

ARMENIAN FAMILY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

MANUAL FOR PRIESTS



UNFPA "COMBATING GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS"
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(1617-82)

Contents

1. Introduction-----	1
2. Gender and Family in the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Tradition-----	4
2.1. Man and Woman: Sexuality and Christian Ethics-----	4
2.2. Man and Woman according to the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Tradition --	18
2.3. The meaning of Holy Matrimony -----	23
2.4. Sins and sirtues in the family-----	27

Introduction

“So God created man in his own image... male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27).

With these simple words the Bible introduces the greatest miracle of creation – the creation of the only known reasonable creature in the infinite universe.

Parallel to the fact that the expression “God’s image” is extremely vague and needs mysteriological explanations and is incomprehensible even to philosophers and theologians, man is represented in a very explicit and obvious way, with the characteristics of “male and female” which can be understood even by children. This specifically emphasizes the relation of man both to God and to the animal world and hence he becomes a link between the Creator and creation.

Being asexual and beyond sexuality, God gifted inalienable sexuality to the man bearing His own image, and saw that it was “good”. Unalterable and invariable, God put the potential of creation into man, giving him the opportunity to be reproduced, changed, restored and improved upon through sexuality. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

Unity in diversity – it is the Lord’s desire that is implemented through the unity of matrimonial love, in which the difference of sexes does not imply any inferiority or superiority, and the unity does not eliminate the diversity of sexes not does it convert similarity into sameness.

The unity of matrimonial love is not just the satisfaction of sexual desire; it is the confirmation of the principle of God’s oneness, which aims at “the perfect union of man and woman through the creation of a complete and perfect human being,” (V. Solovyov). For this reason, man and woman naturally have the desire to complete their imperfection and be united.

Thus, only man can complete woman, and vice versa. A man can give nothing to another man, and a woman is not able to give anything to another woman: they are incapable of completing each other because they are not different, but are the same. Therefore, marriage is possible (not only possible, but indispensable) only between the two sexes, which is crowned with the grace of childbirth, the creation of a new human being evidence of that union.

This means that the aim of sexual orientation is to guarantee the union of sexes and push human beings towards that oneness in a natural way, and not to satisfy instinctive desires on an animal level.

“This is a great mystery,” said Apostle Paul (Eph. 5:32), which means that it is God-given and God-established, and any erroneous thought on and option of the mysterious notion of marriage is merely a rebellion against God.

“What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder,” (Mt. 19:6). Except the union made by God, all the other imaginary “unions” will become reasons for divorce and separation not only for those who will try to do so, but also by neighbors.

We hope that this book will be helpful to our youth in fully and truly understanding the divine blessings and delights given to them through sexuality under the conditions of familial love and peace.

“Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Gen: 1:28).

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Gender and Family in the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Tradition

A. Man and Woman: Sexuality and Christian Ethics

The discussion of sexuality and gender within the framework of Christian ethics implies an understanding and realization of the living example of Christian moral and ethics: Jesus Christ. One can hardly refute that, according to the teaching of Jesus Christ (and as far as we can see in the New Testament), there is an essential difference between male and female, man and woman. Both the New Testament's narratives (cf. Mt. 27:55, Mark 15:40-41, Luke 24:10) and the presence of women in the ministry of Jesus irrefutably attest to the fact that Jesus' greatest revolution in the moral comprehension of Israel was the equality of woman and man. The incarnation of Jesus Christ was to instead remove the sin of Eve from woman and female in general. Hence, the figure of Théotokos as an obedient and devoted servant of the Word of God proves the role of the woman in God's plans.

One of the peculiarities in the kingdom of God, proclaimed by Jesus Christ Himself, is gender equality in that same kingdom.¹ This gender equality is shown in the very fact of the impossibility to divorce, affirmed by Jesus Christ while disputing with the Pharisees and other Jewish denominations (cf. Mt. 5:31-32, 19:3-12, Mark 10:2-12, Luke 16:18, 1 Cor. 17:10-16). According to Jewish law, only the man could ask for a divorce and officially proclaim the dissolution of any matrimonial relation between himself and his wife. Any demand on the part of a woman was illegal and contrary to Jewish law (cf. Deut. 24:1). A divorced woman with a certificate of divorce could be married to another man (Jer. 3:8, Is. 50:1), but after the death of the second husband, reunion with the previous husband was excluded. According to Jewish law, even in cases when the divorce was an act completely depending on the will of man, the Bible indicates explicitly the uselessness of this and similar attitudes vis-à-vis the marriage: "Yet ye say, wherefore? Because Jehovah hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously, though she is thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did he not make one, although he had the residue of the Spirit? And wherefore one? He sought a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For I hate putting away, saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, and him that covereth his garment with

¹ J. JEREMIAS, *Théologie du Nouveau Testament: la prédication de Jesus*, traduit de l'allemand par J. Alzin et A. Liefoghe, Cerf, Paris 1996, p. 280.

violence, saith Jehovah of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously” (Mal. 2:14-16).

Not only has the relation between man and woman been defined by the prophet, but it is also at the center of God-Israel relationships accentuating the love and fidelity of Israel towards the Lord. Thus, Nerses of Lambron observes:

“And what about this caution not to desire the women of gentiles? For if the Israelites were not escaping from gentile women and were not taking care of their own women, then the impious thoughts would conquer their minds and they would leave their families making impious unities with gentile women... Accordingly, you must be careful in your mind not to leave your wife immediately. Be tolerant and patient and you will conquer your hatred and will retrieve the love of your wife...”²

The commandment of Christ not to divorce, as a biblical reference, embraces the famous narrative from the Gospel according to Mathew:

“And there came unto him Pharisees, trying him and saying, Is it lawful [for a man] to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said, Have ye not read that he who made [them] from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement, and to put [her] away? He saith unto them, Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it hath not been so. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery. The disciples say unto him, if the case of the man is so with his wife, it is not expedient to marry. But he said unto them, not all men can receive this saying, but they to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs that were so born from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs that were made eunuchs by men: and there are eunuchs that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

In this respect, it is worthy to note the two narratives from the Book of Genesis where, for the first time, the Bible references the sexual difference of the created human couple.

² **Nerses of Lambron**, Commentary on Twelve Prophets (in Armenian), edition and introduction by Archimandrite Andreas Narinyan, Constantinople 1826, p. 235.

God has set forth the heterosexuality as the basis and dynamics of his own creation. This notion is common for all the six days of creation:

Day I - light and darkness;

Day II - heaven and firmament;

Day III - sea and earth;

Day IV - night and day;

Day V - animals and birds of different sexes; and

Day VI - man and woman.³

The narrative speaks of the heterosexuality of the first human couple adding, that man (*homo*) has been created in God's image and after His likeness. Hence, the guarantee of the continuation of God's creation is the mutual desire of different sexes to complete each other. Light and darkness, with their reciprocity, complete the cosmos; heaven and firmament; sea and earth constitute our planet; and night and day guarantee the existence of the day, etc. In man's case, heterosexuality is the opportunity to imitate God.⁴

Before the creation of man, God designed the plan of man's creation and only after this created man. Thus, man is the only creature for whom God had a special predestination (cf. Gen. 1:26). As a new dimension of *imitatio Dei*, God gifted man with intelligence, conscience and a mind. In this respect, certain questions arise: what does it mean for man to be in God's image and after His likeness? Does the notion of heterosexuality suggest any contradiction in conceiving God as a male or female *prosôpon/person*? First of all, it is necessary to observe that sexuality or sexual forms present in God's creation implicitly indicate the metaphorical sexuality of God. This metaphor of sexuality is indeed mystified by the figurative association to God's *prosôpon/person*. How?

In the Bible, there are certain narratives which describe God using both male and female metaphors. For example, in Is. 51:11-13 the prophet compares the relations between Israel and God with the relationship of the mother and child. Jesus, mourning for Jerusalem, applies the metaphor of the hen: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Mt. 23:37)." All of these biblical passages, as previously mentioned, gain

³ **Harold J. ELLENS**, *Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration*, London 2006, p. 15-21.

⁴ **Karl PESCHKE**, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, Bangalore 2001, vol. II, p. 391.

meaning only through their metaphorical understanding. The observation of the relationships of God and man in the scope of father-son and mother-daughter kinship clarifies the above-mentioned heterosexuality. In Gen. 1:27-28, the author's idea becomes clearer according to the method of mutual accomplishment. Accordingly, "God created man: a) in his own image, b) in the image of God created he him; c) male and female created he them." In this passage, it is interesting to remark that a) the author passes from the image of God into heterosexuality and b) from the singular into plural. In Gen. 1:28 God's address to the human couple is already in plural: two human beings, whose love results in embracing the very existence of the human race. The second narrative of creation, Gen. 2:7, 18-25 is present in order to elucidate the reason for the creation of woman, "And Jehovah God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." That is, he would make an ideal cooperator for man in order to realize God's plans in this world. The rest of this narrative is very important for understanding human sexuality. The well-known founder of Christian anthropology, St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his famous work "*De opificio hominis* (On the making of Man)", introduced the theory of animal derivation of human sexuality.⁵ According to this theory, man, as a perfect image and likeness of God, lost his infallibility after his transgression and became a part of the animal nature of creation by sexual differentiation. However, by stressing sexual differences as a division of human nature and result of Adam's fall, St. Gregory of Nyssa left the neo-platonic conception of Christian mystics. However, the author of Genesis presents the specific relation between man and woman as two different *prosôpons/persons* of the same and unique body and nature. The word play that one can observe in the Hebrew Bible is not so evident in other biblical translations. In Hebrew, Gen. 2:23 has very interesting linguistic and semantic significance: "And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman (*išah*), because she was taken out of Man (*meiš*)." Hence, even in keeping with the lexical significance, these two notions are inseparably united (cf. *iš= (me)iš*). The sexual difference revealed itself as a sin only after the fall of the human couple, when Adam and Eve realized their nakedness and, speaking metaphorically, tried to cover the reason for sin and temptation. The mutual relationship of the two sexes has thus an inter-complementary significance. In this regard, one can better understand the real character of the human mission in this world,

⁵ PG 44, 124-246, cf. English translation in Philip SCHAFF (ed.), *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series II, vol. 5, pp. 747-830.

which is the continuation of God's creation. Even after the fall, Adam called his wife Eve because "she was the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20).

In further Old Testament narratives, marriage and parenthood are considered as gifts and blessings from God (cf. Ps. 126 (125):3-4, 127 (126):3-6). On the other hand, infertility is the mark of God's punishment and reproach of the married couple (cf. Lev. 20:20, 1 Sam. 1:1-20, Is. 47:9). In the Sapiential books of the Old Testament, the relationship between man and woman is very significant, despite some juridical and ritual canons of Pentateuch concerning the ritual impurity and imperfection of woman. For instance, in the Book of Proverbs, the mother of the family is considered to be an equally important figure in family education: "My son, keep the commandment of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Prov. 6:20). According to the Book of Proverbs, the Wisdom is also accessible to women (cf. Prov. 14:1): men and women are bearing and raising their children together and they also share the joy of parenthood together (cf. Prov. 23:25). The Book of Canticle of Canticles is the most expressive and natural description of human love. Here the love of the created couple is described in very vivid detail. In this biblical pearl we perhaps find the most acute definition of human love:

"Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm: For love is strong as death; Jealousy is cruel as Sheol; the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of Jehovah. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be condemned" (Cant. 8:6-7).

There is no allusion to sexual discrimination in the Canticle of Canticles. The author of the book describes human love as an equally shared reality and life of a loving couple.

In the New Testament, the problem of sexual discrimination is finally resolved in St. Paul's epistle to Ephesians:

"Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own

bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself: for no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church; because we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. *This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church*" (Ephes. 5:22-32).

As the expression of St. Paul's theological conviction, these words explain the concept of matrimony and sexuality in light of Christ-Church relations. Therefore, here St. Paul reproduces the theological intentions and ideas of the authors of the Old Testament. Accordingly, in Ancient Israel there was a divine conception of matrimony that is the relation between God and His bride - Israel. In the pagan nations living near Israel, sex and sexuality also had rituals and religious significance referring to the cults of different deities. In Gen. 1 and 2, the author emphasizes this new spiritual quality of matrimonial relations: God Himself in Paradise blesses the union of Adam and Eve granting them love and familial prosperity.⁶ Metaphorically speaking, God is thus the first witness of their marriage. In further developments of this divine conception of matrimony, the love of God towards His people became an inseparable idea of the Old Testament's prophetic books. God and His bride, Israel are the two figures of eternal love. Therefore, in this order of ideas, the interpretation of St. Paul proves to be a clear expression of the two Testaments. He rejects any sexual discrimination, while at the same time emphasizing the differences constituted by the order of creation. Man and woman, as persons of different sexes, differ from one another in their capacities and aptitudes; however, they are also bonded with one another by their same and unique human nature. Consequently, sexual differences can be explained in the light of two great Christian mysteries: the Holy Trinity and the person of Jesus Christ.⁷

In the inner-Trinitarian life, the three hypostases of the same and unique divine nature maintain their hypostatic peculiarities and none change their hypostatic characteristics: the Son doesn't need to be the Father; the Holy Spirit doesn't want to be the Son. These three hypostases are inseparable and remain in divine love for ever. The second hypostasis, the Beloved Son of God, became man assumed a human nature and was born of the Holy Virgin. In the very fact of divine incarnation, the indistinguishable union of human and divine natures, the unmixed expression of this divine-human nature can elucidate the character of the union, of which St. Paul speaks

⁶ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Le Mariage: Réalité terrestre et mystère de salut*, tr. du neerlandais par L. M. Hayaux, Paris 1966, p. 40-41.

⁷ Fr. Vladimir SHMALIY, *The Problem of Sex in the Light of Christian Anthropology: Gen. 1:27* (in Russian), in *The Anthropological Teaching of Church, Theological Conference of Russian Orthodox Church* (Moscow, 5-8 November, 2001), Moscow 2002, p. 303-305.

of in the Epistle to Ephesians. Both the union of the human and divine natures in Christ and the union of man and woman are mysteries. Neither loses its characteristics and peculiarities, but as a result of that union they are bonded together inseparably. In other words, in that union the person learns to live not only with himself, but also for himself, for the union has already made them one.

Christian ethics, perceiving the relationship of man and woman in light of the union of Christ and His Church, accentuate the ecclesial, holistic character of that union.⁸ Through their union, the human couple becomes a member of Christ's body. Indeed, it is by this *communication* that God, as in the case of Adam and Eve, becomes the witness of their union and sanctifies it.

B. Man and Woman according to the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Tradition

According to the tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church, man and woman have defined roles within this union. In this respect, one can find certain peculiarities related to man-woman relations in the rite of Holy Matrimony.⁹ First of all, it is important to notice that, in the Armenian Church, Holy Matrimony, in the light of Christ-Church relationships, is preceded by the rite of Betrothal,¹⁰ which is the preparatory and religious phase of the matrimonial union. One can, more or less, clearly distinguish the roles of man and woman as key figures in the creation of God within these two parts of the rite of Holy Matrimony.

In the rite of Holy Matrimony, man and woman are called *king* and *queen*. This metaphorical qualification leads us directly to Gen. 1-3, when Adam and Eve were the absolute masters of their passions and all of creation. This observation is proven in the first part of the matrimonial rite, when the priest, after having blessed the union of the married couple with the sign of cross and having laid the *nar'ot* (ribbon-like ornament) on their heads as a confirmation of their inseparable union, sings the *sharagan* (hymn) of Boun Bar'ekendan (Carnival, The First Sunday of Great Lent). In this hymn, the commemoration of paradise and the infantile state of humans refers implicitly to that ideal of the human couple, of which the man has been deprived. The presence of the

⁸ V. GUROIAN, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics*, Notre Dame, Indiana 1987, pp. 91-93.

⁹ « Girk' mec' Mashtoc' kochech'eal (The Great Ritual Book=GR)», Constantinople 1807, pp. 21-34.

¹⁰ *Idem*, pp. 229-234.

sharagans (hymns) dedicated to the Holy Cross¹¹ is also interesting, for in most parts of allegorical-exegetical treatises, the Cross is predominantly presented as a symbol of the Tree of Life and Knowledge. In other words, the passages of Gen. 1-2, metaphorically reproduced by their main figures (God, Cross-Tree of Life, man-Adam, woman-Eve) in the matrimonial rite, exemplify the Christian vocation given to the human couple for making a family and being the master and king of creation. And yet, besides bearing children, man and woman have another mission to accomplish,¹² namely to be one mind and one spirit:

“Lord, look upon them with sweetness, and send Your angel of peace to come and keep them holy and pure and in oneness of spirit and thought.”

Thus, man and woman were called to the same and unique Christian mission, to the oneness of thought and life. According to this teaching of the Church, the married couple can never rightly be fruitful and realize their parental vocation until they are in oneness of thought and spirit. So, the duty of man and woman in their conjugal life is to anchor their union in love and mutual understanding. In the prayer of the Canon of Holy Matrimony we read:

“O Lord, You are Holy, and You rest in Your saints. Therefore, keep holy their bridal life and unite them by the yoke of Your commandment, to become one body, united with a spirit of meekness, *to love each other in modesty, in sober mind and pure faith, without shame, without impudence* and always ready for good works.”

There cannot be any difference between the roles of man and woman in maintaining the peace and serenity of the family, given the clear example of the Christ-Church indissoluble relationship. Therefore, marital life is holy, and in conjugal duties man and woman equally share their responsibilities.

According to St. Paul:

“Let the husband render unto the wife her due: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power over his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be by consent for a season, that ye may give yourselves unto prayer, and may be together again, that Satan tempt you not because of your incontinency” (I Cor. 7:3-5).

In the Armenian tradition, the expression of harmony and mutual devotion is the canon of the Betrothal or the Blessing of the Engagement. The scriptural basis for this

¹¹ “Christ, You who love the mankind, protect us from the invisible enemy by the sign of Your all-conquering Cross, for You are the only King of Glory, praised forever”.

¹² **A. TER-MIKELIAN**, “The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony”, Complete Works, St. Etchmiadzin 2009, p. 140.

canon is the biblical episode of the Annunciation (cf. Luke 1:26-38). The ritual has the following instruction for the priest:

“And then the priest, taking the cup of blessing, explains the greatest mystery of Betrothal, which symbolizes the Annunciation by Archangel Gabriel to the Ever Blessed Virgin, who conceived the Word of God.”¹³

Accordingly, the bride is presented as a symbolic figure of the Holy Virgin, and the bridegroom as a figure of Christ. St. Gregory of Tat'ev has some interesting observations concerning this symbolic identification:

“As Archangel Gabriel announced the Holy Virgin, and she, after having thought about this mystery, gave her consent, likewise the ring on the finger of the bride signifies her consent and agreement. And the consent of two wills (i.e. the bride's and bridegroom's agreement) is the confirmation of their union. ...As the Bible says; “...and the rib, which God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man” (Gen. 2:22), which means that for the real love they have to see each other. And it is for this reason that the bride and bridegroom have to meet before the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, for they are to agree in their hearts and with their wills. Only after this they can be married by the priest.”¹⁴

Thus, the conjugal duties of the married couple do not have any importance if they do not seek to create a new “paradisiacal family”. In this respect, the family is a mosaic of the Church. The physical naissance and growing, which one can observe in the family are retrospectively reproduced, in the spiritual and allegorical sense, in the bosom of the Church in the forms of Baptism and Christian education.

C. The meaning of Holy Matrimony

The canon of Holy Matrimony itself is a properly compiled and systematized admonition to the married couple. It is within the meaning of prayers and hymns that the married couple can understand the whole sense of the mystery of Holy Matrimony as a guidebook for their continuing relations.

In general, it must be noted that the Ancient Church acquired, apart from some general principles, the matrimonial law of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, it modified this law utilizing Christian interpretations and customs according to the spirit of Christian ethics. It is interesting to observe the formulation of this law by the famous Roman lawyer Modestinus (III c. B.C.): “Matrimony is a union of man and woman, their mutual

¹³ GR, *idem*.

¹⁴ “Girk' Harc'manc” (Book of Questions), Jerusalem 1993, p. 608.

sharing and communion of life, the communion with divine and secular laws.”¹⁵ According to this brief formula, the greatest part of the Christian Church, in their canonical writings, emphasizes the following main characteristics of matrimony:

- a. Natural, i.e. monogamous and heterosexual union.
- b. Ethical, i.e. mutual sharing of life and communication in all the circumstances and conditions (wealth, poverty, illness, etc.).
- c. Religious-juridical, i.e. communion with divine and secular laws.¹⁶

In the rite of Holy Matrimony, all of these qualities are expressed in a very complex series of connections, occasionally stressing the divine-human qualities of Holy Matrimony.

First of all, it is necessary to emphasize the close relationship between Holy Matrimony and the mystery of Divine Liturgy. According to the ritual, Holy Matrimony begins with the supplication by the priest: “For Thine is the power, and the might, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.” This supplication declares the beginning of the Liturgy of Word and the lection of the Gospel, accompanied by the Trisagion (Sourb Astuac’).¹⁷ This comparatively brief rite, which forms the core of the canon of Holy Matrimony, confirms that in the Early Church the rite of Matrimony was conducted in the sacrament of the Divine Liturgy as an opportunity for the married couple to receive the Holy Communion at the end of the Matrimony, as indicated in the ritual: “After Holy Matrimony, if they wish to receive Holy Communion, they have to maintain their sexual purity for eight days.”¹⁸ This is the echo of a very ancient tradition, when the matrimonial union was sanctified by Holy Communion. The lesson from the Epistle of St. Paul (Ephes. 5:22-23) and the Gospel lection (Mat. 19:3-12) strengthen the significance of the inseparable union, which takes its roots from the mystical union of Christ and His Bride, the Church, sanctified by the mystery of Holy Communion. The song of the Royal Wedding (Ps. 44) serves as biblical criterion for the confirmation of the matrimonial union. As a special rite of coronation, this Psalm is accompanied by the rite of “placing the coronets”. This rite is preceded by the Divine Liturgy. First, the priest blesses the

¹⁵ “Orthodox Encyclopedia”, vol. 6, 2003, p. 146.

¹⁶ Idem. One of the most famous specialists of Armenian canon law, Fr. Vahan Bastamianc, envisages the following main points for Armenian society in his time: a. Divine law (cf. Gen. 1-2), Secular law, as “the union or agreement between man and woman based on all the juridical peculiarities”, c. Natural law, that is the natural desire of different sexes towards each other, d. State law, as “a separate institute in its relations with the society and consequently with the government”, cf. “Matrimony according to Armenian Canon Law”, *P’ordz* 4, 1880, p. 149.

¹⁷ In the Orthodox tradition, the monography of **J. MEYENDORFF** (Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective, St. Vladimir’s Seminary, New York, 1984) is one of the most detailed presentations of *the Holy Matrimony-Divine Liturgy* link.

¹⁸ GR, p. 31.

wedding vestments (*halav* in Armenian). After the dressing of the bridegroom, the priest and the bridegroom visit the house of the bride and the priest conducts the ceremony of mutual vows.¹⁹ In reality, this detailed and meticulous rite is nothing more than preparation for entrance into the Kingdom of God, i.e. for participation in the Divine Liturgy.²⁰ The coronets signify the spiritual and luminous crowns of the first married couple, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden.²¹ After the mutual vows are made in public, the couple participates in the Liturgy of Word. Here, the coronets are signs of familial prosperity and spiritual accomplishment. This means that the family has a responsibility to create peace and prosperity for this life, and to accomplish the fullness of a Christian life in the life to come, which is an ongoing process of spiritual battles for faith and sanctity.²²

D. Sins and virtues in the family

As we have seen, Matrimony is presented in the light of the Kingdom of Christ, which is to be realized by the spiritual courage of the couple. Indeed, in their familial and conjugal life, the married couple has to overcome all of the temptations and difficulties through mutual effort and understanding. According to Christian ethics, although the responsibilities of the husband and wife are different, they are not unequal. As it has been noted above, from the viewpoint of Christian theology, man and woman are the *prosôpons-expressions* of the same human nature. This implies that the results of sins and virtues equally reflect on the life of the married couple. In addition, each of them becomes responsible for the mistakes and successes of the other.

The most difficult challenge in the conjugal life of the married couple is sexuality,²³ which is rarely perceived and interpreted in the spirit of true Christian ethics and, consequently, makes room for criticism and misunderstanding in the life of the Church and Christian societies. Without a doubt, one can confirm that sexuality is equally at the root of violence and virtue. According to St. Paul, one of the main reasons for the loss of the divine image by humans was the sin of *increased sexuality* (cf. Rom. 1:18-27). As a gift granted to all the creation, man received sexuality as an individual being and was separated from the other creatures. Adam and Eve indeed loved each other as people. The personification of the sexuality in the Garden of Eden is also the

¹⁹ GR, p. 24.

²⁰ J. MEYENDORFF, op. cit., p. 34.

²¹ GR, p. 25.

²² Ibid, p. 31.

²³ R. GAIAIAN, He has created them man and woman: Evangelical Perspectives, tr. by S. Khachatryan, Yerevan 1997, p. 61.

fact of the sanctification of Eros,²⁴ which lost its value after the fall of Adam. Like other creatures in nature, Eros and sexuality, by the fall of human nature, were put in danger of continuing mutation and distortion. Perceived through animal instinct, sexuality became the source of violence and one of the main factors of sin. Through the examples of levirate marriage and polygamy, one can explain the violence and inequality concerning the role of women in the narratives of the Old Testament.²⁵

The New Testament basically changed this and similar attitudes towards marriage and sexuality. According to Jesus' words, all matrimonial rules and traditions mentioned in the Old Testament were to be revised in the light of the divine gift given to the first human couple in the Garden of Eden (cf. Mt. 19:3-12, Mark 10:2-12) and according to the idea of the Resurrection in the Last Judgment (Luke 20: 27-40). Hence, the virtues of conjugal life are the return to the original and paradisiacal state that is the deep and spiritual love suitable to every individual being.²⁶ It is in this mutual knowledge²⁷ and love that the sexuality of animal world is purified and sanctified.

It is noteworthy that sexuality, as an idea, is inseparable from human nature, and despite all other vices, it is sexuality that greatly influences the spiritual and psychological world of man. So, it requires constant care and attention in the process of spiritual psychotherapy. According to Gen. 3: 16-21, after the fall of man, the sexual act and childbirth were registered as a divine curse in human history. On the other hand, thanks to His true love, God granted man an opportunity to be delivered from the effects of fall. It is in this sense that one can understand the words of St. Paul: "Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). Here the idea of sanctity is closely related to Christian Salvation. The way from instinctual and animal sexuality towards the new and spiritual one, i.e. love, passes through self-criticism and self-purification. Two main ideas - *resurrection* and *salvation* - are very important here.²⁸ The first concerns Jesus' response to the Sadducees' question (cf. Mt. 22:23-32, Mark 12:18-27, Luke 20:27-40). According to the Gospel, Sadducees belonged to the party that didn't accept the doctrines of the Resurrection and Last Judgment. Their question is consequently touching upon the

²⁴ **David M. CARR**, *The Erotic World: Sexuality, Spirituality and the Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 153-167.

²⁵ Cf. Gen. 4 :19, 30 : 9-13, Lev. 18 :16, 20 :21, Deut. 21 :10-14, 25 :5-10.

²⁶ **R. GAIAIAN**, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

²⁷ It is interesting that in the Hebrew Bible the sexual relations between Adam and Eve are described with the verb « ya'da », *to know*: "And the man knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah" (Gen. 4:1).

²⁸ **Evgenia NEGANOVA**, "The Ideal of Matrimony in the Orthodox Tradition" (in Russian), in *The Anthropological Teaching of Church*, The Theological Conference of Russian Orthodox Church, p. 271.

delicate subject of sexuality and matrimony, which is also the guarantee of the continuity of human race. In the understanding of Sadducees, the Resurrection is impossible because the physical body, developing through sexual intercourse, had to return to its original state. The Sadducees' example of the woman, who married seven brothers in turn, and after death, according to the doctrine of Resurrection, would belong to all of them (which is impossible both theoretically and practically), was very sharp and appropriate (Luke 20:27-40). Yet the response of Jesus clarifies the question of matrimony and sexuality in light of the Resurrection: "And Jesus said unto them, the sons of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they that are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: for neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:34-36).

The physical and corrupted image of matrimony as the only means of childbirth was even more unacceptable to Jesus than the law of levirate marriage. Being the divine gift to the human race, matrimony is beyond the simple physical relationship or sexual relations. Married couples that try to establish true Christian families, have their *imitatio Dei* (imitation of God) at the very heart of the family and familial life. To create with love, which is the most inherent quality of Divine Nature, thus becomes the mission and aim of newly created Christian families in this life.

Jesus Christ is the model for these families in overcoming all of the difficulties and challenges in familial and conjugal life, for He is the Sacrament of the Divine Love that God has for humanity.²⁹ In moments of misunderstanding, violence and sin married couples have to turn their eyes to the Mystery of Christ, who gave His life for the salvation of His Beloved Church. Besides this self-sacrifice, in the Mystery of Christ one does distinguish a pedagogical approach, that is, Christ leads and teaches His Body, i.e. the Church with humility and with patience. So, married couples should understand and teach one another according to this example, which they receive while communicating with the Holy Eucharist, the perfect knowledge of Jesus Christ.

²⁹ **Marcel LEFEBVRE**, *La famiglia, Della rinuncia alla speranza*, tr. Paola Fabrizi, Edizione Paoline, Milano 1991, pp. 90-91.