, however, should be considered a crucial stage due to the malleability of the Greek language and the ways in which the Church Fathers tended to redefine terms that were previously widely in usage.<sup>51</sup> Due to limited space, it was not possible to provide such an exercise here. References are made to available works where the reader can find an

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<sup>49</sup> The author was born in the Republic of Moldova and was raised and educated in Greece. Both countries have been traditionally Orthodox, albeit socio-cultural specificities.

<sup>50</sup> These were accessed through the Index of Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* made available online by the initiative of the Aegean University, Department of Cultural Technology and Communication.

<sup>51</sup> Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspective on the Nature of the Human Person* (New York: St Vladimir's Press, 1987), 16.



English translation. However, the author's altered/adapted renderings in English of all the passages cited in the text and in the footnotes are readily available upon request.<sup>52</sup>

An important terminological comment that needs to be made regards the translation of the term 'γάμος' which has been rendered in most existing works uniformly as 'marriage.' It was felt that giving this translation in all instances that Chrysostom used the word would risk obscuring the expansion in the meaning of 'γάμος' when it was employed to refer to the post-fall condition (after the disobedience of the first couple and the expulsion from heaven). In commentaries referring to the non-existent relations of man and woman in the heavenly state, Chrysostom clearly used the word 'γάμος' to refer to the lack of carnal attraction and sexual union.<sup>53</sup> Following the fall from heaven, however, this primal carnal attraction acquired the understanding of marriage as sacramental and spiritual bond which was intended for the salvation of the fallen humanity. Under Chrysostomean logic, God apprehended the fall and had providentially created the close bond between man and woman (with woman originating from man) that would provide the substructure for marriage to serve the ends of salvation in the post-fall condition. It follows from this that whichever spousal dynamics Chrysostom considered ideal for marriage, he strictly referred to the post-fall married state and this differed from man-woman relations in the heavenly state and the state of virginity.

## AN OVERVIEW OF CHRYSOSTOM'S TEACHINGS

To understand Chrysostom's positions on man-woman relations it is important to start with his commentaries on the fashioning of Adam and Eve and their disobedience that led to their expulsion from heaven. Examining his commentaries on Genesis, makes evident that Chrysostom exerted important energy to establish that the woman was made of "like fashion" and "like honour" to the man.<sup>54</sup> He echoed emphatically the Orthodox understanding that man and woman had been originally one. In his commentaries on the Ephesians he reiterated this<sup>55</sup> and mentioned how content Adam was when he realised that he had a partner similar in all ways to him, exclaiming upon beholding her: "This now is bone of my bones" and "flesh of my flesh!"<sup>56</sup> Chrysostom, in fact, believed that the woman's

<sup>52</sup> It should be observed that some of the English renderings cited in the text were reproduced from existing translations by English-speaking scholars; however, minor or major changes were made to approximate better the nuances of the original according to the discernment of the author. Italics were used to signify the changes proposed.

<sup>53</sup> This reflects in the very etymology of the noun 'γάμος' which derives from the verb 'to sleep with' ('γαμέω/γαμώ').

<sup>54</sup> "πόσης εύφροσύνης αὐτοῦ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐνεπίμπλατο κοινωνῶν θεωρῶν τὴν γυναῖκα, καὶ ὁμότροπον καὶ ὁμόδοξον αὐτὴν καθεστῶσαν;" In *Genesim* (sermo 3).

<sup>55</sup> "ὥσπερ καὶ ἡ Εὐὰ σὰρξ ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς τοῦ Ἀδάμ." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>56</sup> "Ἄκουε· Τοῦτο νῦν ὁστοῦν ἐκ τῶν ὁστῶν μου, φησὶ, καὶ σὰρξ ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς μου". In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

fashioning from man was God's Providence<sup>57</sup> to ensure that under no circumstances would man look down on woman as alien to him.<sup>58</sup>

Expressing the Orthodox understanding, Chrysostom explained that prior to their disobedience Adam and Eve had existed in a relationship of comradeship and mutual help without any sexual attraction that required physical union between the two. As he spoke in his Homily on Virginity, while they were still in heaven the two had been uncorrupted like children, had direct contact with the Creator and were fully satisfied with their life in the Garden.<sup>59</sup> It was their disobedience that resulted in the corruption of their minds, which fundamentally altered also the nature of their relationship. It was at that time that the woman lost her equal authority in the Creation, initially granted to her by God in being fashioned alike to Adam. Chrysostom explained that due to her weak judgement which contributed to their disobedience she was thenceforth consigned to be dependent on her husband.<sup>60</sup> However he ventured to clarify that this was not meant as punishment, but as an act of Providence by a merciful God who knew that the fall from heaven would put the woman in much terror and risk. He explained:

And notice God's benevolence here. For lest when she heard the word, "He shall rule over you," she might imagine them to mean a burdensome tyranny, God puts the words of caring first. He did this by saying, "You will depend on your husband," that is to say, "He is your refuge, your haven, and your security: he shall be these things to you. Amid all life's daily terrors, I give you the right to turn to him, to take refuge in him." And not only to her [He allowed these], but also he joined the two with physical needs just as in an unbroken bond, arraying the chain with desire. You see how sin introduced woman's subjection, but God, so ingenious and wise, used the result of sin for our benefit?<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Original being 'οικονομία.' This is another important concept within Orthodox cosmology and pertains to the understanding that some things that may not be in line with Orthodox ideals are allowed providentially or temporarily for the sake of securing an unseen spiritual benefit and, ultimately, salvation.

<sup>58</sup> His emphasis on both the flesh ('σάρκος') and the bones ('ὀστών') betrayed his intention not to leave any doubt that woman was made in every way similar to man.

<sup>59</sup> "Πλασθεὶς δὲ ἐκεῖνος ἔμεινεν ἐν παραδείσῳ καὶ γάμου λόγος οὐδεὶς ἦν. Ἐδέησεν αὐτῷ γενέσθαι καὶ βοηθόν, καὶ ἐγένετο, καὶ οὐδὲ οὕτως ὁ γάμος ἀναγκαῖος εἶναι ἐδόκει. Ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἐφαίνετό που, ἀλλ' ἔμενον ἐκεῖνοι τούτου χωρὶς καθάπερ ἐν οὐρανῷ τῷ παραδείσῳ διαιτῶμενοι καὶ ἐντροφῶντες τῇ πρὸς Θεὸν ὁμιλίᾳ. Μίξεως δὲ ἐπιθυμία καὶ σύλληψις καὶ ὠδίνες καὶ τόκοι καὶ πᾶν εἶδος φθορᾶς ἐξώριστο τῆς ἐκείνων ψυχῆς." In *De virginitate*, Paragraph 14. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 109.

<sup>60</sup> "Ἐποίησά σε, φησὶν, ὁμότιμον· οὐκ ἐχρήσω καλῶς τῇ ἀρχῇ· μετάβηθι πρὸς τὴν ὑποταγὴν. Οὐκ ἤνεγκας τὴν ἐλευθερίαν, καταδέξαι τὴν δουλείαν. Οὐκ οἶδας ἄρχειν, καὶ δι' αὐτῆς τῶν πραγμάτων ἔδειξας τῆς πείρας· γενοῦ τῶν ἀρχομένων, καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ἐπίγνωθι κύριον. Πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα σου ἡ ἀποστροφή σου, καὶ αὐτός σου κυριεύσει." In *Genesim Sermones*, Homily 4. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 30.

<sup>61</sup> "Καὶ ὅρα Θεοῦ ἐναυθα φιλανθρωπίαν. Ἴνα γὰρ μὴ ἀκούσασα τὸ, Αὐτός σου κυριεύσει, φορτικὴν εἶναι νομίση τὴν δεσποτείαν, πρότερον τὸ τῆς κηδεμονίας ἔθηκεν ὄνομα εἰπών, Πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα σου ἡ ἀποστροφή σου, τουτέστιν, Ἡ καταφυγὴ σου καὶ ὁ λιμὴν καὶ ἡ ἀσφάλεια ἐκεῖνος ἔσται σοι· ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἐπιούσι δεινοῖς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ἀποστρέφου καὶ καταφεύγειν σοι δίδωμι. Οὐ ταύτη δὲ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ φυσικαῖς αὐτοὺς συνέδησεν ἀνάγκαις καθάπερ ἄρρηκτόν τινα δεσμόν, τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας περιβαλὼν αὐτοῖς ἄλυσιν. Εἶδες πῶς εἰσήγαγε μὲν τὴν ὑποταγὴν ἢ ἁμαρτία, ὁ δὲ εὐμήχανος καὶ σοφὸς Θεὸς καὶ τούτοις πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον ἡμῶν ἀπεχρήσατο;" In *Genesim Sermones*, Homily 4. Original translation in Miller, *Women*, 30 with underlined alterations.

To ensure that the woman's loss of authority did not expose her to more terror and vulnerability which the expulsion from Paradise was expected to bring, the Provident God instilled in the fallen pair natural desire for each other. In this new dynamic, the husband was made the wife's head so as to act as her refuge, while her 'natural' (post-fall) inclination toward him and his 'natural' (post-fall) desire for her were instilled by the caring God to increase the likelihood that their bond would be one of love and trust and would not turn into a bond of intimidation. This was apprehended to happen in view of humanity's susceptibility to sinfulness in the post-fall condition and Satan's perennial efforts to interfere with humanity's salvation.

It needs to be underscored here that while the subordination of Eve was traced back to the original disobedience, for which she had the largest share, this was never meant to inculcate her alone. In fact, Chrysostom appeared to hold Adam equally responsible, as evident in places where he observed that had it not been for Adam's disobedience, there would have been no necessity to preserve mankind in the first place.<sup>62</sup> At other times he referred generically to the disobedience of the "first human."<sup>63</sup> His approach reflects rather faithfully the Orthodox *phronema* within which more emphasis has been traditionally placed on rectifying the consequences of the fall rather than on attributing blame.

Within Orthodox tradition, following the fall, salvation could be achieved either by living a virginal, ascetic life or by marrying. Both these pathways have been considered honourable and have been protected by the Orthodox Church vehemently against multiple historical heresies. However, there were reasons for which Chrysostom held that the ascetic life was higher and nobler than the married life. This followed from his understanding that the physical attraction and carnal union of man and woman had resulted from the disobedience of the first couple<sup>64</sup> and had become necessary only because of humanity's 'infirmity.'<sup>65</sup> On the contrary, virginity had existed before the fall, and also in the angels.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, according to him one would aspire to live in virginity if one wanted to be as close as possible to the heavenly state.

In Chrysostom's commentaries virginal life was also perceived to be freer from worldly worries, which married life could not possibly avoid. In the recluse life, one would strive for the salvation of one's soul and could devote oneself entirely to spiritual work, but in the

<sup>62</sup> "Ὡσπερ οὖν τότε ἀπὸ νεκρῶν σωμάτων τοσαύταις μυριάσι δέδωκεν ὑπόθεσιν καὶ ρίζαν ὁ Θεός, οὕτω καὶ παρὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰ τοῖς προστάγμασιν αὐτοῦ πεισθέντες οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἀδὰμ τῆς ἡδονῆς ἐκράτησαν τοῦ ξύλου, οὐκ ἂν ἠπόρησεν ὁδοῦ δι' ἧς τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος αὐξήσει." De Virginitate, Paragraph 15. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 110.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, in Genesim (sermo 3) where he mentions the first human "τὸν πρῶτον ἄνθρωπον" who failing to keep the fast, lost Paradise. While the etymology of the word 'ἄνθρωπος' ('human' in Greek) has been disputed, it is often associated with 'ἄνδρ-ωπος' which refers roughly to 'one who had the look of a man (ἀνήρ).' Chrysostom seemed to use 'human' and 'man' distinctively so it is unlikely that he referred here only to Adam. Even so, this would only strengthen the argument that he did not speak of the disobedience exclusively as being Eve's responsibility.

<sup>64</sup> "Ἀπὸ τῆς παρακοῆς, ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρᾶς, ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου. Ὅπου γὰρ θάνατος, ἐκεῖ γάμος." De Virginitate, Paragraph 14. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 109.

<sup>65</sup> Original being "ἀσθένειαν."

<sup>66</sup> "Ἄλλ' οὐχ ἡ παρθενία ταύτην ἔχει τὴν ἀκολουθίαν ἀλλ' αἰεὶ χρῆσιμον, αἰεὶ καλὸν καὶ μακάριον καὶ πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου καὶ μετὰ τὸν θάνατον καὶ πρὸ τοῦ γάμου καὶ μετὰ τὸν γάμον," De Virginitate, Paragraph 14.

married life, a man and woman would have to concern themselves with worldly necessities and would need to worry about the material wellbeing and spiritual progression of both themselves and other family members. Moreover, for a marriage to be in God the married would need to act as if they were not married at all, which echoed Paul's commandment to the Corinthians: "Let those who have wives live as though they have none."<sup>67</sup> Thus, asked Chrysostom: "What occasion to take up such a load, when even after taking it you must use it as having it not?"<sup>68</sup>

He proceeded to explain that marriage should be understood as a mystery that was intended to assist men and women to overcome sin and to achieve holiness. Marriage, as a monogamous bond, could safeguard against fornication and prostitution, temptations that the Orthodox Church has acknowledged to have a stronghold on all fallen humanity and to impede the process to a union with God and salvation. Chrysostom explained that this aim of marriage was not always articulated as such, but originally more emphasis had been placed on procreation.<sup>69</sup> After the fall, there was a necessity for humanity to secure the reproduction of their species and fulfil the divine plan for salvation. However, the more fundamental objective of the marriage bond that God had apprehended was to alleviate humanity's harmful desires that served as obstacles to overcoming sin in the fallen state.<sup>70</sup> Chrysostom enforced this point by referring to the example of Abraham and Sara who had lived most of their married life childless. He observed that Abraham's marriage to Sara had not secured him the child he had earnestly hoped for.<sup>71</sup> This underscored his understanding that it was not by means of marriage and carnal union that people multiplied, but by God's commandment "Be fertile and multiply." In other words, Chrysostom observed that had God's aim been procreation alone, He would have not needed to provide the mystery of marriage. Subsequently, marriage must have been intended for a more profound purpose,

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<sup>67</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:29 (ESV).

<sup>68</sup> "τί χρη λαβεῖν τοσοῦτον ὄγκον, ὅταν καὶ μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν οὕτω δεοὶ χρῆσθαι, ὡς μὴ ἔχοντα;" In *Epistulam i ad Corinthios*, Homily 19. Original translation from Schaff, *NPNF1-12*, 194.

<sup>69</sup> "Ὅτι πάλαι μὲν τῷ γάμῳ δύο προφάσεις, νῦν δὲ μία. Ἐδόθη μὲν οὖν καὶ παιδοποιῶς ἕνεκεν ὁ γάμος· πολλῶ δὲ πλέον ὑπὲρ τοῦ σβέσαι τὴν τῆς φύσεως πύρωσιν. Καὶ μάρτυς ὁ Παῦλος λέγων· «Διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἔχεται», οὐ διὰ τὰς παιδοποιῶς. Καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συνέρχεσθαι κελεύει οὐχ ἵνα πατέρες γένωνται παίδων πολλῶν, ἀλλὰ τί; «Ἴνα μὴ πειράζη ὑμᾶς ὁ σατανᾶς», φησί. Καὶ προελθὼν δὲ οὐκ εἶπεν· εἰ δὲ ἐπιθυμοῦσι παίδων, ἀλλὰ τί; «Εἰ δὲ μὴ ἐγκρατεύονται, γαμησάτωσαν.» Παρὰ μὲν γὰρ τὴν ἀρχὴν, ὅπερ ἔφην, δύο ταύτας εἶχε τὰς ὑποθέσεις· ὕστερον δὲ πληρωθείσης καὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ τῆς θαλάττης καὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης πάσης μία λείπεται πρόφασις αὐτοῦ μόνη, ἡ τῆς ἀκολασίας καὶ ἡ τῆς ἀσελγείας ἀναίρεσις." De *Virginitate*, Paragraph 19. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 113.

<sup>70</sup> Predicting that he could be blamed for denigrating the laws of Moses, Chrysostom reassuringly explained: "Κακίζω μὲν οὐδαμῶς· Θεὸς γὰρ αὐτὰ συνεχώρησε καὶ γέγονεν ἐν καιρῷ χρήσιμα. Μικρὰ δὲ αὐτὰ εἶναι φημι, καὶ παίδων κατορθώματα μᾶλλον ἢ ἀνδρῶν. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἡμᾶς τελείους ὁ Χριστὸς δημιουργῆσαι βουλόμενος ἐκεῖνα μὲν ἀποθέσθαι ἐκέλευσεν, ὡσπερ ἱμάτια παιδικὰ καὶ οὐ δυνάμενα περιβάλλειν τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν τέλειον οὐδὲ τὸ μέτρον κοσμήσαι τῆς ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὰ δὲ ἐκείνων εὐπρεπέστερα καὶ τελειότερα περιθέσθαι ἐκέλευσεν, οὐκ ἀντινομοθετῶν ἑαυτῷ ἀλλὰ καὶ σφόδρα ἀκολουθῶν." De *Virginitate*, Paragraph 16. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 110-111.

<sup>71</sup> "Καὶ νῦν δὲ οὐχ ἡ τοῦ γάμου δύναμις τὸ γένος συγκροτεῖ τὸ ἡμέτερον ἀλλ' ὁ τοῦ κυρίου λόγος ὁ παρὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰπὼν· «Αὐξάνεσθαι καὶ πληθύνεσθαι καὶ πληρώσατε τὴν γῆν.» Τί γάρ, εἰπέ μοι, τὸν Ἀβραάμ εἰς παιδοποιῶν τὸ πρᾶγμα ὤνησεν; Οὐκ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτοις αὐτῷ χρησάμενος ἔτει ταύτην ὕστερον ἀφῆκε τὴν φωνήν· 'Δέσποτα, τί μοι δώσεις; Ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπολύομαι ἄτεκνος.'" De *Virginitate*, Paragraph 15. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 110.

which was, at its most basic articulation, to avoid and to overcome sin, such as intemperance, wanton and other states of unchastity.<sup>72</sup>

Chrysostom spoke about the union of man and woman in the context of the Orthodox marriage as a mystery and explained that it was “a bond” that had been “ordained by God.”<sup>73</sup> The fact that man was asked to leave his father and mother, who bore him and raised him in order to attach himself to a stranger evidenced to him the depth of the mystery of marriage.<sup>74</sup> The carnal union of the spouses was understood to constitute part of the mystery, which he described as follows:

They come to become one body. Here is again the mystery of love. If the two do not become one, they cannot have many offspring, as long as each remains one. But when they come in union, then they can procreate. What do we learn from this? That the strength of the bond has much power. The genius of God divided the one into two from the beginning of the creation, and wanting to show that after this division each remains one, he did not let each be adequate for procreation. Because they do not yet make one, but each half of one, and it is obvious that each alone does not procreate, exactly as before.<sup>75</sup>

Just as Adam and Eve had been initially one, the husband and wife become one in one flesh in their marriage. According to Chrysostom, after the union wife and husband are not two people, but one person as the first-fashioned human.<sup>76</sup> He furthermore added: “That is why “helper” He also calls the woman, to show that they are one.”<sup>77</sup>

In the previous comment, it is important not to take his reference to procreation to mean that the Orthodox marriage was conditioned on childbirth. Chrysostom’s point that both woman and man were essential for child-bearing was only meant to illustrate the power of the bond at its most visible manifestation. The intensity of the bond was furthermore illustrated with his discussion of romantic love:

When blessed David was mourning for Jonathan, who was of one soul with him, what comparison did he use to describe the loftiness of their love: “Your love to me

<sup>72</sup> It is important to observe that sin within Orthodox theology has never been understood legalistically or moralistically. Sin is understood as a distancing from God, which impedes the process of enlightenment and the achievement of salvation.

<sup>73</sup> “δεσμὸς ὠρισμένος παρὰ Θεοῦ.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12.

<sup>74</sup> “Ὀντως γὰρ, ὄντως μυστήριόν ἐστι, καὶ μέγα μυστήριον, ὅτι τὸν φύντα, τὸν γεννησάμενον, τὸν ἀναθρεψάμενον, τὴν ὠδινήσαντα, τὴν ταλαιπωρηθεῖσαν ἀφείς, τοὺς τὰ τσαυτὰ εὐεργετήσαντας, τοὺς ἐν συνηθείᾳ γενομένους, τῇ μηδὲ ὀφθείσῃ, μηδὲ κοινόν τι ἐχούσῃ πρὸς αὐτὸν προσκολλᾶται, καὶ πάντων αὐτὴν προτιμᾷ. Μυστήριον ὄντως ἐστί. Καὶ οἱ γονεῖς τούτων γινομένων οὐκ ἄχθονται, ἀλλὰ μὴ γινομένων μᾶλλον· καὶ χρημάτων ἀναλίσκομένων καὶ δαπάνης γινομένης, ἥδονται.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>75</sup> “Ἐρχονται ἐν σῶμα γενησόμενοι. Ἰδοὺ πάλιν ἀγάπης μυστήριον. Ἄν οἱ δύο μὴ γένωνται ἐν, οὐκ ἐργάζονται πολλοὺς, ἕως ἂν δύο μένωσιν· ὅταν δὲ εἰς ἐνότητα ἔλθωσι, τότε ἐργάζονται. Τί μανθάνομεν ἀπὸ τούτου; Ὅτι πολλῆ τῆς ἐνώσεως ἡ ἰσχὺς. Τὸ εὐμήχανον τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν ἕνα εἰς δύο διεῖλε παρὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν, καὶ θέλων δεῖξαι ὅτι μετὰ τὸ διαιρεθῆναι καὶ εἷς μένει, οὐκ ἀφῆκεν ἕνα ἀρκεῖν πρὸς τὴν γέννησιν. Οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν εἷς [ὁ] οὐδέπω, ἀλλ’ ἤμισυ τοῦ ἐνός· καὶ δῆλον, ὅτι οὐ παιδοποιεῖ, καθάπερ καὶ πρότερον.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12. Translation with reference to the modern Greek in *Παιδαγωγική*, p. 22

<sup>76</sup> “Ἐνὶ τῇ γὰρ καὶ ἀνὴρ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἄνθρωποι δύο, ἀλλ’ ἄνθρωπος εἷς.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12.

<sup>77</sup> “Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ βοηθὸν καλεῖ, ἵνα δεῖξῃ ὅτι ἐν εἰσι.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12.



was wonderful, passing the love of women.” The power of this love (*the love between man and woman*) is truly stronger than any passion; other desires may be strong, but this alone never fades. This (*romantic*) love is deeply planted within the inmost being. Unnoticed by us, it attracts the bodies of men and women to each other, because in the beginning woman came forth from man, and from man and woman other men and women proceed.<sup>78</sup>

Chrysostom explained that the force of the love between man and woman was exemplified in the fact that Adam was given to unite with Eve, who herself was his flesh.<sup>79</sup> This original closeness was evoked to justify the strength of the heterosexual love, which attracted unrelated men and women to each other. Any disruption of this physical union or the dedicated love of the spouses was expected to spoil the bond of marriage itself. This was especially pronounced when Chrysostom compared the repercussions of being married to a non-believer and someone committing adultery. While being married to an “idolatress” did not spoil the marital bond because the believing spouse sanctified the unbeliever, adultery could destroy the adulterous spouse’s marriage rights.<sup>80</sup> Chrysostom’s comment was not made for purposes of condemning those who succumbed to these practices, since within the faith deep remorse can transcend any sin and wrongdoing, but rather to emphasise again that the power of the conjugal relationship lies in the exclusivity of the marriage bond.

Chrysostom was adamant that the union of the spouses had to be experienced in the faith. As he said, “[t]his then is marriage when it takes place according to Christ, spiritual marriage, and spiritual birth, not of blood, nor of travail, nor of the will of the flesh.”<sup>81</sup> Experiencing marriage as a spiritual relationship would require approaching marriage as a Sacrament that aims toward salvation and living with one’s spouse according to one’s duty to God to achieve that. In his commentaries, Chrysostom discussed the conjugal duties in detail, echoing Paul’s command: “Women submit to your own husbands, as if to the Lord, for the man is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the Church, and He is Himself

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<sup>78</sup> “Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τις τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν ἀγάπην δηλῶν μακάριος ἀνὴρ, καὶ τινα τῶν αὐτῷ φίλων καὶ ὁμοψύχων πενθῶν, οὐ πατέρα εἶπεν, οὐ μητέρα, οὐ τέκνον, οὐκ ἀδελφόν, οὐ φίλον, ἀλλὰ τί; Ἔπεσεν ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ἡ ἀγάπησίς σου, φησὶν, ὡς ἀγάπησίς τῶν γυναικῶν. Ὅντως γὰρ, ὄντως πάσης τυραννίδος αὕτη ἡ ἀγάπη τυραννικωτέρα. Αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλαι, σφοδραὶ αὕτη δὲ ἡ ἐπιθυμία ἔχει καὶ τὸ σφοδρὸν, καὶ τὸ ἀμάραντον. Ἔνεστι γὰρ τις ἔρωσ ἐμφωλεύων τῇ φύσει, καὶ λανθάνων ἡμᾶς συμπλέκει ταῦτα τὰ σώματα. Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἡ γυνή, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ καὶ γυνή. In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 43-44 with underlined alterations.

<sup>79</sup> “Ὁρᾶς σύνδεσμον καὶ συμπλοκὴν, καὶ πῶς οὐκ ἀφῆκεν ἐτέραν ἐπεισελθεῖν οὐσίαν ἐξωθεν; Καὶ ὄρα πόσα ὠκονόμησε. Τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἠνέσχετο γαμῆσαι αὐτὸν τὴν αὐτοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐ τὴν ἀδελφὴν, ἀλλὰ τὴν θυγατέρα, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐ τὴν θυγατέρα, ἀλλὰ τι πλέον θυγατρὸς, τὴν σάρκα τὴν αὐτοῦ. Τὸ δὲ ὅλον ἐποίησεν ἄνωθεν, ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν λίθων, εἰς ἓν αὐτοὺς συνάγων.” Translation in Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 43-44.

<sup>80</sup> “Πῶς γὰρ ἡ τὸν ἔμπροσθεν ἀτιμάσασα χρόνον, καὶ γενομένη ἐτέρου, καὶ τοῦ γάμου τὰ δίκαια ἀφανίσασα, ἀνακαλέσασθαι δυνήσεται τὸν ἠδικημένον, πρὸς τούτοις καὶ τὸν μένοντα ὡς ξένον; Πάλιν ἐκεῖ μὲν μετὰ τὴν πορνείαν ὁ ἀνὴρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνὴρ· ἐνταῦθα δὲ, κἂν εἰδωλολάτρις ἡ γυνή, τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τὸ δίκαιον οὐκ ἀπόλλυται.” In *Epistulam i ad Corinthios*, Homily 19. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-12*, 189.

<sup>81</sup> “Ἄρα γάμος ἐστὶν οὗτος γινόμενος κατὰ Χριστὸν, γάμος πνευματικὸς καὶ γέννησις πνευματικὴ, οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων, οὐκ ἐξ ὠδίνων.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 274.



the Saviour of the Body.”<sup>82</sup> Regarding this verse, Chrysostom explained that the wife was asked to show to her husband the type of sacred fear and reverence that the Church is expected to show to Christ who is Her Head. By the Orthodox *phronema*, this fear has been intimately tied to love and should be differentiated from more profane forms of fear motivated by threats or profane agony because of one’s sins.<sup>83</sup> As St Nektarios of Pentapolis has explained, “This fear—as a feeling—relates to love, and it generates piety inside the soul, so that she does not reach the point of being despised by the man through the outspokenness of love.”<sup>84</sup>

A further way to evidence this is by looking closely at how the duty of the husband in marriage was described, which Chrysostom appeared to consider even more difficult than women’s duty to honour their husbands:

But now listen to what else he requires from you; he has not finished with his example. “Husbands, he says, “love your wives, as Christ loved the Church.” You have seen the amount of obedience necessary; now hear about the amount of love necessary. Do you want your wife to be obedient to you, as the Church is to Christ? Then be responsible for the same providential care of her, as Christ is for the Church. And even if it becomes necessary for you to give your life for her, yes, and even to endure and undergo suffering of any kind, do not refuse. Even though you undergo all this, you will never have done anything equal to what Christ has done.”<sup>85</sup>

This was again pronounced in Chrysostom’s discussion of male headship in commenting on Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians. The homilist referred there also to the analogy between the relationship of man and woman and that of Christ and the Church.<sup>86</sup> He explained that Jesus Christ willingly gave His life for the Church, even though She rejected him, acted foolishly

<sup>82</sup> “Αἱ γυναῖκες, τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὑποτάσσεσθε, ὡς τῷ Κυρίῳ, ὅτι ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐστὶ κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς, ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶ σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>83</sup> ““And the wife see that she reverence her husband- Η δέ γυνή ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα”: A theological commentary on Ephesians 5:33 by Saint Nektarios, Metropolitan of Pentapolis, 1902,” republished and translated in English by OODE, June 22, 2011,

[http://www.oodegr.com/english/ekklisia/pateres/Saint\\_Nektarios\\_on\\_woman\\_respecting\\_man.htm](http://www.oodegr.com/english/ekklisia/pateres/Saint_Nektarios_on_woman_respecting_man.htm)

<sup>84</sup> ““And the wife see that she reverence her husband...” OODE, June 22, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> “Ἄλλ’ ἀκουσον, ἃ καὶ παρὰ σοῦ ἀπαιτεῖ· πάλιν γὰρ τῷ αὐτῷ κέχρηται ὑποδείγματι· Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε, φησί, τὰς γυναῖκας ἑαυτῶν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησε τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. Εἶδες μέτρον ὑπακοῆς; Ἄκουσον καὶ μέτρον ἀγάπης. Βούλει σοι τὴν γυναῖκα ὑπακούειν, ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν; Προνοεὶ καὶ αὐτὸς αὐτῆς, ὡς ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας· κἂν τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς δοῦναι δεῖ, κἂν κατακοπῆναι μυριάκις, κἂν ὅτιοῦν ὑπομείναι καὶ παθεῖν, μὴ παραιτήσῃ· κἂν ταῦτα πάθῃς, οὐδὲν οὐδέπω πεποιήκας, οἷόν ὁ Χριστὸς.” In *Epistulam ad Corinthios*, Homily 18. Translation in Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 46.

<sup>86</sup> “Ἐποθώμεθα οὖν τὸν μὲν ἄνδρα ἐν τάξει κεῖσθαι κεφαλῆς, τὴν δὲ γυναῖκα ἐν τάξει σώματος. Εἶτα καὶ ἀπὸ λογισμῶν δεικνύς, ὅτι ὁ ἀνὴρ κεφαλὴ ἐστὶ τῆς γυναικὸς, φησί, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶ σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος. Ἄλλ’ ὡς ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτω καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί. Εἶτα, Ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν, εἰπὼν, κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς, ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶ σωτὴρ, ἐπάγει, τοῦ σώματος· καὶ γὰρ ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος σωτηρία ἐστίν.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 45.

and was mired in darkness. Therefore, a husband who, contrary to Christ, chooses a wife of his preference should be willing to do at least as much.<sup>87</sup> He reiterated:

And even if it shall be needful for you to give your life for her, even if you have to be cut into pieces ten thousand times, even if you have to endure and undergo any suffering whatever, do not avoid it. And having undergone all this, you will have never done anything close to what Christ did.<sup>88</sup>

In other words, the headship conferred to the husband in marriage cannot be fulfilled unless it is based on the husband's loving and benign (gentle and kind) behaviour with his wife. However, this begs the question: What incentive does the husband have to behave in such a manner and not to abuse the authority bestowed on him, an inclination that would have most likely existed in the male-dominated society Chrysostom addressed? In response to what could have been such a concern, Chrysostom reminded his audiences that the husband represented the head and the wife the body of their common *soma*<sup>89</sup> and emphatically warned his audiences that "if the head scorns the body, it will perish with it."<sup>90</sup> Therefore, he advised: "[L]et the husband offer his love as counterbalance to her obedience."<sup>91</sup>

However, despite asking husbands to be their wives' refuge and spiritual mentors, Chrysostom understood the conjugal relationship to be grounded in a fundamental 'equality of honour'<sup>92</sup> that made the wife's dignity equally important to the husband's. This was highlighted in his commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians.<sup>93</sup> Chrysostom affirmed that as the wife is master and servant to her husband, the husband is servant and master to his wife. By this he aimed to denote a condition of simultaneous powerlessness and powerfulness so that no party would see itself as controlling the other, but as complementary to and dependent on each other. This should not be considered mere semantics. The kind of servitude a man is expected to enter upon marrying was emphasised in the words that Paul spoke to his disciples to dissuade them from marrying, which Chrysostom commented on:

He [Paul] desires by these very words to lead them [away] from it [marriage]. For when you hear that you will not be your own master after marriage but be subject to the will of your wife, you will quickly aspire not to pass under the yoke at all, since

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<sup>87</sup> "Τί δὲ λέγω; καὶ μωρὰ ἦν, καὶ βλάσφημος· ἀλλ' ὅμως τοσοῦτων ὄντων, ὡς ὑπὲρ ὥραιας, ὡς ὑπὲρ ἀγαπωμένης, ὡς ὑπὲρ θαυμαστῆς, οὕτως ἑαυτὸν ἐξέδωκεν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀμόρφου. Καὶ τοῦτο θαυμάζων ὁ Παῦλος ἔλεγε· Μόλις γὰρ ὑπὲρ δικαίου τις ἀποθανεῖται· καὶ πάλιν, εἰ ἔτι ἁμαρτωλῶν ἡμῶν ὄντων ὁ Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανε. Καὶ τοιαύτην λαβὼν, καλλωπίζει αὐτὴν καὶ λούει, καὶ οὐδὲ τοῦτο παραιτεῖται." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Scaff, *NPNF1-13*, 270.

<sup>88</sup> "Κὰν τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς δοῦναι δεῖ, κὰν κατακοπῆναι μυριάκις, κὰν ὀτιοῦν ὑπομεῖναι καὶ παθεῖν, μὴ παραιτήσῃ· κὰν ταῦτα πάθῃς, οὐδὲν οὐδέπω πεποίηκας, οἷον ὁ Χριστὸς," In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Scaff, *NPNF1-13*, 269.

<sup>89</sup> "σῶμα"; translates in English as "body."

<sup>90</sup> "κὰν καταφρονῇ τοῦ σώματος ἢ κεφαλῆ, καὶ αὐτὴ προσapoλεῖται." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>91</sup> "ἀλλ' ἀντίρροπον τῆς ὑπακοῆς εἰσαγέτω τὴν ἀγάπην." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>92</sup> Original being 'ἰσοτιμία' which is begotten by the words 'ἴσος' and 'τιμή,' the first meaning 'equal' and the second translating as 'value' or 'honour.'

<sup>93</sup> In *Epistulam ad Corinthios*, Homily 18.

once you have entered into this state, you must be a slave henceforth, so long as it pleases your wife.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, despite the proclaimed difference in authority between husband and wife, the husband remains the servant of his wife in all matters. Husband and wife are equally responsible for preserving the honour of the marriage and the dignity of their partner. Similarly, wife and husband are equally reprehensible for committing adultery, which can irrevocably impair the strength of the marriage bond.<sup>95</sup>

It should be underlined that despite the husband and wife being described as the head and body respectively of their common *soma* in marriage, Chrysostom did not say anywhere that gender roles were stipulated by divine plan. Although women are called to entrust the judgement of their husbands and to honour them as spiritual leaders, a gender-segregated lifestyle has not been imposed doctrinally in this tradition. If Chrysostom associated wives with household responsibility on various occasions, it is understood that he did so in part because he was addressing a society that was segregated in that way.

In his commentaries, Chrysostom did not evade referring also to the sexual relations of the married couple. Echoing the Orthodox tradition, Chrysostom explained that in the physical union of marriage the man and woman become one in one flesh. He described that in this union the seed of the man is received by the woman and is lovingly nourished to produce a child.<sup>96</sup> The child then becomes the bridge between the parents and the three are one in one flesh. Here again Chrysostom drew a parallel between the physical union of the parents and the union of the believers in the Body of Christ by partaking in Communion.<sup>97</sup> It should be added that such depictions were not meant to suggest that Chrysostom confined sexual intercourse to child bearing, but rather to evidence that the child was the seed of the loving bond between the spouses realised in the sexual union.

Chrysostom was realistic and unashamed to declare the facts of life openly. He in fact blamed his audiences for bashing away from a discussion of sex in Church since the marriage bed, as he explained, was honourable and undefiled. It is not sex in marriage that is dishonourable, he said, but the minds and actions of men who use the union for licentious purposes. Thus he was not against spousal love-making, but he taught that the physical union needed to be done with modesty and with recognition that marriage represented a

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<sup>94</sup> “αὐτοῖς τοῖς περὶ τοῦ γάμου λόγοις ἐξαγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς τοῦ γάμου βουλόμενος. Ὁ γὰρ ἀκούσας ὅτι μετὰ τὸν γάμον οὐκ ἔσται κύριος ἑαυτοῦ ἀλλ’ ἐν τῇ τῆς γυναικὸς κείσεται γνώμη ταχέως ἀπαλλαγῆναι σπουδάσει τῆς πικροτάτης δουλείας, μᾶλλον δὲ μηδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν τὸν ζυγὸν ὑπελθεῖν, ἐπειδὴ εἰσελθόντα ἅπαξ δουλεύειν ἀνάγκη λοιπὸν ἔως ἂν τῇ γυναικὶ τοῦτο δοκῇ.” De Virginitate, Homily 18. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 114.

<sup>95</sup> Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 86.

<sup>96</sup> “Πῶς δὲ καὶ γίνονται εἰς σάρκα μίαν; Καθάπερ χρυσοῦ τὸ καθαρώτατον ἂν ἀφέλης καὶ ἐτέρῳ ἀναμίξης χρυσοῦ, οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἐνταῦθα, τὸ πῶτατον τῆς ἡδονῆς χωνευούσης ἢ γυνὴ δεχομένη τρέφει καὶ θάλπει, καὶ τὰ παρ’ ἑαυτῆς συνεισηνεγκάμενη ἄνδρα ἀποδίδωσι. Καὶ γέφυρά τις ἔστι τὸ παιδίον. Ὡστε οἱ τρεῖς σὰρξ γίνονται μία, τοῦ παιδὸς ἐκατέρωθεν ἐκατέρους συνάπτοντος.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 569.

<sup>97</sup> “...καὶ λοιπὸν ἡ σὰρξ ὁ πατήρ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ καὶ ὁ παῖς ἔστιν ἐκ τῆς ἐκατέρου συνουσίας συγκραθεῖσα· καὶ γὰρ μιγέντων τῶν σπερμάτων, τίκεται ὁ παῖς· ὥστε τοὺς τρεῖς εἶναι μίαν σάρκα. Οὕτως οὖν ἡμεῖς πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸν γινόμεθα μία σὰρξ διὰ μετουσίας· καὶ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἡμεῖς, ἢ τὸ παιδίον. Τί δὴ ποτε; Ὅτι ἐξ ἀρχῆς οὕτω γέγονε.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 272.

vehicle to a spiritual aim, and was not itself a *telos*. To meet its Christian ends, marriage needed to be experienced as a spiritual union between wife and husband with Christ as their Head.

Within the Orthodox Church, the spousal bed is honourable and it serves the purpose of strengthening the spouses against the temptation of adultery and other unchastity. For this reason, Chrysostom advised against spouses withholding from each other for a long time without mutual agreement.<sup>98</sup> He explained that spouses should abstain from each other only if both agreed to dedicate more fully to prayer or fasting (which ideally should take place even when spouses do not abstain from sexual activity). He insisted, however that they should do so in mutual consent, otherwise one of the two may be tempted toward adultery and other sins, which would undermine the very purpose of marriage in cultivating holiness and spiritual growth for both.

While marriage was envisioned as a union between lovers aiming to mutual *theosis*, Chrysostom—as the pragmatist he was—understood that in reality the relationship was not always peaceful or partners' behaviours always altruistic. In his commentaries on Virginitate, he acknowledged that marriage required much compromise and tolerance.<sup>99</sup> On one occasion he asked his audiences rhetorically: “What if the husband is lenient, but the wife is malicious, libelous, chattering, sumptuous...? What if, contrary to her who is comely and quiet, he is impudent, arrogant, and irascible, of a materialistic disposition and one to rule by force (greatly “puffed up” because of money and of oppressiveness)?”<sup>100</sup> His response reiterated Paul's teaching that each spouse should try to endure their partner's flaws and to

<sup>98</sup> “Μη ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους, εἰ μή τι ἂν ἐκ συμφώνου. Τί δὴ τοῦτό ἐστι; Μη ἐγκρατεῦσθω, φησὶν, ἡ γυνὴ, τοῦ ἀνδρός ἄκοντος, μήτε ὁ ἀνὴρ, τῆς γυναικὸς μὴ βουλομένης. Τί δὴ ποτε; Ὅτι μεγάλα ἐκ τῆς ἐγκρατείας ταύτης τίκεται κακὰ· καὶ γὰρ καὶ μοιχεῖαι καὶ πορνεῖαι καὶ οἰκῶν ἀνατροπαὶ πολλάκις ἐντεῦθεν ἐγένοντο. Εἰ γὰρ ἔχοντες τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας, πορνεύουσι, πολλῶ μᾶλλον, ἂν αὐτοὺς τῆς παραμυθίας ταύτης ἀποστερήσης. Καὶ καλῶς εἶπε, Μη ἀποστερεῖτε, ἀποστέρησιν ἐναυθὰ καὶ ὀφειλὴν ἀνωτέρω εἰπὼν, ἵνα δείξῃ τῆς δεσποτείας τὴν ἐπίτασιν. Τὸ γὰρ ἄκοντος θατέρου ἐγκρατεῦσθαι θάτερον, ἀποστερεῖν ἐστὶ· τὸ δὲ ἐκόντος, οὐκέτι. Οὐδὲ γὰρ, εἰ πείσας με λάβοις τι τῶν ἐμῶν, ἀποστερεῖσθαί φημι. Ὁ γὰρ ἄκοντος καὶ βιαζομένου λαβὼν, ἀποστερεῖ· ὅπερ ποιοῦσι πολλαὶ γυναῖκες, μείζονα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἀμαρτίαν ἐργαζόμεναι, καὶ τῆς ἀσελγείας τοῦ ἀνδρός ὑπεύθυνοι γινόμεναι ταύτη, καὶ διασπῶσαι πάντα. Δεῖ δὲ πάντων προτιμᾶν τὴν ὁμόνοιαν, ἐπειδὴ καὶ πάντων τοῦτο κυριώτερον, καὶ εἰ βούλει, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτὸ ἐξετάσωμεν. Ἔστω γὰρ γυνὴ καὶ ἀνὴρ, καὶ ἐγκρατεῦσθω ἡ γυνὴ μὴ βουλομένου τοῦ ἀνδρός· τί οὖν, ἂν ἐκεῖνος ἐντεῦθεν πορνεύῃ, ἢ μὴ πορνεύῃ μὲν, ἀλγὴ δὲ καὶ θορυβῆται καὶ πυρῶται καὶ μάχηται, καὶ μυρία τῆ γυναικὶ πράγματα παρέχη; τί τὸ κέρδος τῆς νηστείας καὶ τῆς ἐγκρατείας, ἀνάγης διερρήγμενης; Οὐδέν. Πόσας γὰρ ἔνθεν λοιδορίας, πόσα πράγματα, πόσον ἀνάγκη γίνεσθαι πόλεμον.” In *Epistulam ad Corinthios*, Homily 19. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-12*, 186-187.

<sup>99</sup> “Ὅτι πολλὴ ἡ τοῦ γάμου δουλεία καὶ ἀπαραίτητος. Τί οὖν ἂν μὲν ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐπεικὴς ᾖ, ἢ ἡ δὲ γυνὴ μοχθηρὰ, λοιδορος, λάλος, πολυτελής, τὸ κοινὸν τοῦτο πασῶν αὐτῶν νόσημα, ἐτέρων πλειόνων γέμουσα κακῶν, πῶς οἴσει τὴν καθημερινὴν ταύτην ἀηδίαν ἐκεῖνος ὁ δειλαιος, τὸν τυφόν. τὴν ἀναισχυντίαν; Τί δαί, ἂν τούναντίον αὐτῆ μὲν ᾖ κοσμία καὶ ἡσυχος, ἐκεῖνος δὲ θρασύς, ὑπεροπτικός, ὀργίλος, πολὺν μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν χρημάτων, πολὺν δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς δυναστείας ὄγκον περιβεβλημένος, καὶ τὴν ἐλευθέραν ὡς δούλην ἔχει καὶ τῶν θεραπεινίδων μηδὲν ἄμεινον πρὸς αὐτὴν διάκειται, πῶς οἴσει τὴν τσαύτην ἀνάγκην καὶ βίαν; Τί δαί, ἂν συνεχῶς αὐτὴν ἀποστρέφεται καὶ διὰ παντὸς μένη τοῦτο ποιῶν; Καρτέρει, φησὶν, πᾶσαν ταύτην τὴν δουλείαν· ὅταν γὰρ ἀποθάνῃ, τότε ἐλευθέρᾳ ἔσῃ μόνον, ζῶντος δὲ δυοῖν θάτερον ἀνάγκη, ἢ παιδαγωγεῖν αὐτὸν μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς σπουδῆς καὶ βελτίω ποιεῖν ἢ, εἰ τοῦτο ἀδύνατον, φέρειν γενναίως τὸν ἀκήρυκτον πόλεμον καὶ τὴν ἄσπονδον μάχην.” De Virginitate, Paragraph 40.

<sup>100</sup> “Τί οὖν ἂν μὲν ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐπεικὴς ᾖ, ἢ ἡ δὲ γυνὴ μοχθηρὰ, λοιδορος, λάλος, πολυτελής...; Τί δαί, ἂν τούναντίον αὐτῆ μὲν ᾖ κοσμία καὶ ἡσυχος, ἐκεῖνος δὲ θρασύς, ὑπεροπτικός, ὀργίλος, πολὺν μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν χρημάτων, πολὺν δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς δυναστείας ὄγκον περιβεβλημένος...” De Virginitate, Paragraph 40.

entreat and counsel them so as to help them to change pernicious behaviours and to edify them spiritually. He added that one is freed of this duty only at the death of their partner.

However, it is important to underscore that while Chrysostom considered patience in marriage and endurance of a difficult spouse to be an Orthodox trait (for both genders), he did not advise it indiscriminately.<sup>101</sup> In parallel, the condemnation of all conjugal abusiveness as un-Orthodox practice ran through his work and referred to both genders. This became evident, for example, when he warned wives against insulting or criticising their husbands because of poverty,<sup>102</sup> or when he instructed that husbands not be tempted to earn their wife's obedience "by fear and menaces, but with love and good temper."<sup>103</sup> This was emphasised below:

But nor should the husband who hears these, because he has authority, to resort to insulting and hurting, but to encourage her to the good, to advise and counsel her, and because she is less perfect than he to try to convince her with thoughts, never [should he] raise hands [on her]. All these should be far from a free soul; [he should use] neither hubris, neither insults, neither shame, neither ridicule, but because she is more frivolous [he should] direct her.<sup>104</sup>

Chrysostom cautioned men not to abuse their spiritual authority because a man free from worldly shackles who lives in faith should have nothing to do with abusiveness. He should be meek and patient and should always respond to his wife with careful words that aim to improve her understanding through constructive counsel. Chrysostom, in fact, seemed to encourage husbands to think of their wives as weaker vessels who required more consideration and thoughtfulness. One may argue that he believed this, but it should also be entertained that he employed this also as a rhetorical device to leverage the male listeners' pre-existing sense of superiority for the sake of promoting women's wellbeing.

Chrysostom evidenced his genuine protectiveness toward women when he instructed husbands to be patient, kind and non-judgemental with their wives, even if the latter provoked them and were worthy of criticism.<sup>105</sup> He commented:

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<sup>101</sup> It needs to be underscored again that the Orthodox tradition treats the works of the Church Fathers as suggestive on matters that are not clearly doctrinal or theological. Thus, Orthodoxy cannot take a single stance about how a spouse should react to a harmful partner. This relates to the concepts of *oikonomia* and *diakrisis* mentioned earlier.

<sup>102</sup> "Μὴ λεγέτω ταῦτα γυνή, καὶ τὰ τοῦτοις ὁμοία· σῶμα γάρ ἐστιν, οὐχ ἵνα διατάτῃ τῇ κεφαλῇ, ἀλλ' ἵνα πείθῃται καὶ ὑπακούῃ. Πῶς οὖν οἴσει, φησί, τὴν πενίαν; πόθεν εὐρήσει παραμυθίαν; Ἐκλεγέσθω παρ' ἑαυτῆς τὰς πενεστέρας, ἀναλογιζέσθω πόσαι πάλιν εὐγενεῖς καὶ ἐξ εὐγενῶν κόραι οὐ μόνον ἐξ ἀνδρῶν οὐδὲν προσέλαβον, ἀλλὰ καὶ προσέδωκαν, καὶ τὰ αὐτῶν ἅπαντα ἀνάλωσαν· ἐννοεῖτω τοὺς ἐκ τοιούτων πλούτων κινδύνους, καὶ τὸν ἀπράγμονα ἀσπάσεται βίον. Καὶ ὅλως εἰ φιλοστόργως πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα διακέοιτο, οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον ἐρεῖ, ἀλλ' αἰρήσεται πλησίον αὐτῆς ἔχειν αὐτὸν μηδὲν πορίζοντα, ἢ μυρία τάλαντα χρυσοῦ μετὰ μερίμνης καὶ φροντίδος τῆς ἐκ τῶν ἀποδημιῶν ταῖς γυναιξίν ἐγγινομένης αἰεί." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 278-279.

<sup>103</sup> "οὐ φόβω καὶ ἀπειλαῖς δεῖ καταδεσμεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀγάπῃ καὶ διαθέσει." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 270.

<sup>104</sup> "Ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ ταῦτα ἀκούων ὡς ἀρχὴν ἔχων, ἐπὶ ὕβρεις τρεπέσθω καὶ πληγὰς, ἀλλὰ παραινείτω, νοουθετείτω, ὡς ἀτελεστέραν λογισμοῖς ἀναπειθέτω, χεῖρας μηδέποτε ἐντεινέτω· πόρρω ἐλευθέρας ψυχῆς ταῦτα· ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ὕβρεις, μηδὲ ὀνειδή, μηδὲ λοιδορίας· ἀλλ' ὡς ἀνοητότερον διακειμένην ῥυθμιζέτω." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>105</sup> "κὰν ὑπερορῶσαν, κὰν θρυπτομένην, καταφρονοῦσαν ἴδης, δυνήσῃ αὐτὴν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας ἀγαγεῖν τοὺς σοὺς τῇ πολλῇ περὶ αὐτὴν προνοίᾳ, τῇ ἀγάπῃ, τῇ φιλίᾳ." Translation in Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 47-48.



For, one may be able to tie down a servant through fear, but I daresay, not even him; for he, leaping out (of his fetters) will swiftly run away. As for her that shares his life, the mother of his children, the source of his every joy, she should not be “tied down” with fear and threats, but rather with love and cheerful disposition. For what kind of conjugal union can there be when the woman is afraid of the man? What kind of pleasure can that man enjoy, when living with the woman as if she were a slave, and not as a free individual? And even if you do suffer something for her sake, do not reprehend her, for neither did Christ do this.<sup>106</sup>

His emphatic differentiation between the fear that one coerces in a servant and the fear that one should inspire in a free-willed wife leaves no doubt that Chrysostom spoke of fear as reverence and respect that was inspired in the woman by the wise words, consideration and kind demeanour of the husband toward her. He drew again from the parallel between the relationship of husband and wife and that of Christ and His Church advising men against blaming their wives and urging them to suffer for their wives’ sake to imitate Christ in His approach. This was emphasised in the subsequent comment about using abuse: “Because she is your own body; because if you do this, you disgrace yourself in dishonouring your own body.”<sup>107</sup> And according to Chrysostom, “no man ever hated his own flesh.”<sup>108</sup>

Chrysostom told husbands not only that they had to treat their wives with kindness regardless of how intolerable they could be at times, but that this was their duty to God: “Love her therefore not for her sake so much as for Christ’s sake.”<sup>109</sup> Similarly, a wife was asked to respect and to honour her husband even if he did not love her as he ought to due to sacred fear for God.<sup>110</sup> Chrysostom explained that this was fitting because it could be that each spouse might display defects or disappoint the other at some point in their marriage and therefore should focus on fulfilling their duty to God without judging the other.

That Chrysostom did not consider forbearance binding was also evidenced in the fact that he was willing to allow physical separation when spouses could not co-exist. He explained:

Now what is that which to the married the Lord commanded? That the wife depart not from her husband; but if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled

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<sup>106</sup> “Οικέτην μὲν γὰρ φόβω τις ἂν καταδῆσαι δυνήσεται, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐδὲ ἐκέινον· ταχέως γὰρ ἀποπηδήσας οἰχήσεται· τὴν δὲ τοῦ βίου κοινωνόν, τὴν παίδων μητέρα, τὴν πάσης εὐφροσύνης ὑπόθεσιν, οὐ φόβω καὶ ἀπειλαῖς δεῖ καταδεσμεῖν, ἀλλ’ ἀγάπη καὶ διαθέσει. Ποία γὰρ συζυγία, ὅταν ἡ γυνὴ τὸν ἄνδρα τρέμη; ποίας δὲ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ ἀπολαύσεται ἡδονῆς, ὡς δούλη συνοικῶν τῇ γυναικί, καὶ οὐχ ὡς ἐλευθέρᾳ; Κἂν πάθῃς τι ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, μὴ ὀνειδίσης· οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦτο ἐποίησε.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>107</sup> “Ἄλλ’ ὅταν ἀκούῃς φόβον, ἐλευθέρᾳ προσήκοντα φόβον ἀπαίτει, μὴ καθὼς παρὰ δούλης· σῶμα γὰρ ἐστὶ σόν· ἂν γὰρ τοῦτο ποιήσῃς, σαυτὸν καθυβρίζεις, τὸ σῶμα ἀτιμάζων τὸ σόν.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation from Schaff, NPNF1-13, 275.

<sup>108</sup> “Οὐδεὶς γὰρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>109</sup> “Μὴ δι’ ἐκείνην τοῖνον τοσοῦτον, ὅσον διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν αὐτὴν ἀγαπᾶν.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, NPNF1-13, 277.

<sup>110</sup> “Τί οὖν, ἂν μὴ φοβῆται, φησὶν, ἡ γυνή; Σὺ ἀγάπα, τὸ σαυτοῦ πλήρου. Καὶ γὰρ ἂν τὰ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων μὴ ἔπηται, τὰ παρ’ ἡμῶν ἔπεσθαι δεῖ. Οἷόν τι λέγω· Ὑποτασσόμενοι, φησὶν, ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβω Χριστοῦ. Τί οὖν, ἂν ὁ ἕτερος μὴ ὑποτάσσεται; Σὺ πείθου τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἐνταῦθα· ἡ γοῦν γυνὴ κἂν μὴ ἀγαπάται, ὅμως φοβείσθω, ἵνα μηδὲν ἢ παρ’ αὐτῇ γεγονός· ὁ τε ἀνὴρ, ἂν μὴ φοβῆται ἡ γυνή, ὅμως ἀγαπάτω, ἵνα μηδὲν αὐτὸς ὑστερή· ἕκαστος γὰρ τὸ ἴδιον ἀπέλαβεν.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, NPNF1-13, 274.



unto her husband. Here, seeing that both on the score of continence and other pretexts, and because of meanness of the spirit separations took place: it were better, he says, that such things should not be at all; but if they take place, let the wife remain with her husband, if not to cohabit with him, yet so as not to introduce any other to be her husband.<sup>111</sup>

Chrysostom was clearly concerned not to encourage divorce, the violation of God's divine bond that brought the two-haves into one. Nonetheless, he allowed that in cases where conjugal co-existence resulted in constant enmity, spouses could live separately. Ideally, they should not remarry so as to allow room for future reconciliation.<sup>112</sup> It is important to caution again that Chrysostom offered his counsel through the Orthodox *phronema* that he embodied and not to establish universal rulings.

## DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT

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This overview should evidence that Chrysostom's teachings have not been understood in a pernicious manner within the Orthodox Church and have been appraised generally in recognition of the specific circumstances in which he lived and the kind of audiences he addressed. However, as it was mentioned, the degree to which these Orthodox teachings regarding man-woman relations and marriage have been understood with their intentions by the Orthodox has been dependent on a host of historical, ecclesiastical, sociocultural and individual factors. Chrysostom's explications of apostolic teachings could help to alleviate some of the pernicious attitudes and misunderstandings that were mentioned in earlier sections, provided that they are explained with caution.<sup>113</sup>

Within the Orthodox *phronema*, as highlighted in Chrysostom's homilies, male and female are understood to have been fashioned alike and with equal honour and to have been originally one, a union that is re-achieved in the Orthodox marriage. While Chrysostom suggested that a certain order in authority needed to be respected so as to preserve the harmony in the couple, his emphasis on the husband serving as the head and the wife as the body was motivated by his concern to underscore their mutual dependence and to deter them from mistreating and alienating each other. Such pronouncements could be deployed to obliterate misperceptions of divinely-instituted husband superiority and to enforce wives' dignity. They can also become a counter-discourse to rigid gender-segregated arrangements

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<sup>111</sup> "Τί οὖν ἐστίν, ὃ τοῖς γεγαμηκόσι παρήγγειλεν ὁ Κύριος, Γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρισθῆναι; ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ, μενέτω ἄγαμος, ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλαγήτω· καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι; Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ καὶ δι' ἐγκράτειαν καὶ δι' ἄλλας προφάσεις καὶ μικροψυχίας γίνεσθαι διαιρέσεις συνέβαινε, βέλτιον μὲν μὴδὲ γενέσθαι τὴν ἀρχὴν, φησὶν· εἰ δὲ ἄρα καὶ γένοιτο, μενέτω ἡ γυνὴ μετὰ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς, εἰ καὶ μὴ τῇ μίξει, ἀλλὰ τῷ μηδένα ἕτερον παρεισαγαγεῖν ἄνδρα." In *Epistulam i ad Corinthios*, Homily 19. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-12*, 188.

<sup>112</sup> It is understood here that reconciliation is desirable insofar as the spouses change their behaviours to imitate that of Christ and His Church. Reconciliation not only evades the sinful act of divorcing but, when it is achieved in an Orthodox *phronema*, it can result in heightened humility (in view of one recognising one's own shortfalls) and subsequently more kindness and understanding between the spouses, fostering a spiritually stronger restored relationship.

<sup>113</sup> The potential of Chrysostom's commentaries to change attitudes and misperceptions has been suggested also in Gassin, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity," 2015.

that place disproportionate burden on women, since they evidence that a husband and wife are one *soma* and should share the burdens of their life together.

Furthermore, Chrysostom clearly condemned husbands using any type of forceful and demeaning behaviour with their wives. He advised that husbands earn their wives' reverence by giving them steady, kind and considerate love to achieve a harmonious and mutually gratifying relationship. Such messages could help to counter some male abusiveness by cultivating Orthodox masculinities that emphasise spiritual leadership and altruistic giving. On the other hand, his discussion of sex in marriage, which emphasised mutual consent, dignity and modesty, could help to discourage practices such as sexual coerciveness in the bedroom (including marital rape), excessive sexual demands by husbands, or other perverse acts (including the use of pornography), all of which can further impair the dignity and wellbeing of the wife and the quality of the conjugal relationship.

Finally, Chrysostom's pragmatism regarding the difficulties of marriage and his nuanced counsels that simultaneously taught patience in marriage but allowed separation in cases of conjugal enmity could help women living with harmful husbands to realise that showing forbearance for the sake of preserving the family might become unjustifiable where their or their children's (and even their husbands') spiritual progress is hindered. This may be an especially pertinent message for women in Orthodox societies who have typically prioritised their family or their marriage. Chrysostom's suggestion for spouses to live separately could be a pragmatic option for some women, while wives' departure could provide husbands with the motivation to reconsider their pernicious practices and to take concrete measures to alleviate those. There can be no single solution for all women in this situation, not least because this depends on their own *diakrasis* and practical/material circumstances, but Chrysostom's commentaries help to enlarge the options.

Three caveats need to be mentioned briefly. The first consideration must be that not all Orthodox are expected to be motivated by Church teachings, not least due to a different spiritual state. In addition, these teachings cannot be expected to address more ontogenetic, psychological or environmental parameters motivating pernicious or abusive behaviours in the individual, which could require psychological remedies or other measures.<sup>114</sup> Finally, the communication of such teachings to the laity could be hindered by a limited understanding among some clergy of the Orthodox marriage, problematic attitudes about conjugal abuse and unhelpful counselling approaches to spiritual children, possibilities that would require understanding intimately the conditions of the clergy in a given context.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on our Deadliest Epidemic* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999); Donald Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2007); Linda Mills, "Shame and Intimate Abuse: The Critical Missing Link between Cause and Cure," *Children and Youth Services Review* 30 (2008): 631–63.

<sup>115</sup> Within the Orthodox tradition, most believers will have a spiritual father to whom they go for confession. The spiritual father is usually involved in the life of the couple and may be approached first when problems in the family arise.

## CONCLUSION

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This paper has put forward an argument for decolonising gender and theology/religion(s) studies from west-centric feminist representations of Christian theology on the premise that these hinder understanding non-western Christian traditions in their own cosmological and theological terms. It was argued that this is especially urgent in for Orthodox traditions and communities which developed in a distinct eastern epistemological framework. The endeavour was made to delineate the contours of the Orthodox cosmology and the socio-cultural context of the development of this tradition in order to provide a more informed prism through which to appraise the works of the Eastern Church Fathers. The ultimate aim was to evidence that commentaries such as Chrysostom's contain messages that have the potential to address pernicious attitudes regarding women and marriage in Orthodox societies provided that they are explained through the prism of the Orthodox *phronema*.

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Romina Istratii is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Religions and Philosophies at SOAS. Her current PhD project is an interdisciplinary study of spousal abuse attitudes among the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo community in Northern Ethiopia. She has previously completed gender-sensitive research in a number of African countries as a Thomas J. Watson Fellow and has worked as researcher and consultant in the sector of international development for seven years. As a critical practitioner, Ms Istratii has been working to attune theory and practice to non-western and non-secular epistemologies which have been neglected in the western epistemological framework that prevails. Ms Istratii has served since 2016 as the Co-editor-in-Chief of The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research. In 2018 she was selected by SOAS to participate in its first-year Open Access Champions Scheme, which aims to promote awareness of Open Research among SOAS faculty and students. Ms Istratii views opening up research as a first step toward the decentring of western epistemology in the making of knowledge, an objective that has underpinned both her professional career and research activities.