

New Age Philosophy, Orthodox Thought, and Marriage

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The carnal mind is enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7)

In the past few years the number of articles and books published by Orthodox writers on the subject of marriage and specifically marital relations has increased. The ideas expressed in some of these works are not always consistent with Orthodox Tradition. The essence of these ideas is the deification of carnal relations, or, as some express it, the sanctification of erotic desires. Authors claim that these desires can lead one to God—to the realization of God within us—that such union is a reflection of the Godhead.

These ideas are not original. They are found in pagan writings and the works of Gnostics. They are very popular in the philosophy of the New Age Movement. New Age philosophy believes that the world is about to enter into a new period of existence, a New Order in all areas of life. Our concern here is the religion that will be the spiritual force in this New Age. The movement can be defined as:

...a new syncretistic working of individuals and organizations dedicated to a mystical interpretation of reality and the pursuit of occult practices to enhance spirituality. Its followers range from those seeking metaphysical experience to those searching for enhanced human potential through a holistic view. The New Age Movement represents a formidable social and spiritual challenge for Christianity. This elect form of mysticism has invaded such areas as business, education, psychology, medicine, and religion. Because of the Movement's espousal of psychic and spiritualistic phenomena, those who revere Scripture must address the New Age wherever it intrudes. (Bob Larson, *Straight Answers on the New Age*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers)

At first glance the overall atmosphere of New Age philosophy appears to be one of tolerance and sincerity, but closer investigation reveals otherwise. On the one hand, although any religious practice or creed is acceptable for the New Age movement, on the other, the New Age rigorously opposes any attempt to promote one religious belief or philosophy as the single true faith, especially Christianity which professes to be the only path to salvation. The New Age movement believes Christianity to be just one of many inner spiritual paths, all leading to the same goal. New Agers try to convince us that

the reason for all the problems of the twentieth century (and the past in general) lay in the unstable values of old religious, political, and social systems. The search for answers, they believe, must be *outside of traditional religious thought* (Priest George, "The New Age" [in Russian], *Pravoslavnyaya Rus*, #24, 1996, p. 8). Those answers, they claim, are found in a more humane, less rigid approach to questions concerning man, God, life, and death. In essence man, according to New Age teaching, is better and more capable of perfection than we assume; God is found everywhere, in all religions and practices; through understanding our mystical potential by Self-realization and the attainment of Higher Consciousness, life can be a pleasurable spiritual experience; and death is a wonderful entrance into "the light," union with a god who is much less demanding than we have been led to believe. New Agers claim that man advances not by the process of discernment, "testing the spirits," and moral struggle, but through intuitive "knowing" and "creativity."

In order to illustrate the connection between the New Age Movement and the nontraditional ideas of various Orthodox writers we offer the following excerpts from various works with commentary.

In an essay by Laura Jones entitled, "Made in the Image of the Holy Trinity: Where Does Sex Fit into this Picture?", found in the Moscow Patriarchate journal, *One Church* (vol. XLVIII, no. 5, 1994), the author introduces her theme:

We can say that the life of the Triune God is that of the eternal ecstasy of the three Divine Persons, for ecstasy means a kind of going out from one's self... How then do we reflect the Divine ecstasy of the Three in One? In sexual ecstasy one goes out of oneself to be physically lost in another person. Spiritual writers utilize erotic imagery very much, as also in Holy Scripture, to describe the mystical ecstasy of being lost in God. Such a correlation is also found in the traditions of non-Christian religions where belief in the Holy Trinity is absent. In what way must ours be an especially Trinitarian spirituality? How, moreover, does such a spirituality transform our understanding of our own, properly human, sexuality? (p. 166)

The author uses extensively the thoughts of an American "mystic", Herbert Schwartz, in order to explain her theory. She claims that with the proper knowledge of love, sexuality, and the Triune God, one can attain to a higher spiritual state. She writes, "...when we use our minds rightly, knowledge leads into love." Further, "This knowledge is not something that we can attain by our understanding alone. What we can do with our understanding is seek

after that which will unite us more intimately with God, for it is within this union that God reveals Himself to us." She instructs us that we must correct our understanding of love to conform to a new definition, which she summarizes as follows:

So true love for another person is not mere feeling, but feeling which derives from and is informed by the very rational conviction that we are loved by God. The joy this inspires is the rational ecstasy of that invincible faith which has the power to move mountains (Mark 11:23). (Jones, p. 169)

To clarify her concept she quotes her guide, the mystic Schwartz: "Just as when man is overcome by sexual desire everything else would be obliterated, so when you turn to Jesus this way there is a supernatural obliteration of everything else, and the more you do this the more you'll experience this joy...." At this point she rightly poses the question, "We may ask how this relates to sexual union...." While passing over her answer, it is sufficient here to quote her conclusion: "Rightly understood, true and holy conjugal union does reflect the Spirit of the Word from on High. It is like a mysterious love of the Father towards the Word mysteriously begotten" (Jones, p. 169-170).

Knowledge as well as carnal union, both important to New Agers, play a vital role in Mrs. Jones' spirituality. In the book, *Understanding the New Age*, the author, Russell Chandler, writes: "The New Age premise is that knowledge, or *gnosis*, is the key to being awakened from our ignorance of divinity. The slumbering 'Higher Self' can be roused. Creation and humanity are simply 'elevated' to divine status through personal transformation" (Russel Chandler, *Understanding the New Age*, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988, p. 32).

In the book, *New Age Lies to Women* (by Wanda Marrs, Austin: Living Truth Publishers, 1989), the author quotes a witch, Miriam Starhawk, who instructs that "sexuality is sacred because it is a sharing of energy...." Retreats, seminars, and courses on this subject are being introduced throughout America and the world. The concept that carnal union has a cleansing or purifying action and can lead to spiritual states, even spiritual union with the divine ("the energy that is the passion of God"), is a well known aspect of pagan cults (Marrs, p. 58). The author of this informative book, rightly determines that while ancient pagans "confused fleshly desires with spiritual attainment," modern New Age teachers also lift up the act of carnal union "from the profane to higher levels of sublime spirituality" (Marrs, p. 65).

In contrast to the above teachings, the Holy Fathers consistently warn us not to mingle the carnal with the spiritual, for it interferes with spiritual growth. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov writes the following about the union of the mind with the heart (the goal of spiritual life, and the condition for true prayer to God): "Not only does every sinful emotion and every sinful thought disrupt this union; even all natural thoughts and feelings, however subtle and disguised by an appearance of righteousness, destroy the union of the mind with the heart, and set them in opposition to one another" (*The Arena*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1991, p. 87). St. Mark the Ascetic advises, "If we no longer fulfill the desires of the flesh, then with the Lord's help the evils within us will easily be eliminated" (*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, London: Faber and Faber, 1983, p. 122, no. 181). St. Nilus of Sinai instructs, "If you desire to pray in the Spirit, depend on nothing carnal" (M. A. Novoselov, *Mysticism of the Church and Mysticism of the Western Confessions* [in Russian], Moscow: 1995, p. 59).

The New Age Movement, in complete contradiction to Orthodox thought, is replete with teachings on "spiritualized sensuality." Another example of this teaching, so foreign to the traditional Orthodox school of thought, is the book, *Marriage, Sexuality, and Celibacy, a Greek Orthodox Perspective*, by the Greek Archdiocesan priest Rev. Demetrios J. Constantelos (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 1975). Father Demetrios describes physical relations in marriage in an almost liturgical manner:

Sexuality, intimate embraces between husband and wife and their subsequent union into one flesh is a holy altar. The moment when love leads husband and wife into a consummation of their beings is a holy moment and a sacred event. Sexual intercourse in marriage is an act of recreation, the restructuring of mankind in a microcosmic form, the recreation of the unity of man. (p. 23)

To the uninformed reader the above quote may seem at best like exaggerated poetic musings by Father Demitrios concerning marital relations. On the other hand, the reader, even if not well-read in patristic literature, might, through common sense and reverent feelings, be offended by the inappropriate use of the expression "holy altar" to describe this function. Those acquainted with pagan or satanic cults which incorporate a carnal "altar" into their rituals, will see the similarity here. How do the Fathers differ from Rev. Demetrios in their view of marital relations? St. Gregory of Rome (the Dialogist) wrote to St. Augustine of Canterbury, England:

...since lawful intercourse must be accompanied by bodily desire, it is fitting to refrain from entering a holy place [immediately after], since this desire itself is not blameless. For David, who said: *behold, I was shapened in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*, was not himself born of any illicit union, but in lawful wedlock. But knowing himself to have been conceived in iniquity, he grieved that he had been born in sin, like a tree bearing in its branches the sap of evil drawn up from its root. In saying this, he does not term the bodily union of married people iniquity, but the desire of such union.

...when lust takes the place of desire for children, the mere act of union becomes something that the pair have cause to regret; ...this carries a warning with it. For when the Apostle Paul said, *If they cannot contain themselves, let them marry*, he at once added, *I speak this by permission, and not of commandment*. This concession makes it lawful, yet not good; so when he spoke of permission, he indicated that it was not blameless. (Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, London: Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 85-86)

The famous Byzantine commentator on the Psalms, Zigabenos, repeats the same thoughts:

Had Adam not sinned, there would be no necessity for him to enter into carnal intercourse with Eve. For sin gave birth to that form of union... And although marriages by the law became honorable before the Lord for the sake of procreation, nonetheless in their essence they are the offspring of sin... Therefore it is not surprising that David himself had the misfortune to sin, in a way submitting to the necessity of nature. (Euthymius Zigabenos, *Commentary on the Psalter* [in Russian], Montreal: 1986, p. 401)

St. Athanasius the Great comments on Psalm 50 in the same spirit:

God's original intention was that we give birth not through marriage and corruption; the violation of the commandment introduced marriage as a result of Adam's transgression, i.e., as the result of falling away from the commandment given to him by God. (*Collection of Works* [in Russian], vol. 4, p. 175)

The assumption that God created man and woman with the intention of them engaging in carnal, sexual relations is faulty and can lead to dangerous conclusions. God created mankind in an unfallen, sinless, pure, angelic state. Carnal relations, as we can see from the Fathers cited above, came about as a result of the fall. Finally, there came a time in the life of the Old Testament

Church, when it was time for it to be replaced by the New Testament, revealed by the incarnate Word of God, in Whom man's nature was finally made whole. Man's wholeness was not accomplished through the carnal union that occurred in blessed marriages throughout the Old Testament, but rather man's wholeness was accomplished in Christ, Whose incarnation occurred without carnal relations.

The faulty understanding that from the beginning God ordained sexual relations can lead, for some, to a justification of the sin of fornication, because, supposedly, God created us with this predisposition from the start. This then can lead to blaming God for the sin that a fornicator falls into. This idea of placing the blame on the Creator (or on nature) will be discussed below in connection with the heresy of Sophiology.

Some contemporary Orthodox writers would tell us that the above interpretations refer to the human state under the Old Testament and now Grace has given a different meaning to marriage. Now we hear of "sanctified erotic desires" which are consummated upon a "holy altar." One would expect the children of such sacred unions to be spiritually more stable (New Testament) and less inclined to sin than King David (Old Testament). Is this in fact so?

Father Demetrios goes on to claim that

in the Orthodox Church sexual intercourse is described as *synousia* which means community of essence, consubstantiality. Basil the Great uses this very term to denote the relations between the three persons in the Trinity. Athanasius and Origen appropriate the same word to indicate that Jesus was born not as a result of *synousia*—sexual intercourse—although he shares in the *synousia* of the Trinity. (p. 25)

The term *synousia*, besides its basic meaning of personal, social contact, in the writings of the pagan historian and philosophers Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle, can indeed convey the meaning of sexual intercourse. In the period of the New Testament, for example, St. Justin the Philosopher uses this term in the following context in his thoughts on the incarnation of Christ: "If He was to have been born by intercourse [*synousia*] like all other firstborn, then why did God Himself say that He would give a sign, which is not common to all firstborn" (*The Works of Saint Justin the Philosopher and Martyr* [in Russian], "Dialogue of Saint Justin with Tryphon the Jew," Moscow: 1864, 84, p. 286). St. Basil did in fact use this same term when speaking of the essence of the

Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity (Homily 24, 5). One should also note the use of terms derived from the word *synousia*, for example, *synousiastes*, among the Appollinarians, who held that in Christ the human and divine essences (*ousia*) were united (*syn*) in one essence (*Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Oxford University Press, 1992). St. Epiphanius of Cyprus employs another meaning derived from the word *synousia*, i.e., *synousios*, in order to indicate the Arian idea of a kind of participation of Christ in the essence of God the Father (G. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, 1961, p. 1337). The same term is used by St. Gregory of Nyssa in describing the Sabelian (heretical) mingling of the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity. All of the above references illustrate the importance of understanding the term *synousia* as used by the Fathers of the Church, and the importance of a correct choice of theological context for its use in modern theological texts (Lampe).

Having used this term in relation to the Holy Trinity, in no way does it carry over this exalted meaning to, for example, marital relations. On the contrary, it is strange to even try to find a typological analogy between marital relations among created human beings and the Divine existence of the Holy Trinity. This use of human attributes to define God is more along the lines of the Eunomian heresy which attempted to determine the essence of God according to the attribute of "unbegottenness." In the present case these new theologians are attempting to determine the essence of God by applying to it the attribute of "copulation."

Fr. Demetrios ends his book with the words: "A theology, an attitude, or an institution must correspond to current needs and experiences if it is to continue across the generations, constructive and influential." Although his words are in agreement with the contemporary philosophy he espouses in his book, they are contrary to the Church's attitude towards tradition. There is much in contemporary "needs and experiences" which needs to "correspond" to traditional Orthodox piety and not vice versa. The Church has for centuries successfully called the faithful to repentance and renewal, but only according to the path traced by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church.

Ideas similar to some of those quoted above are found in the article, "The Descent to God," by John Perkins published in *St. Vladimir's* [Orthodox Seminary] *Theological Quarterly* (vol. 1, 40, no. 4/1996). The author expounds his theme as follows: "Modern people often must go down first—return to the earth—to rich sensuous experience—in order to reconnect with their animal natures, *before* they are fit candidates for Christian transformation". He

instructs: "We must first come to a realistic experience and acceptance of our 'dirty' impulses and the feelings that accompany them...we should...not follow the temptation to reject anything *prematurely*... We should embrace our animal nature with love rather than denouncing it... We need to realize that sexual energy, rather than being inimical to the divine, can actually *connect us to God*" (p. 315). He then quotes another "lay theologian," Philip Sherrard, who writes:

The energy which manifests itself as sexual energy in man has its source in the deepest strata of their being... It is the energy of life itself, divine in its origin and sacred in its nature, and not ceasing to be sacred even where its use, through ignorance or malice, is perverted or abused. (Philip Sherrard, *Christianity and Eros, Essays on the Theme of Sexual Love*, London SPCK, 1976, pp. 76-77)

Any attempt to contradict or discredit (even patristically) the above cited notions of this author are dismissed: "The notion—ubiquitous in the history of theology—that our animal natures, including our genders and our sexuality, came into being, or were superadded, as a result of the Fall is chaff that needs to be sifted from the wheat of patristic tradition" (Perkins, p. 310). He credits Bishop Kallistos Ware for this original expression concerning, "patristic 'wheat' and 'chaff.'" One might inquire of Perkins which of the Holy Fathers should we begin to "sift" in order to come to a correct understanding of life according to the author? Perhaps we should begin with St. Athanasius, who was quoted earlier and whose words disagree with the present authors. Is this not pride and arrogance to assume that one knows more than the Fathers of the Church? What message does this convey to Orthodox believers? Will this not lead to a Protestant approach where each interprets at will, as the spirit moves him?

There is nothing unique in the theological innovations expressed by these Orthodox authors. Taoism, Tantric Buddhism, Hinduism and their offspring in New Age philosophy of our time are replete with information and directions on how to become more spiritual through "sacred sex." In an advertisement for the new book by Richard Craze, *The Spiritual Tradition of Sex*, this topic is explained as "a means of expanding and exploring spirituality." A New Age course is offered over the Internet, entitled, "Exploring Sexuality; A Philosopher's Perspective," where the professor tells us that "through all human history there has been a connection between sexuality and spirituality. Why? Because something intrinsically spiritual lies at the heart of the sexual

act." A New Age instructor in spiritual enlightenment, Chris Griscom, makes the claim that "our sexual energy is the closest energy to spirit. It is the closest energy to the divine force..." (cited from the Internet). A flood of books has appeared under headings reflecting the themes and the spirit of those writers to whom Archbishop Averky referred to as "liberals and avant-garde theologians." The following are titles of just a few examples: *Eros Breaking Free: Interpreting Sexual Theo-ethics* (Gilson), *Body Theology* (Nelson), *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood, and Theology* (Graham), *Eros Redeemed: Breaking the Stranglehold of Sexual Sin* (White), and many others.

We encounter the above theme again in the chapter, "The Mystery of Love," in the recently published book, *The Faith, Understanding Orthodox Christianity, An Orthodox Catechism*, by Clark Carlton. Mr. Carlton states the following:

In Christ the true nature of marriage is revealed; marriage is an end in and of itself. To understand this, however, we must first understand the nature and purpose of man's sexual drive.

We have said that man's nature possesses certain faculties or energies. One of these is the erotic power, the power of sexual desire. In the animal kingdom this desire guarantees the survival of the species. In human beings, however, this desire is related directly to the realization of the image of God within us. (*The Faith*, Salisbury: Regina Orthodox Press, 1997, p. 228)

Expressions similar to these are very common among New Agers. A New Age witch, Irena Tweedie, has said, "Sexual energy is extremely important. Without sexual energy, a person can never realize the Self." The term "Self" is frequently employed by New Agers to "indicate the realization of the god or goddess within" (*New Age Lies to Women*, p. 68).

Carlton continues by quoting Archimandrite George (*The Faith*, pp. 228-229):

Archimandrite George writes:

But what—more than anything else—manifests the imprint of God on the human soul is the power of desire (eros) within the soul...and the impetus which a sanctified eros leads the soul in its movements towards its divine archetype. The Saints, especially Maximus the Confessor and Dionysius the Areopagite, understand this power of eroticism as not referring simply to human sexual desire. To put it better, the sexual urge is an expression of that natural yearning which is implanted within us by our Creator, and leads us toward Him (*The Eros of Repentance*, pp. 2-3).

The problem here lies in the authors confusion of terminology. St. Dionysius the Areopagite used an understanding of *eros* that refers to the very hypostatic love of God Himself:

...while He Himself being the Cause of all things...is also Himself good, divine Love [*eros*]... [in Greek:] *o Theios eros agathos.*" (DIONESIOS AREOPAGITES * Dionisius the Areopogite, *PERI THEION ONOMATON * ON THE DIVINE NAMES*, ch. 4, 10. [parallel Greek and Russian]. G. M. Prokhorov, Ed., Saint Petersburg: 1995, pp. 118, 119.)

Following this, St. Dionysius immediately defines the very meaning of *eros* itself, explaining that he does not use the term in the pagan sense like Plato, i.e., *eros* meaning a human desire to achieve one's own perfection, but rather, he uses it as a name of God:

And let no one think that we venerate the name Love (*erotos*), in a manner contradictory to Scripture (*Logia*). For truly it is foolish and senseless, it seems to me, to pay attention to the letter, and not to the sense of the discourse. This is not an attribute of people who desire to understand the divine, but characteristic of those who only accept sounds [i.e., assume "love" (*erotos*) always refers to something carnal] but do not allow the meaning of the sounds to register in their ears and have no desire to know what a particular expression might mean and how one might illumine its sense with the help of other similar expressions.... (*ON THE DIVINE NAMES*, ch. 4, 11, p. 121)

Thus St. Dionysius speaks of *eros* as a Divine characteristic of the supernatural existence of the Creator Himself. St. Maximus the Confessor, in his commentary on this work of St. Dionysius, explains the term as used by Dionysius in this way:

...he [St. Dionysius] calls God the Bestower and Parent of benevolence (*agapes*) and of love (*erotos*). For having these within Himself, He extended them outward, i.e., into the realm of creation. And therefore it is said that God is love (I John 4:16), and in the *Song of Songs* He is called love (Song 2:4), and sweetness and desire (Song 5:16), which is love. (*ON THE DIVINE NAMES*, ch. 4, 14, note 84, p. 129)

If one were to examine a dictionary of Greek terms defined according to the usage of the Holy Fathers, for example *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, one would find the following examples for the word *eros*: 1. love, defense of term as synonym for *agape*; 2. of God's love; 3. of man's love towards God; 4. of love

towards saints; 5. for virtues (*A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe, D. D., Oxford, 1961). On the other hand, concerning the ancient Greek pagan usage of the word *eros*, we find the following definitions: love, love of a thing, desire for it, loves, amours, the god of love, Eros, Amor (*An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Liddell and Scott's, Oxford, p. 317). This simple study makes it clear how we should understand the word *eros* as the Fathers used it. A confusion of terminology could be easily avoided if proper sources are employed to define terminology, at the very least for the purposes of translating patristic texts.

Therefore, in any given exposition, if we follow the example of the Fathers of the Church, it is imperative to determine initially in what sense is the term *eros* used? In the section quoted in *The Faith*, from the work *The Eros of Repentance*, cited above, the "power of eroticism" is spoken of as if St. Dionysius and St. Maximus understood it as "not referring simply to human sexual desire." However, according to the thought of the Fathers, it does not only *not* "refer" to sexual desire, but in general has *nothing* to do with sexual desire—the attraction towards the opposite sex. The author of this work, *The Eros of Repentance*, Archimandrite George, by means of this play on words nonetheless concludes that sexual attraction is a natural desire, implanted within us by God Himself, and leads us towards Him. This opinion of Archimandrite George is not shared by St. Isaac the Syrian, who writes: "There are three means by which every rational soul can draw close to God: by burning faith, or fear, or the Lord's instruction. And no one can draw close to God's love if he is not led by one of these three means" (*Collection of Works*, "Homily 58," Moscow: 1993, p. 307).

The "realization" of the image of God according to Carlton's understanding actually leads us away from the salvific way of the cross, planned for us by the Lord Himself. St. Abba Dorotheos explains a quote of St. Gregory the Theologian:

'Thus let us honor the Prototype, understand the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.' [St. Dorotheos explains:] The power of the mystery of Christ's death is such: in so much that we have lost the image of God within ourselves and through falls and sins have been deadened, as the Apostle says (Eph. 2:1) God having created us in His image, had mercy on His creation and His image, and for our sakes became a man... let us give [what is due] to the Image having been created in the image. How can we do this? Let us learn from the Apostle who says, *Let us cleanse ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh*

and spirit (II Cor. 7:1). (Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings* [in Russian], "Discourse 20, Explanation of Some Sayings of Saint Gregory, Which Are Sung With the Troparions for Holy Pascha," Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra: 1900, pp. 195-196)

No such "sexual desire" was inherent in human nature before the fall, as St. John Damascene explains:

...the commandment *go forth and multiply* does not necessarily mean through conjugal union. For God could increase the human race by another means, if people had preserved the commandment inviolate to the end. (Saint John Damascene, "Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith," ch. 24, p. 337, *Collection of Works*, Saint Petersburg: 1913)

The famous desert dweller, George of Zadonsk, wrote to a spiritual daughter who was inquiring about Adam and Eve and marital relations:

...May holy truth enlighten you to the correct understanding of [Scriptural] words. I am pleased to cite an example from the 18th Discourse of St. John Chrysostom on the 1st book [Genesis] on your so unexpected [for me] statement, in which, incidentally, St. John expresses the following words: *And Adam knew his wife Eve*. Mind you, when did this take place? After disobedience, after the exile from Paradise; then intercourse began; before disobedience, they lived like Angels, and nowhere is there any mention of intercourse. Because previously we were not subject to physical needs, therefore from the beginning virginity was preeminent. But when, due to their weakness, disobedience occurred, sin made inroads and virginity stepped aside (retreated), as from those unworthy of so great a virtue. Then the practice of carnal union appeared. Please take heed to the great merit of virginity, what an elevated and great deed it is, which is exalted above human nature and needs." You can read further in the book of discourses the correct explanation of the words cited, and see that it is not by carnal union or intercourse that the human race multiplies, but by the unfathomable power of God's blessing. Is it clear to you now that there was no commandment about carnal union but that it took place after the transgression and disobedience which might not have occurred [i.e., could have been avoided]?

With love I warn you about important matters: do not engage in conversations with those incapable of expounding properly. It is better to avoid curiosity and not listen to those from whose tongues words fall like peas from a sack." (*Letters...*, Saint Petersburg, "Letter #115," p. 110)

Views expressed in the chapter, "The Mystery of Love," from the book, *The Faith*, and works of a similar nature, return a person once again to a fallen state, undermining the Christian ideal defined by St. Paul for all Christians (since at that time there was no established monastic state), *But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none. But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord* (I Cor. 7:29, 32).

Carlton continues:

Our sexual drive was given to us by God and is good by nature; it is the misuse of that desire that is sinful. There are two ways whereby our erotic energies are sanctified and return to their proper state: celibacy and marriage...

Through the Mystery of Marriage, therefore, man's sexual energies are properly channeled, and his ego is overcome through mutual submission. In doing so, the couple serves as an icon of Christ's union with His Bride, the Church, participating in that union.

The natural fruit of this sanctified, erotic communion is the begetting of children,...

...The family then images forth not only the union of God and man, but also the union of love shared between the persons of the All-holy Trinity. (*The Faith*, pp. 230-233)

Is it traditional or even proper to allow here for any analogy between "sanctified, erotic [sexual] communion" among husbands and wives, and between God and man, or between the "persons of the All-holy Trinity"? A scholar of both patristics and psychology, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Oreoi (Synod of Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili), has written:

Love within the domain of theology, that is, when applied to God, is not love as we understand it in the human sense. Needless to say, the relationships between the Hypostases of the Trinity, too, cannot be understood in terms of human relationships and the kind of love that passes between two or more humans. Indeed, spiritual love is far above and beyond the love that we find in human experiences and interactions.

We should also note that the experience of the highest form of Christian love, which leads to union with God and an ecstatic state of spiritual communion with Him, has no physical or material dimensions..." (Chrysostomos of Oreoi,

Bishop, and Thorton, Father James, "Love," Vol. 4 of *Themes in Orthodox Patristic Psychology*, Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1990, p. 65)

Although the present author, Mr. Carlton, is not as bold as Laura Jones, John Perkins, or others cited earlier, nonetheless, his terminology, images, and themes indicate a similar school of thought. Modern man, aside from the theological incongruencies indicated here, is far from a correct, patristic understanding of *Eros*. An attempt to convey the patristic term *Eros* as "erotic desire" can only be understood by the modern reader as it is described in the Webster's Dictionary: 1. Of, relating to, or promoting sexual love and desire: AMATORY. 2. Dominated by sexual love or desire (Webster's II New College Dictionary, Boston, 1995, p. 382). This carnal understanding of the word "erotic" is suggested openly by these contemporary theologians, for example: "One of these [energies] is the erotic power, the power of sexual desire" (*The Faith*, p. 228). Can we accept the carnal as "sacred," or sexual intercourse as "union into one flesh [as] a holy altar"? Are we to believe that "sexual energy, rather than being inimical to the divine, can actually connect us to God"? That sexual energy is "divine in its origin and sacred in its nature, and not ceasing to be sacred even where its use, through ignorance or malice, is perverted or abused"? Where will such thought lead the uninformed believer seeking salvation according to the path indicated by Tradition? Is it possible that the consequences for our flock of such theologizing are not foreseen? The very foundation of our ascetic Orthodox world outlook is threatened by such innovations. Could our pious Orthodox ancestors even a generation ago imagine that a prestigious Orthodox journal would print the words, "Modern people often must go down first—return to the earth—to rich sensuous experience—in order to reconnect with their animal natures, before they are fit candidates for Christian transformation"? If anyone is offended by any of the above ideas, is it only because they have not reached the spiritual maturity of these "enlightened" theologians?

At the end of his book, *The Faith*, among the books listed by Mr. Carlton in his recommended reading list (for the advanced reader) is, *The Sacrament of Love*, by Paul Evdokimov published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. In Evdokimov's section on birth control he quotes Father V. Palachkovsky:

...In the opinion of the confessors, the entire domain of the relations between husband and wife is too intimate to provoke investigation by the priest... the latter not wishing to penetrate the intimacy where the unity of two in one flesh is accomplished and where the presence of a third is superfluous, even

when invested with the priesthood and if only by his questions. (as quoted in *The Sacrament of Love*, pp. 175-176)

Evdokimov comments that "the opinion cited expresses the Orthodox attitude very clearly and correctly... The whole person *lives* his eternal destiny between his conscience and the eyes of God. No third party may intervene" (*The Sacrament of Love*, p. 176). In these words the author has successfully excluded the spiritual father from any "interference" in this aspect of the married couple's life. What a disaster such direction implies for the majority of young people entering into marriage and raised in the hedonistic culture around us which encourages every kind of sensuality as normal and desirable. How can they discern for themselves, by means of their conscience that which they have no tradition to guide them in? If the author hopes for their growth towards spiritual maturity ("...the spouses' harmonious growth in charisms"), how can they progress without any direction?

We have noted the influence of New Age philosophy, and a misunderstanding of patristic terminology as factors contributing to the development of the above teaching. There is yet another possible source of inspiration for these new ideas, the heretical teaching of Sophiology. There are a number of similarities between Sophiology and this incursion of New Age philosophy that has appeared in religious literature. We shall examine these similarities below.

The basic premise of Sophiology is that there exists a fourth "person" in the Holy Trinity, a female entity—Sophia. One of the more corrupt ideas in the teaching of Sophiology, spread by Archpriest Sergius Bulgakov, was to divide the simple essence of God into two principles—the male and female. Archpriest S. Bulgakov made an analogy between this dual principle and the image of God in man. In a 1935 *Ukaz*, the Moscow Patriarchate made the following observation:

The danger of such musings about God and their extremely corrupting influence is accentuated by Bulgakov's desire to see a duality of sexes in the image of God in man. Here one is not far from a deification of sex, as it was understood by some of the gnostics, or so called "spiritual Christians," or some of our secular writers such as V. V. Rozanov. We are by no means saying that Bulgakov taught this. But everything can be elaborated upon, that which the teacher did not finalize, the student (disciple) may finish, may draw conclusions, which would horrify the teacher. ("Ukaz of the Moscow Patriarchate to the Most Reverend Metropolitan Eleutherius of Lithuania and

Vilnius," as reproduced in *Defense of the Sophian Heresy of Archpriest S. Bulgakov* [in Russian], by Archbishop Seraphim [Sobolev], 2nd ed., Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1993, Appendix III, p. 4)

The heretical concept of a "duality of sexes in the image of God in man" can lead to a "deification of sex," since if in God there is male and female and if in His image in man there is also male and female, one may conclude that if male and female unite in carnal relations they are reflecting the Divine. These ideas originated with Bulgakov himself who desired to find in the Divine and human essences male and female principles. This is contrary to the teaching of the Apostles which states that in Jesus Christ *there is neither male nor female* (Gal. 3:28).

Bulgakov's teaching leads to the thought that the responsibility for the fall of Adam and Eve can be transferred to God in so much that God supposedly desired man to enter into carnal relations, and therefore, man had to fall to enter into this state, because in Paradise carnal relations did not exist.

The Moscow Patriarchate, in its 1935 *Ukaz*, explains that by allowing for the thought that one could transfer the responsibility for the fall onto the Creator, this teaching weakens the consciousness of sin in a person, i.e., it shakes the very foundation of the spiritual life. (*Defense...*, Appendix III, p. 11)

A prime example of this weakening of the consciousness of sin is when, after the fall, Adam tried to transfer the responsibility for the fall onto God when he said: *The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat* (Gen. 3:12).

Another concept, popular among New Age theologians, that of the "realization" of the image of God within us, i.e., that image being something like a particle of God (of the Divine) placed in us from the beginning by the Creator, leads to the same conclusion as Sophiology. Count Grabbe in his work against that teaching summarizes:

Accordingly, it turns out we are [supposedly] created not only in the image and likeness of God but in part identical to Him. A piece of the Divinity abides in us now, not only through Grace and the boundless mercy of God (*We will take up Our abode in him* is spoken of in the future tense), but in essence, independently of our personal relation to God and His teaching. (Count Paul Grabbe, *On the Parisian "Theologians,"* as reproduced in *Defense of the Sophian Heresy of Archpriest S. Bulgakov* [in Russian], by Archbishop Seraphim

[Sobolev], 2nd ed., Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1993, Appendix V, p. 7)

From the above theory, believed by many, concerning a particle of God within us (uncovered by a process of "realization"), which is in contradiction to the teaching about the fate of unrepentant sinners in the future life, we can understand one of the reasons for the widespread permissiveness of our contemporary society. Based on this concept of a particle of God within us, one can justify permissiveness by saying that we were created that way, thus excusing our fallen state by faulting the Creator. Count Grabbe concludes:

How can we reconcile the above view with the teaching of the Church concerning the eternal loss of sinners, when one rightly concludes that this part of the Divinity cannot be sent to hell, and for it to be present at the judgement as an accusatory element would be of no benefit. Ultimately it is incomprehensible how sin could even overcome a being who has within it a part of the Divinity. (*Defense...*, Appendix V, p. 7)

If sin cannot "overcome a being who has within it a part of the Divinity," then one can conclude that *all* the actions of such a being, justified by one means or another, are governed by this piece of God within the being's nature.

Finally, St. John Maximovitch, in his work against Sophiology, comments that the concept of Sophia (i.e., the female) as something abiding both in God and man, connects the natures of the Creator and the created, destroying the clear distinction between them. St. John Maximovitch states:

A kind of ladder [gradation] of essences is established in which a clear distinction between the One Who creates and the one who is created is destroyed.

...the desire here is clearly to equalize the divine with the human, to place not only humans in a position of dependence on God, but God in dependence on humans.

...the new theologians have not reached the conclusion of Valentine [a gnostic]. There is still no basis to conclude that their teaching is based on his. Nonetheless, the same foundations are laid there and here—human reasoning suits its own purpose rather than humbling itself to divinely revealed truths. (Saint John Maximovitch, *Veneration of the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist and the New Direction of Russian Religious-Philosophical Thought*, as reproduced in *Defense of the Sophian Heresy of Archpriest S. Bulgakov* [in

Russian], by Archbishop Seraphim [Sobolev], 2nd ed., Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1993, Appendix IV, p. 40, 41)

In conclusion, all members of the flock of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and all Orthodox Christians who desire to save their souls and depart from the wisdom of this world should recognize and reject all such notions as contrary to Holy Tradition and the ascetic spirit of the Gospel. We are not advocating a teaching hostile to marriage, as some might infer, but rather we believe that not only in Church administration and practice, but in all aspects of our Orthodox life *let all things be done decently and in order* (I Cor. 24:40). We have the grievous witness of the various Christian denominations around us which have fallen under the spell of "liberated theology." Where has this led them? What spiritual and moral chaos they find themselves in because they did not check the spread of ideas hostile and foreign to traditional Christianity when they still had the opportunity to do so! Having harkened to the spirit of this world they are now lost. Archbishop Chrysostomos of Oreoi has written:

A new age of Orthodox scholars, prompted by a foolish desire to reconcile the life of God with the life of those enslaved by the flesh, has begun to distort the nature of Christian love. Deviating from the Fathers and embracing the spirit of sophistry to which we have referred above, these same individuals—happily a small minority—would have us believe that human love, with all its psychological and bodily dimensions, is somehow a reflection of spiritual love. (*Themes in Orthodox Patristic Psychology*, p. 64)

The twentieth century has witnessed to the fact that it is not from those who cling to Tradition and defend the Faith from innovation that divisions have arisen, but that rather they have arisen from those influenced by contemporary spiritual currents and politics, who in their wide embrace have lost their way, bringing many to ruin and threatening the very heart of Orthodoxy.

As the ever-memorable abbot of Holy Trinity Monastery, Archbishop Averky, noted, "Does our Church also have to go down this fashionable path, 'in step with the times,' so as 'not to be left behind'? What kind of 'church' would it be, which would permit itself all this, or at least would look upon this with all-forgiving condescension! ...No matter what is done by apostates, fallen from True Orthodoxy, which is the ascetic Faith, the Faith of struggle, we will not permit the modernization of our Church, and we will not go 'in step with the times!'" (Archbishop Averky, "We Will Not Go In Step With the Times!",

Sermons and Speeches [in Russian], Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1967, p. 459).

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