

WOUNDED BY LOVE



No one was near him at that hour, no friend, nor intimate, no kinsfolk. The High President of this mighty contest knew that this man needed a supporter—however noble he was he was also affected by human feelings. He appeared immediately as (Stephen) gazed to heaven, and showed him the Son standing at the right hand in the form of the incarnation. What philanthropy, what goodness! The athlete saw those for whom he contented in a vision. And the God of All spoke to him this message, “Do not suffer unworthy feelings Stephen. You have no human companions, no friend supports you in this hour of fear, but I, together with my Beloved, am watching your holy action. Your rest is prepared, the gates of Paradise are open. Be steadfast, just a little longer and then leave this transitory existence and strive for the everlasting life without end. {Homily on St. Stephen by St. Asterius of Amasea: Bishop of Amasea in Turkey between 380 to 390 A.D.}



Falling in Love

There's a feeling we all get when a gorgeous stranger passes by or pops up on the Instagram. Friends say it's a coincidence, but you swear its fate. It's as if, in that instant, the heavens have opened up,

shone down a light and whispered to you, "That's the one." We've all seen the story play out countless times on the big screen. Any rom-com enthusiast knows there is a point in the movie when the protagonist finds the one character he or she will spend the next 90 minutes pursuing. And we all know these two will definitely end up together because, if not, it would be rated as the worst love story ever, right?

Everyone, at some point, has caught feelings for some ambiguous figure before. Whether it's a celebrity crush, an acquaintance through social media or through a mutual friend, if the person seems to match what you're looking for in a significant other, you're all in. We have this scary ability to instantly become emotionally, and sometimes mentally, fixated on people we virtually have no clue about.

Symptoms of this sickness are desperation and unrealistic expectations. We get this mindset that "life as we know it will cease to function if we do not successfully engage this person in conversation." We make pathetic attempts at talking to the person, and we often do not take the time to plan out what we say. You'll dream up scenarios of the two of you making out, relaxing on vacation at a secluded beach house, buying your first pet together and so on.

Speaking as a 20-something young adult¹, the aforementioned "symptoms" of this condition are further magnified by society.

We, as young people, are constantly receiving messages that tell us we should aspire for love, that we're "missing out on" if we're single or that everyone else around us has somehow caught on to

these ideas more quickly than we have. In this digital age, we're constantly plugged in to every little thing that happens around us, and these messages are messing with our sense of timing and good judgment. You may think you're resilient to these worldly pressures, but are you seriously telling me you weren't a little bit ticked off at your friend's recent engagement announcement on Facebook (especially when you're still getting over your last breakup)? Or what about the 200 plus Instagram likes your best friend got on that photo with her boyfriend? (It sort of makes that "artsy" photo of your frozen yogurt cup seem a bit meaningless, huh?)



We're all affected. There's no denying it.

As young people of this generation, we internalize the stranger who passes us by as the one we could call ours because we see it happen for so many other people. There's a part of us that hopes and prays if we could just figure out how to be nice enough, cute enough, bubbly enough, sexy enough or simply just "enough," the person would want us back, too. Inside all of us lies a basic desire to be wanted, plain and simple. That's why it's not so crazy when the stranger on the subway is the only thing we can think about.



We want love, and when we catch a rare glimpse of what could be just that, we attack like the poor, clueless love predators we are.

What are we to think of this phenomenon from an Orthodox point of view? Is it good or evil, or something in between?²

The phrase "falling in love" suggests something ambiguous, partaking of both good and evil. On the one hand, the word "falling" indicates that this is a phenomenon close to lust, a fall from virtue. And certainly, it comes from the influence of fall. Thus St. Augustine writes: "*We know that many of our brothers by mutual agreement refrain from carnal love, but not from marital love. The more strongly the former is suppressed, the more the latter is strengthened*". Again, "*when purity is preserved,*"

¹ Online source written by a 20 year old youth

² The Theology of Eros by Vladimir Moss

writes St. Asterius of Amasia, “*peace is preserved as well as mutual attraction, but when the soul is overwhelmed by unlawful and sensual lust, it loses the lawful and just love*”. Again, St. John Chrysostom says that “love is born from chastity”, that “**love makes people chaste**”, and that “**lewdness comes from nothing else than a lack of love**”.

As Sir Roger Scruton (English Philosopher) has pointed out, “Desire is indeed a natural phenomenon, but it is one that lies beyond the reach of any ‘natural science’ of man.” Science can understand love, desire and “falling in love” only by reducing them to the category of instinctual animal behavior and chemical reactions in the brain. The problem is that while being in love is clearly influenced by instinctual forces, it differs from instinctual behavior in important ways.



This important psychological fact **is well documented in Orthodox Christian**

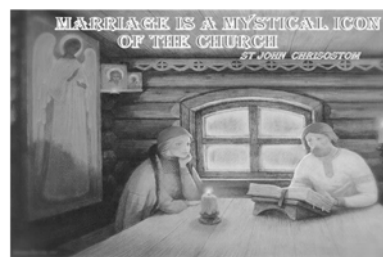
literature – but more or less completely discounted/omitted by secular psychologists. In the next article of this same issue, we shall understand the path instituted by God through His grace and mercy to convert this “fallen love”. We look into the fact, that through the sacrament of marriage, ‘the faculty of *desire in our soul*’; designed by God in our nature; corrupted in the fall; can be converted to its true, real and “divine love”, in our journey towards the real purpose of attaining Theosis.

In this article, let us examine the progress of this process from childhood and adolescence to the adult married love. The progress of the process, as it were, of the sexual impulse from its inchoate, undirected, instinctual beginnings in childhood and adolescence to its fixed, focused and “intentional” end in adult married love.

Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky (from Russian Orthodox Church) writes: “When the male organism matures, a feeling of self-satisfaction is aroused in the young man. This is strengthened by the change in the youth’s social position: he becomes an independent member of society – a student; or, as a senior schoolboy, he is preparing to become one – to enter this totally uninhibited group of people.

In student society he feels like a bridegroom – he is no longer under the constant supervision of his parents, he earns some money for himself. In general, his conditions of life favor the development of a feeling of self-satisfaction. The newly aroused sexual passion on its part has also something in common with this feeling, and now he wants to live without any restriction; mentally he says to himself: ‘*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth... and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes*’. But the words which follow in Ecclesiastes, ‘*But know, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement*’ (Ecc.11:19) will be revealed to him by the voice of his conscience even if he has never read them, and will cause him intense irritability and will arouse a feeling of enmity against God and against religion.

But then he meets a girl who for the first time focuses and “incarnates” his hitherto bodiless, unshaped longing. And not only focuses it, but also *humbles* it. For the feeling of self-satisfaction noted by Metropolitan Anthony flees with the advent of true (or, at any rate, truer) love. Before the image of beauty he humbles his proud mind. Now he and his own desires are no longer his first priority; he seeks to *serve* the object of his love. The way in which falling in love humbles the lover is illustrated by the words of a German Nazi during the invasion of Russia: “I fell in love with a Russian girl, although nothing ever came of it, and for the first time I began to doubt our racial superiority. How could I be better than her?”



Does the instinctual longing then disappear? No. And yet one can no longer call it purely instinctual. For what precisely is this

longing *for*? The sexual act? Hardly, especially if the youth is still a virgin. In fact, the very idea would probably disgust him, as if it polluted the absolute purity of his new feeling. A particular form of sensual pleasure? Not at all, for he does not yet know what sexual pleasure is, still less how it is produced. In fact, the paradoxical thing is that at the first appearance of the object of desire, desire as such is stilled, at any rate temporarily. It is as if a thirsty man having come upon a river in the desert is so stunned by the beauty of the water that he forgets to drink...

When vague longing has matured into “being in love”, the boy longs for a specific individual girl, *the*

girl, not for just any girl, not for anything about the girl, but *the girl herself*. He does not long for certain pleasures which she may be able to give him. He does not long for her body as such, nor any part of her body. He longs for *her*. John longs for Mary, not for anything or anyone else.

Of course, even now he still feels a fascination for certain parts of the girl's body, and here undoubtedly the instinctual part of his nature is evident. And yet the part of the body which fascinates him most is not any of the specifically sexual members or "erogenous zones", but *the face*. What a German Philosopher Schopenhauer (1788-1860,) writes is referred by Sir Scruton, "– whose view of these matters is a good example of the chaos that ensues from the premature attempt to explain them – argues that the face is the least important of all the indices of beauty, since it is the least relevant to the reproductive function which underlies and explains desire. That is almost the opposite of the truth. *Although a pretty face surmounting a deformed or mutilated body may indeed fail to arouse sexual interest, it is well known that a pretty face may compensate for much bodily ugliness... A beautiful body, however, will always be rendered repulsive by an ugly face, and can certainly never compensate for it.*"

Why the face?

Because *the face*, far more than any other part of the body, **reveals the soul**, the person. In Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich's ((1920-1956) from Serbian Orthodox, canonized as Saint Nikolai Velimirovich of Ohrid) parable on love entitled "Cassiana", the heroine of the story is ugly in body – she has a huge hump-back. And yet she has a beautiful *face* – which indicates her inner beauty of soul. This is why the word for "face" and person", similarly the Latin word persona, whence comes the English "person", originally referred to the masks, or faces, that actors assumed during performance. If we wish to know who a person is and what he is feeling, then while we may take into account other elements of body language, it is the movements of the face, - the smiles, the blushes, the laughs, the tears, - and especially the expression of the eyes, that we will study most closely. For it is the eyes that are, as the proverb says, "the mirror of the soul", making the workings of the invisible soul visible with an extraordinary transparency: a quote from Shakespeare's, *The Merchant of Venice*: "*Beshrew*

your eyes, They have o'erlooked me and divided me, One half of me is yours, the other half yours – Mine own I would say: but if mine then yours, And so all yours."

But what has sexual desire to do with the workings of the invisible soul?

The phenomenon of sexual desire, which, the more focused and concentrated it is, the more intensely personal it is. *For sexual love, as opposed to lust, is not in the first place directed to the flesh of the desired one but to the soul*. It is not the purely physical pleasure of the caress, the glance or the kiss that is the vital element, but the fact that *his* (or *her*) caress, glance or kiss; the physical pleasure is inseparable from the *knowledge of the person* who gives it. This knowledge makes the physical contact the sign, the "incarnation", the icon, as it were, of a non-physical reality.

How is this physical pleasure inseparable from the knowledge of the person who gives it?

For e.g if that same physical pleasure were provided by another person, it would entirely lose its significance and thrill. This is proved by the fact that if the lover discovers that the pleasure he receives comes not from the person he thought it came from, but from someone else, the pleasure immediately evaporates and often turns to disgust.

Thus the true object of desire is not the body as such, but the body as the expression of the soul, not the pleasure as such, but the pleasure as the expression of the thought. It is this iconic quality of the flesh in sexual love, enabling the veneration paid to the flesh to ascend to its "archetype", the soul that transforms the temporality of pleasure into the eternity of true love: Again another quote of Shakespeare's from, Antony and Cleopatra: "Eternity was in our lips and eyes, Bliss in our brows' bent, none our parts so poor, But was a race of heaven."

But what does the lover actually see in the "embodied soul" of his beloved? And: *with what* does he see it?

He sees with the eyes of *the mind*, and not of the body. For, as Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich writes, "flesh can neither love nor hate. A body cannot fall in love with another body. The capability of loving belongs only to the soul. When a soul falls in love with a body, that is

not love but desire, lust. When a soul falls in love with a soul, but not through God, that is out of either fascination or empathy. But when a soul falls in love with another **through God**, then regardless of the physical appearance (beauty or ugliness) **that is love.**

- The power of Eros is a power of the mind no less than of the body.
- For Erotic love must become “all mind” in order to see its true object. And this object must be, an ideal, unmoving object and not a sensory object.
- For “It was not sex” – that is, simple lust – by which the lovers saw each other. And yet it was Eros. *For the love in question here is **the image of God** in her; which is the one in which the object of erotic love that is true is in essence unchanging—and not her body, which is changeable, nor the moods of her soul, which are also changeable. Only such an object (i.e. the image of God) is worthy of love and can raise love from the corruptible to the incorruptible. Hence the intuition that true love must survive the fading of bodily beauty; it must be immortal, since its true object is immortal.*

This intuition was wonderfully expressed by Shakespeare in his work *Sonnet*, who begins by pointing out that even erotic love is in essence the marriage of *minds*:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds, Admit impediments. Love is not love, Which alters when it alteration finds, Or bends with the remover to remove. O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark, That looks on tempests and is never shaken; It is the star to every wand’ring bark, Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken. Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks, Within his bending sickle’s compass come; Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, But bears it out even to the edge of doom. If this be error, and upon me prov’d. I never writ, nor no man ever lov’d.

And yet what we are in essence, our Godlikeness, which alone is worthy of an undying love, does not match up to what we show ourselves to be in everyday life (we give more preference to our will and refuse to cooperate with the will of God, never finding our true selves, and increasing the image of sin in us.)

And this discrepancy between the image of God and the image of sin - in the soul both of the lover and of his beloved – causes intense anguish and pain – moral pain – to the lovers.



For, as Sir Scruton writes: “Desire obliges you to find value in its object, and so to ‘see him as’ the embodiment of virtue”. You want your lover to see *you* as the embodiment of virtue, and you are prepared to work on yourself to make yourself more worthy. Thus falling in love becomes a major incentive to moral improvement.

In fact, this love is well defined, in Solomon’s words, as “*the care of discipline*” (Wisdom 6.17). For the lover is impelled by his love to discipline himself, to make himself worthy of his beloved. This inextricable – and highly creative - relationship between love and esteem is the analogy and reflection, on a much lower level, of Christ’s making His Bride “without spot or wrinkle” (Ephesians 5.27).

In the words of Sir Scruton “One may describe the course of love as a kind of ‘mutual self-building’ ... I want you to be worthy of my love, behind which desire lies, always compelling me. And I too want to be lovable, so that you may reciprocate my affection. Hence we begin to enact a cooperative game of self-building.” This “cooperative game of self-building” may lead to quarrels – but quarrels with a creative element, because the relationship becomes an arena of moral improvement, spurred on by desire. Hence the English proverb: “*The falling out of lovers is the renewal of love.*” Thus according to Shakespeare, in his work *Antony and Cleopatra*, even Cleopatra, the embodiment of fallen sensual desire, wishes in the end to become not simply a mistress for Anthony, but a wife, having shed all downward-looking elements, the “earth and water” of lust, in order that only the “fire and air” of pure love should remain: “*Husband, I come. Now to that name my courage prove my title! I am fire and air; my other elements, I give to baser life.*”

Of course, a lover may wish to “build up” himself or his beloved for selfish, vainglorious reasons: because he considers himself to be a good person, and “only the best will do” for such a good person.

However, this attitude is already at one remove from the initial experience of being in love, which in its simplicity is an encounter with what one’s perceives to be goodness incarnate. For not only does love reveal beauty to be truth: it also reveals it to be *goodness*. But is it in fact virtue or goodness? Does not love see beauty sometimes in the most worthless objects, as was dramatized in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*? Is it not so much the perception of an ideal as an idealization of something that is far from ideal, a form of self-deception?

It certainly can be; for *the intuitive power of the lover’s erotic vision is strictly dependent on his own moral level*. An unspiritual man is not likely to fall in love with a spiritual woman, because he will neither *see* her spirituality nor *admire* it if he did. But a spiritual man will love a woman who is like him in being spiritual -although he, too, can be deceived into loving an object unworthy of his love. For like can recognize like only in the case of one whose Eros is sufficiently purified to see the likeness. But for one who’s Eros is less purified, there will be many misperceptions and mismatches in love, giving fertile ground for the proverb that love is blind. And yet Eros in its essence, purified of that veil of darkness that the fall has draped over it, is the opposite of blind: it is an instrument given by God to us in order to pierce the veil of the flesh and see the true person underneath.

According to research and studies, while falling in love in a sense idealizes the beloved, this idealization may not always be self-deceiving. It may sometimes be a more accurate vision of the true nature of the beloved, an ideal vision which nevertheless lights up something that is real, and therefore helps rather than hinders the durability of the relationship. Similarly, while falling *out* of love may be the consequence of seeing “the bitter truth” about the beloved, it may in also involve a *loss* of true vision, an obscuring of that ideal reality which was so wonderfully obvious before. Since human beings are a mixture of good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly, the image of God and

the image of the beast, there are objective grounds for both kinds of vision - the vision which accompanies falling *into* love and the vision which accompanies falling *out of* love...

“Falling in love” is not simply lust, but nor is it pure love unsullied by fallen passion. Saints do not fall in love; they have passed that stage. But nor do the truly evil fall in love; they cannot attain to the glimpse of the ideal that it provides...

And so falling in love remains an ambiguous phenomenon, on the frontier between good and evil. But whether good or evil, it is always essentially human, and irreducible to mere lust, since it is always an intentional, personal experience.



- 1) Its moral quality depends, first, on *the spiritual maturity and purity of the person* who loves, and
- 2) Secondly, on whether God is in the process, guiding and inspiring it to the end-state of lawful marriage.
 - a. If He is not in that process, and He is not leading it to that end, then the love is likely to fade and may lead to fornication or an unhappy marriage or even divorce.
 - b. If, on the other hand, He *is* in it, then the experience will be truly “in the Lord”, that is, “in all decency and in honour”. For, as St. John Chrysostom says, “it is God Who sows these loves”, in that “it is by the Lord that a man is matched with a woman” (Proverbs 19.14).

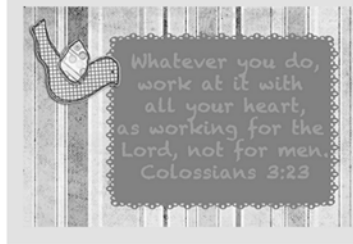
Love Story with a promising end

As youngsters we are often carried away by the pagan philosophies and pagan morality, termed as secular ethics. The world around us—the society, the educational system and the media, who do not know Christ or wish to follow Christ, create this confusion in us. Many of us do not differentiate this kind of secular ethics to that of Orthodox Christian ethics. We blindly follow believing such ethics as the truth.

Secular Ethics



Christian Ethics



Professor David Frost, Principal of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge, England, delivered a lecture entitled "The Basics of Christian Ethics: Part I" in which he sought to answer this question. Professor Frost's conclusion is as follows:

- Popular secular ethics shares similar values, because popular secular ethics directly borrowed some of its values from Orthodox Christianity.
- Popular secular ethics now reaches very different conclusions because it borrowed only some aspects of Christian teaching.
- Borrowing Christian ideals but divorcing them from the context of a loving relationship with God radically changes the ethical system.

For, as St. Cyril of Alexandria writes, "our Lord Jesus Christ requires those who love Him to be accurate investigators of whatsoever is written concerning Him; for He said, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field.' For the mystery of Christ is deposited, so to speak, at a great depth, nor is it plain to the many; but he who uncovers it by means of an accurate knowledge, finds the riches which are therein." Again, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow writes: "None of the mysteries of the most secret wisdom of God ought to appear alien or altogether transcendent to us, but in all humility we must apply our spirit to the contemplation of Divine things."

The only way to learn this differentiation and understand the truth is to have faith in the faith of our Church. You have to live/practice the faith of the church; to obey and to do what is commanded to you. And to hold on till the end; by just being there even if some things are not clear to you; even if you do not understand. Just have faith and obey it with all humility. And your effort and perseverance will give you the rewards of finding the real treasure in the

Kingdom of God through the grace of God, even while living in this world.

"Love" is the most famous subject among the youth. This love in its deeper sense is termed as Eros. The meaning given to Eros by the secular world is different. Research and studies have found some dilemmas on this kind of love which the pagan philosophy teaches. We have already seen the psychology behind this kind of love and also its solution in Orthodoxy in the cover article of this issue.

As we all know Christianity is itself the religion of love. We can get answers on true love only in Orthodox Christianity; it solves these



dilemmas of pagan philosophy through its teachings; it can be understood only if it is practiced. This is a very vast subject that is beautifully explained in Orthodox Theology. Writings of Church Fathers like St. John Chrysostom on this subject can be studied. Famous Russian Orthodox scholar, Vladimir loss has given a detailed understanding of the subject through his research, for the present generation. We will look at only an overview here and give timely understanding as we progress with other issues.

Christianity has solved the dilemmas of many pagan philosophies of love by teaching that the immaterial God created the material universe out of nothing, which both preserves the reality and the goodness of that universe, and distinguishes it from the reality of God Himself. As a result of the fall, created reality tore itself away from union with uncreated reality, God, and corrupted itself; but through the Incarnation of the Word the different realities of the Creator and His creation were reunited without division or confusion in the Person of Jesus Christ. And at the end of time all men who have received and retained Christ in themselves will be united in the whole of their transfigured natures, including their bodies, with the immaterial God.

This means that eros can be regarded as a created reality which is good in essence, but has become bad in the fall, and which through Christ can be restored to its original goodness... Nietzsche, an atheist German philosopher wrote: "Christianity gave eros poison to drink: it did not die of it but degenerated – into a vice." This is the precise opposite of the truth. The truth is that Christianity found eros which was

poisoned by the fall and Christ through his death on the cross gave it the antidote, the food of immortality, and thus reviving eros. Far from being a vice, *eros is a part of human nature as it was originally created*: it fell with the rest of human nature; but purified, redirected and resurrected through the grace of God, it can become the motive power of all true virtue.

The novel “Love in the time of cholera” by Gabriel Gracia Marquez is a very big hit among the youth. We have a plot where a young man Florentino falls in love with Femina, a beautiful young lady. They continue their romance without the knowledge of anyone including Femina’s father. Femina’s father eventually discovers their relationship and takes her away to another place so that she can forget Florentino. Once she is back, she gets married to a doctor. Florentino rejected by the beautiful Fermina at a young age devotes much of his adult life to carnal affairs as a desperate attempt to heal his broken heart. At the end of the novel, he finally wins his lady love after the death of her husband.

For any youth this kind of love is an ideal love. The man longed for a woman and finally wins his love. Any youth will look at the struggles Florentino went through only as his goodness or a phase of hard-luck; to win his lady love.

This love story is based on some sort of secular ethics which we have mentioned at the beginning of the article. Finally the morality/lesson that majority of the youth will take back from this story is that it is a true love of a kind between Florentino and Femina. But before concluding, as Orthodox Christians we need to ask some questions to ourselves.

Was such a love sown by God Who sows such loves in the heart of man? Was such a decision to love a woman been taken up at an age suitable to Florentine? Was Florentine’s love for Femina chosen with the grace of God or, as a sign from God; Did it end up in the sacrament of marriage? Was there repentance for all the sins he committed to satisfy his broken heart? Do the carnal affairs mean no flattery or being selfless?



St. Seraphim in his words: 'True Christian marriage is the union of the souls of those being married that is



sanctified by the grace of God. It gives them happiness and serves as the foundation of the Christian family, that 'house church'. People in recent times have

forgotten that the grace of God is communicated in the sacrament of marriage. One must always remember this grace, stir it up and live in its spirit. Then the love of the man for the woman and of the woman for the man will be pure, deep and a source of happiness for them. For this love, too, is a blessed gift of God. Only people do not know how to make use of this gift in a fitting manner! And it is for this simple reason, that they forget the grace of God! '

The first thing in the spiritual life,' says St. Macarius the Great, 'is love for God, and the second - love for one's neighbour. When we apply ourselves to the first and great task, then the second, being lesser, follows after the first and great task. But without the first the second cannot be pure. For can he who does not love God with all his soul and all his heart apply himself correctly and without flattery to love for his brothers?' What has been said about love in general applies also to married love. Of all the kinds of earthly love, the married love is the strongest and so it is represented in Holy Scripture as an image of the ideal love of the human soul for God: 'The Song of Songs,' says Blessed Jerome, 'is a nuptial song of spiritual wedlock,' that is, the union of the human soul with God. However, with the blessedness of the virgins (monastics) nothing can be compared, neither in heaven nor on earth..."



True virginity (monasticism) is the fulfilling of the first and greatest commandment, to love God with all one's soul and mind and heart and strength. It is a burning love of God so strong that there can be no thought of a human bride or bridegroom. This love is known as Divine Eros. For

such a thought would indeed be a defilement for one who has dedicated himself exclusively to the Heavenly Bridegroom (Christ). St. Ignaty Brianchaninov writes: “The purity of those living in marriage consists in their faithfulness to each other.

The purity of virgins (monastics) and widows who are wedded to Christ consists in their faithfulness to Christ.” Thus the path of this mystery lies in the renunciation of everything that can in any way distract from the love of God.

As for "the greatest of those born of women" (Matthew 11.11), St. John the Baptist, that "burning and shining light" (John 5.35) who compelled the admiration even of the Pharisees and who prepared the way of the Lord in the spirit of Elijah, he, too, was a virgin. Of him the Church chants: "Having embraced chastity and temperance, he possessed them by nature, while he fled contrary to nature, fighting against nature".



This is the path chosen by St. Stephen³ who became the first martyr for Christ. He was a youth icon and a deacon. Saint Stephen was a Jew, by race, and, as some say, a disciple of Gamaliel, the teacher of the Law mentioned in Acts 5:34 and 22:3. He was the

first of the seven deacons whom the Apostles established in Jerusalem to care for the poor, and to distribute alms to them. Being a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, he performed great signs and wonders among the people. While disputing with the Jews concerning Jesus, and wisely refuting their every contradiction, so that no one was able to withstand the wisdom and the spirit whereby he spake, he was slandered as a blasphemer and was dragged off to the Sanhedrin of the elders. There with boldness he proved from the divine Scriptures the coming of the Just One (Jesus), of Whom they had become the betrayers and murderers, and he reproved their faithless and hardheartedness. And finally, gazing into Heaven and beholding the divine glory, he said: "Lo, I see the Heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." But when they heard this, they stopped up their ears, and with anger cast him out of the city and stoned him, while he was calling out and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then, imitating the long-suffering of the Master, he bent his knees and prayed in a loud voice for them that were

stoning him, and he said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," And saying this, he fell asleep (Acts 6, 7), thus becoming the first among the Martyrs of the Church of Christ.

As youngsters, the life of St. Stephen is the most exemplary life for us to follow. His love for God was the reason for the love towards his neighbor, that he could pray for them and forgive them. This is pure love. The Divine Eros made him pure enough to see the heavens open and see the Lord.

In a similar way, true marriage is the fulfillment of the second commandment, to love one's neighbor as oneself. For in loving his wife, a man is loving his neighbor as himself, in that "he that loveth his wife loveth himself" (Ephesians 5.28). Moreover, it is a training ground for those virtues that will enable him to love all men, and even his enemies, as himself. Marriage is both an end in itself in the same way that an icon is an end in itself – a thing of beauty mirroring Eternal Beauty, – and one of the paths whereby the spouses can attain to a closer union with Eternal Beauty Himself. We all know that no husband measures up to the infinite patience and self-sacrificial love of Christ for the Church, just as no wife measures up to the infinite humility and obedience of the Church towards Christ, as exemplified most perfectly in the All-holy Virgin Mary. But the grace of marriage and the struggles of the married life are a path whereby they can attain to truly Christian love.

The idea that marriage is in any way incompatible with true Christian love is contrary to the Holy Scriptures. Moses and Apostle Peter are examples of married men from Scriptures

- Who showed more love for man than the God-seer Moses, who was willing to sacrifice his own salvation for that of the People of Israel? - and he was a married man.
- To whom was entrusted a greater authority and a weightier burden in the service of the Church than the Apostle Peter? - and he, as St. John Climacus points out, "had a mother-in-law".

Therefore, says St. Gregory the Theologian to those preparing to be baptized: "Are you not yet married to the flesh? Fear not this consecration; you are pure

³ <https://www.goarch.org/chapel/saints?contentid=355>

even after marriage. I will take the risk of that. I will join you in marriage. I will dress the bride. We do not dishonor marriage because we give a higher honor to virginity. I will imitate Christ, the pure Bridegroom and Leader of the Bride, as He both worked a miracle at a wedding, and honors marriage with His Presence.”

For fallen man, marriage is a virtual necessity; and even in Christ it is the best path for most to the goal of chastity. However, Christ by His Coming and Example has opened up another path to the same end - that of monasticism. Christ, writes Vladimir Lossky, “... *for the redemption of ‘eros’, opens two paths...: the path of Christian marriage and the path of monasticism*”. Monasticism is the more direct, more arduous way to the summit; and to reach it by this path brings a special reward. True monastics attain in this life to the condition of the life to come, in which “they neither marry nor are given in marriage... for they are equal to the angels” (Luke 20.35, 36). Marriage is the longer, less direct route to the same summit, with many stops on the way and with the consequent danger of becoming distracted by the scenery along the way. That is why St. Paul says: “I would that all men were even as myself [i.e. virgins]... But every man hath his proper charisma, one after this manner, and another after that” (I Corinthians 7.7).

It is in this contrast that we can perhaps find the solution to the paradox of marriage: that it can be both “on account of fornication” (I Corinthians 7.2) and “not on account of fornication” (Tobit 8.7), both “honorable in all” (Hebrews 13.4) and defiling for some (Revelation 14.4).

First it is necessary to establish that the aim of



marriage is identical to that of monasticism: the purification and redirection of eros, or chastity, a pure heart, without which no one can either see God or truly love his neighbor.

Consequently, we cannot deny that marriage is a form

of asceticism, as the virgin Constantine Leontiev points out: “At first glance it seems that monasticism, in renouncing the family, is the logical antithesis of the family. In fact, however, it is not like that. Marriage is a special kind of asceticism, a special kind

of renunciation. A strict, religious, moral marriage is only a softer kind of monasticism; monasticism for two or with children as pupils...”

But for some one way will be preferable, for others - the other. For the few, the more direct assault on the fallen passions is the path chosen for them by Divine Providence (i.e. monasticism). These are they who earn their reward “in the burden and heat of the day” (Matthew 20.12), without seeking a respite in the shady cool of marriage. Some have even chosen this path (monasticism) at the outset of married life, as we have seen, living as brother and sister with their wives. Others come to it later, after the death of their spouse. Many of the greatest saints, such as St. Spyridon of Cyprus and St. John the Almsgiver, St. Juliana of Lazarevo and St. Theodora of Sihla, and many of the holy kings and queens, have trodden this path to the Kingdom.

However, for most people this more direct approach (i.e. monasticism) is too difficult and dangerous

(because of the danger of falling into fornication, or for other reasons). That is why God has blessed



marriage, not only as an end, the restoration of the fallen unity of Adam and Eve in Paradise, but also as a means, to avoid fornication, to provide children, and to provide an arena of struggle and self-perfection parallel to the still more testing arena of monasticism. *For those called by God to this path, the measured rhythm of coming together and abstinence in sexual relations (I Corinthians 7.5), combined with all the trials and tribulations, the responsibilities and obediences of married life, is the best means to the attainment of chastity.*

Not only are marriage and monasticism compatible in this way: “the many-coloured wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3.10) has placed them in a relationship of mutual dependence, each order gaining in humility from contemplating the feats of the other. Finally, *the married man has to realize, if he is to fulfill his own vocation in the world, he, too, must become something of a monk - internally, at any rate.* For there is no

other way than that of the Cross, and that, as St. John Chrysostom points out, the commandments are the same for monks and laymen with the single exception of the prohibition to marry for the former.

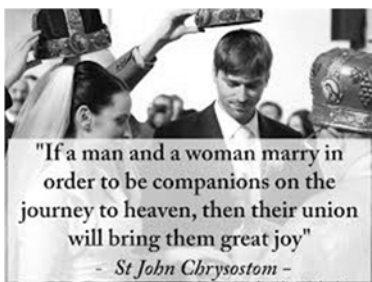
The words of St. Macarius the Great, "In truth there is neither virgin nor married, neither monk nor secular. But **God seeks only the intention of each, and gives the Spirit of life to all.**" Understood in this way, there is no opposition between the two charismata; they both fulfill the commandments, and in both the grace is given of a pure, chaste and single-minded fidelity. Only monasticism must be accorded the higher place. For there is no limit to the love of God, which is higher than the love of man; whereas the love of man is good only so long as it is less than the love of God. For, as St. Barsanuphius of Optina says, "a woman... wants to love her bridegroom with a passionate love and remain devoted with all her soul to Christ, but these are incompatible. In love for one's bridegroom there is, of course, no sin; but if love for him is stronger than love for God, it will distance her from Christ. The Lord Himself said, 'No man can serve two masters' (Matthew 6.24). To work only for Christ, people go to a monastery..."

St. Macarius the Great says, it is impossible to love one's neighbour with a pure heart unless one has first come to love God.

St. Maximus says, "it is impossible for those who have not first cloven single-mindedly to God to harmonize with each other in their mutual tendencies."

"Without Me," said the Lord, "you can do nothing" (John 15.5). Without the grace of God that is given to a man to be a monk (or married), he could make no progress. Of course, the man must also apply his own will. But the will of man alone is not enough. If God does not also will it, then no amount of striving will make him succeed in the calling he has chosen. Fallen nature underlies and hinders all our efforts, whatever our calling.

The struggle against sexual sin in thought, feeling and



deed is a struggle that must be undertaken by all, whether they are in the monastic or the married state. It is not the case that all virgins or monastics necessarily

sin less sexually than married people (let us remember that lusting only in one's heart is adultery, according to the word of the Lord (Matthew 5.28)). Many married people have reached high levels of chastity and sanctity, while many foolish virgins have failed to enter the marriage-chamber of the Lamb. Thus it is not the path to the end, but the end itself which matters in the long run. And that end is attainable by both.

Both the monk and the married, must love the Kingdom more than paradise on earth if he is not ultimately to be deprived of both the one and the other (Matt 6:33); he must be ready in his heart to reject all earthly delights, however lawful, for the Kingdom's sake. For paradise on earth will not last, - at the very most for the duration of earthly life, - whereas the Kingdom of heaven endures for ever and ever. And in the end, those who will be counted worthy of salvation, both the monastics and the married, will be "like the angels, who always behold the face of the Father in heaven" (Matthew 18.11). For when the Supreme Object of desire is present, lesser objects are necessarily eclipsed, not because they are flawed or lacking in beauty, but simply because they are lesser. As St. Maximus the Confessor writes: "It is like the light from the stars. The stars do not shine in the day. When the greater and incomparable light of the sun appears, they are hidden and cannot be seen by the senses. With respect to God this is even more so, for God is infinite, and uncreated things cannot be compared to created things."

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