

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
91 (2), pp. 110-121, 2022

The Divine Homotimy between the Two Sexes

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Abstract

The Orthodox Church has remained faithful to the teachings of the Saviour Christ and the Holy Tradition. It categorically preached equality of honour between man and woman. Both man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God, as the book of Genesis testifies. Recently, there has been a state of uncertainty regarding the equality between men and women, the status that women have in contemporary society. The feminist movement is slowly gaining ground, considering itself a struggle for equality, freedom and justice.

In support of this divine equality between man and woman, we will turn to science, more precisely, to embryology. When a child is born, boy or girl, it remains a miracle blessed by God. From the moment the egg is fertilized by the sperm and the formation of the human zygote, until the moment of birth and appearance of the child, all ontogenetic moments enjoy the perfection with which God built the Universe and the human being.

Next, I will refer to gametogenesis which defines the set of successive transformations of the chromosomal material that will lead to the formation of gametes. God has imprinted divine equality so the baby will inherit an equal number of chromosomes from the mother and father. All this is done in perfect equality within the meiotic or reductional division, thus allowing the restoration of the diploid chromosomal set and taking over the genetic traits of both parents.

Keywords

equality, feminism, misogyny, man, woman, family, gametogenesis

I. Introduction

To begin with, we state that women and men have the right to equal treatment in terms of access to jobs, remuneration and work procedures, professional training and working conditions.

If we were to approach this from a social point of view, the equality between men and women is one of the European Union's targets. French historian Alexis Henri Charles de Clérel, known as viscount of Tocqueville, observes an important aspect about this equality: "Americans are so in love with equality that they would rather be equals in slavery than unequal in freedom"¹. Through time, law, jurisprudence and amendments to treaties have contributed to the strengthening of this principle and its application in EU politics. In this article, we will be focusing particularly on the way the Church describes and illustrates this equality between man and woman.

Lately there has been a feeling of uncertainty regarding equality between man and woman, regarding the status women have in contemporary society. The feminist movement asserts itself slowly, deeming itself a fight for equality, freedom and justice. It is highly important to note that feminism distances itself from several fundamental teachings from the Scripture, and the unchangeable teachings of the holy fathers² in the seven Ecumenic Synods and some canons of the local Synods.

II. Equality seen through the eyes of the Holy Fathers

There are some contemporary theologians and historians who label all holy fathers as misogynistic³, a view often supported in the West. The same suggestion is presented in an academic history handbook of the Western Civilisation:

¹ Alexis DE TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America, Introduction* by Joseph EPSTEIN, Bantam Classics, 2012, p. 28.

² One of the ideologies indirectly driving the campaign for women's ordination is the feminist movement, often having at its core the issues of disaffected, hurt, and unfairly treated women.

³ Elizabeth SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *In memory of her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, New York, Crossroad, 1985, p. 106.

“Without a doubt, the church fathers were all men. Misogyny infiltrated the Christian thought [...] because many of them were aware that the presence of women would awaken their carnal senses. Christianity thus became a male, misogynistic religion, a religion that rejects everything related to sexuality”⁴.

Nothing more erroneous. Such a categorical generalization, with feminist influences, without scientific or logical arguments, cannot distort the authentic and uncovered teaching of the Church.

If we were to analyse Tertullian of Carthage, at first glance it would appear that he is a misogynist because of his negative assertions about women. He claims that not only Eve is responsible for mankind’s fall into sin, but that every woman bears this guilt:

“Do you not know that every one of you is an Eve? The sentence decided by God on your kind is still valid today; so is guilt (reatus), without a doubt. You are the gate of hell; you are the unsealing of the forbidden tree; you are the first who fled (desertrix) from the divine laws; you have convinced those whom the devil was not bold enough to attack. You have so easily destroyed man (hominem), the image of God”⁵.

On the question of whether Tertullian could be accused of misogyny I found an appropriate explanation in Elizabeth Carnelley:

“Concepts such as «sexism» and «feminism», which are fully understood today, were completely foreign in the first three Christian centuries. Therefore, it would be an anachronism to ask Tertullian to be a feminist, and when we realise that he is not, to call him a «misogynist». Besides, he neither feared nor hated women. Rather, we could say that Tertullian’s writings should be understood in the context of the prejudices and fears of his age”⁶.

⁴ John P. MCKAY, Bennett D. HILL, John BUCKLER, *A History of Western Society*, 4th ed., Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991, vol. A, p. 202.

⁵ David C. FORD, *Bărbatul și femeia în viziunea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur*, transl. Luminița Irina Niculescu, Editura Sophia, București, 2004, p. 36

⁶ Elizabeth CARNELLEY, “Tertullian and feminism”, in: *Teologia* vol. 92, issue 745, January, 1989, p. 31.

Tertullian's apparent theology with misogynistic influences is balanced by another patristic writer, Clement of Alexandria:

“The Church is abundant in both virtuous women and virtuous men (*kathaper andron, outo de kai gynaikon sophronon*), who contemplated all their lives the transition to eternity as a path to Christ [...]. Since there is a spiritual identity between man and woman, the woman will be able to achieve the same virtues as the man, but given that there are also differences between them, related to the anatomical configuration of each one of them, the woman is meant to conceive children and tend to household chores [...]. This does not mean that women cannot engage in philosophy, like their male counterparts [...]. We remind that both daughters, wives and maids have reached the highest stages of perfection (*beltistous*), often against the will of their fathers, husbands and masters”⁷.

The first time the terms man and woman appear in the Scripture is in Genesis 1, 27 “And God made man in His own image; in the image of God, He made him; He made man and woman”⁸. It is interesting that for the first time, both appear in the same line in the Book of Genesis. The Book of Genesis, in which the creation of man is described, records that he was made “male and female”, an Old Testament passage quoted by the Saviour Jesus Christ Himself in the Gospel of Mark: “But from the beginning of creation, God made them man and woman” (Mk 10, 6).

At first glance it appears to be a contradiction since man, singular, was made male and female. I share the same vision with that of Saint Simeon the New Theologian: “He says male and female not because (the woman) was already made, but because she was with Adam in his ribcage”⁹. In

⁷ David C. FORD, *Bărbatul și femeia în viziunea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur*, pp. 63-64.

⁸ The rabbinic tradition signals an alteration of this scriptural passage (the man would have been made with female orifices) thus primitive man would be androgynous (Traditions that mention this: Babylonian Talmud, Berakhoth 61a, Erouvim 18a; Quaestiones in Genesim I, 25; Philo, Opif. 152; De cherubim 59). Similar to Philo's interpretation, Origen interprets the female part and the male part allegorically, developing a male-positive and a female-negative spirit, two paradigmatic categories.

⁹ Preot Ioan Sorin USCA, *Vechiul Testament în tâlcuirea Sfinților Părinți, Cartea Facerii*,

other words, the woman had been made, but at that time she was not yet separated from the man (Adam).

The image of God in man refers to the spiritual part, not to his body. Father Seraphim Rose explains more precisely:

“So, the image of God which, as all the Holy Fathers teach, belongs to the soul, and not to the human body, has nothing to do with the division between man and woman. It would be said that in God’s «idea» of man - as man will be in the Kingdom of Heaven - there is no male and female part; but God, foreseeing the fall of man, made this division, linked inseparably to man’s earthly life”¹⁰.

Often treated as a lesser being and worthy of disdain in the Eastern world, the woman nevertheless reclaims her titles of nobility by being in accordance with the man, the image and likeness of God, the man being the one who will master her (Gen 3, 16)¹¹. In the Old Testament, God is not only the author of the first man (Adam), but also of each individual person. For this reason, the prophet Jeremiah saw the formation of each foetus inside its mother as a work of God “Before I formed you in your mother’s womb I knew you, and before you came out of her womb, I set you aside and I made you a prophet to the people” (Jer 1, 5).

III. Genetics and equality

In support of this divine equality between men and women, we will turn to science, more precisely, to embryology. When a child is born, boy or girl, they remain a miracle blessed by God. Starting from the moment of fertilization of the egg by the sperm and the formation of the human zygote, until the moment of birth and the appearance of the child, all ontogenetic moments enjoy the perfection with which God built the Universe and man.

Editura Christiana, București, 2008, p. 27.

¹⁰ Hierom Serafim ROSE, *Cartea facerii, crearea lumii noi și întâiul om: perspectiva creștin-ortodoxă*, transl. Constantin Făgețan, 2nd ed., Editura Sophia, București, 2011, p. 99.

¹¹ *Dicționar enciclopedic al Bibliei*, transl. Dan Slușanschi, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 239.

I will further refer to gametogenesis, which defines the set of successive transformations of the chromosomal material that lead to the formation of gametes. God has imprinted a divine equality so the baby will inherit an equal number of chromosomes from the mother and the father. All this is achieved in a perfect equality within the meiotic or reduction division, thus allowing the diploid chromosomal set to be restored, and the genetic characters of both parents to be taken over¹². According to embryology, the human diploid chromosomal formula is 44 XY (male) and 44 XX (female). The chromosomes of the human species are arranged in pairs of 23, the two chromosomes of each pair being morphologically identical, therefore homologous. The second meiotic (equational) division succeeds the first division without a normal interphase. Each chromosome (containing two parallel chromatids) divides, and each chromatid moves toward one pole of the cell. Thus, the haploid number of chromosomes is maintained (23) and each daughter cell newly formed by meiosis will have the same halved number of chromosomes. In other words, “the chromosomal endowment of the egg is invariable (22X), and that of the sperm is 50% 22X (haploid set), 50% 22Y (haploid set)¹³”.

Neither man nor woman can boast that they took part in the formation of the zygote with more gametes than the other partner, each leaving an equally chromosomal endowment of 23 chromosomes. The conjugation of chromosomes is done gradually from one point, and extends like a zipper. There is a possibility that the two chromosomes from the bivalent are not identical, in which case the conjugation takes place only between the homologous portions. Geneticists have made the assumption that the forces that determine the conjugation are electrostatic or hydrodynamic in nature. Theologians affirm that the Force which determines conjugation or other genetic phenomena is God One in Being and threefold in Persons or Hypostases.

In the Holy Scriptures and in the patristic writings, the equality - in Jesus Christ - between man and woman is outright highlighted. The value of the uniqueness and unrepeatability of man, regardless of whether they are male or female, derives from their creation “in the image of God” (Gen 1, 27- Hebrew text *בְּצַלְמֵי אֱלֹהִים*). Saint Gregory, the Bishop of Nyssa, very

¹² Prof. univ. dr. med. Andrei Moțoc, *Anatomia omului*, Vol. 1: *Embriologie*, Semestrul 1, Editura Victor Babeș, Timișoara, 2018, p. 5.

¹³ Andrei Moțoc, *Anatomia omului*, Vol. 1: *Embriologie*, Semestrul 1, p.5.

beautifully points out that “the woman has the attribute of being made in the image of God just like the man. Honourably are the traits, equally the virtues”¹⁴.

In the *First Epistle to the Corinthians* there is a line, hard to interpret, which has often given rise to controversy “But I want you to know that Christ is the Head of every man; that the man is the head of the woman, and that God is the head of Christ” (I Cor 11, 3). This thesis, which is closely related to the social perspectives of its era, is also argued theologically. The apostle converted on the road to Damascus claims that the submission of the woman to the man is imposed, on the one hand, by the order of creation (chronologically), since the woman came from the side of the man and not vice versa, and, on the other hand, it is imposed by the weakness which was highlighted by the woman giving in first to the temptation of the devil (Gen 3, 6).

This pattern of these theses, today in postmodernity, is considered outdated and incompatible with contemporary social reality. Of course, they also expressed the data of the era in which these teachings were formulated. The Church did not create its own family organization structures, but took over the existing ones by “converting” them, that is, gave them meaning according to its teaching. Today the data of family life has changed, the woman participating in the economic life of the family, equally with the man.

IV. The teaching of St. John Chrysostom

If we were to point out some aspects related to the role of women in society, we would direct our attention to the Golden Mouth (Chrysostom) of the Church. Saint John, the Archbishop of Constantinople, shared the general views of the era in which he lived, according to which the main responsibilities of women were mainly manifested in household chores, the birth of children and their education. A refined intellectual with a profound personality, St. John Chrysostom raises these feminine attributes to a much higher level, giving them a priority and a spiritual force¹⁵.

¹⁴ Georgios MANTZARIDIS, *Morala creștină: Omul și Dumnezeu; Omul și semenul; Poziționări și perspective existențiale și bioetice*, Editura Bizantină, 2006, p. 40.

¹⁵ David C. FORD, *Bărbatul și femeia în viziunea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur*, p. 36.

In the book of Solomon's Proverbs, it is mentioned that the mother was the one who took care of the children's education: "The words of King Lemuel. The teachings that his mother gave him" (Prov 31, 1). Could this be a reason for discrimination? Can the woman consider it a reason for discrimination that the providence chose her to be involved in household chores and raising children? Such thinking would be an aberration and nonsense. God created everything perfectly, in perfect harmony. He gave woman patience, fragility, thoroughness, sweetness in voice and gestures. And genetically, the mother is much closer to the baby, as during pregnancy, a special bond that will be perfected between the two, with the growth and education of the little ones. During this time the man supports the family, appreciates his wife and works for the economic development of the family.

Every time Saint John Chrysostom talks about man and woman, he emphasizes, on the one hand, the absolute ontological identity between man and woman, on the other hand, he is convinced that there are real differences between men and women, not just from a biological or anatomical point of view, but also from the point of view of the functions and attributions that each must exercise in this life. The fact that the women give birth and the men do not, cannot be seen as a competition between the two. The fact that men possess greater physical strength than women cannot be seen as a competition between the two. There are many examples that can be mentioned here. In a homily on the Gospel of Matthew, St. John Chrysostom recalls the spiritual grace that pours equally on both men and women:

"Whether slaves or free, whether Greeks or barbarians, whether Scythians, whether learned, or ignorant, whether men, or women, or children, or old, whether honest, or despised, whether rich, or poor, whether kings, or common men: all, says our Lord, are worthy of the same honour. Faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit lifting the inequality (*anomalian*) of human states, He puts all in the same form (*morphen*), marking them all with the same royal seal (*charaktera*)"¹⁶.

¹⁶ David C. FORD, *Bărbatul și femeia în viziunea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur*, pp. 241-242.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Logos incarnated from a Most Pure Virgin, gives commandments and divine laws that concern both men and women. In the Beatitudes he addresses both men and women without any distinction seeing them as one being.

Today, in postmodernity, the line from Ephesians by the Holy Apostle Paul, “The man is the head of the woman” (Eph 5, 23) has been interpreted by the followers of the feminist current as pejorative towards women. What is really meant by the phrase “woman’s head”? Saint John Chrysostom sees in this a kind of teacher-disciple or leader-subordinate relationship: “One carries out the order (*taxis*) of the disciple, the other that of the teacher; one that of the chief (*archomenes*), the other that of the subordinate (*archomenes*)”¹⁷. In the 5th Homily to the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians, he catechizes the men who, in the Roman world contemporary to the Holy Father, had a supremacy and a higher responsibility in the field of public functions:

“You are the head (*kephale*) of the woman; therefore, let the head command (*rhythmizeto*) the rest of the body. Do you not see that it is not its position in relation to the rest of the body, namely above it, that makes it so, but the provision with which it guides the whole, like a captain of a ship? For in the head are the eyes of the body and those of the soul; there also lies the ability to see and the power to steer. The rest of the body is ordained for service (*diakonian*), and the head is prepared to lead (*epitattein*)¹⁸.

The essence of Saint John Chrysostom’s teaching about the superiority of male leadership lies in the fact that it is conditioned by a deeply Christian ideational content, in the spirit of humility and piety. Faithful to the teaching of Holy Scripture, Saint John teaches us that the humble state of submission to those who hold positions of supremacy is altogether superior from a spiritual point of view, bringing man closer to the behaviour of Christ. Christ always has the last word, God made Man out of humility: “But it should not be like that among you, but whoever wants to be great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever wants to be first among you, let him be servant of all” (Mk 10, 43-44). As such,

¹⁷ David C. FORD, *Bărbatul și femeia în viziunea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur*, p. 243.

¹⁸ David C. FORD, *Bărbatul și femeia în viziunea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur*, p. 244.

men are superior only relative to the temporal distinctions between the roles and functions they hold. Spiritually, with the common human nature shared by both men and women, Christian theology, through the voice of Scripture and patristic writings, declares them to be completely equal.

The preference of man should not be understood as supremacy over woman. Joseph of Vatopedi said about man that he has priority more in terms of duties than in terms of rights. The will of God, expressed by St. Paul, is the mutual submission of spouses: “Submit to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph 5, 21). The man must love and take care of his wife as well as Christ loves the Church. Even if he is Lord, he does not oppress her, does not enslave her, but sacrifices himself for her “to sanctify her” (Eph 5, 26)¹⁹.

In a homily on Genesis, St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the fact that one cannot speak of the submission of the woman to the man before the fall into the sin of disobedience, but only after Eve obeyed the cunning devil:

“From the beginning I created you from the same honour with your husband, and I wanted you to share with him everything in the same dignity; I have entrusted you and your husband with dominion over everything in the world; but because you have not used the honour I gave you properly, therefore submit to your husband. And to your husband is your return, and he will rule over you”²⁰.

Unlike the pre-Christian world, where women were considered inferior to men, the true Church of Christ “revealed the dignity and calling of women in its fullness, giving her deep religious foundations, the most powerful of which is the veneration of the Blessed Mother of God”²¹. What did the Mother of God reach through obedience (Lk 1, 7)? She reached the greatest dignity, that of giving birth to the Son of God by becoming the

¹⁹ Gheronda IOSIF VATOPEDINUL, *Dialoguri la Athos*, transl. Nicușor Deciu, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2012, pp. 128-129.

²⁰ Sfântul IOAN GURA DE AUR, *Omiliile la Facere*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 21, transl., introduction, indexes and notes by Fr. D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biclic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, p. 202.

²¹ Ieromonah Macarie MARCHIȘ, *Bărbatul și femeia*, Întrebări și răspunsuri, transl. Florentina Cristea, Editura Egumenița, 2018, Galați, p. 12.

mother of the human race. The woman, having the Mother of God as her model, has the holy purpose of “giving birth” to God in the souls of her children and her husband.

The Church of Christ honoured the sacrifice of Christian women and mothers. As a man, the Saviour Jesus Christ was born of a woman “more honoured than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim”. The Church honoured the mothers of the saints of the first Christian centuries who raised their children in the Spirit of God (Emmelia – mother of Saint Basil the Great, Nonna – mother of Saint Gregory the Theologian, Anthusa – mother of Saint John Chrysostom, Monnica – mother of Blessed Augustine, Empress Helena – mother of Saint Constantine the Great, Euvula-mother of Saint Pantelimon, Polychronia-mother of Saint George, Saint Empress Theodora). The Holy Church ordained that the 3rd Sunday of the Myrtle Lent be called the Christian Woman’s Sunday. The Christian calendar is sealed with numerous names of holy martyrs and pious saints (Saint Parascheva, Saint Irene, Saint Theodora, Saint Philothea, Saint Catherine, Saint Anastasia, Saint Fevronia, Saint Pelagia, Saint Photinia, etc.).

On the other hand, the holy fathers defended women who suffered because of unjust laws. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, did not hesitate to openly challenge civil laws that punished women for adultery, but which allowed men to escape unpunished. Since then, his words have remained proverbial, as he emphasized: “I do not accept this law, nor do I praise the practice. Men were the creators of those laws, therefore the legislation is against women”²². Both men and women were created by God and are called to seek “resemblance” to God. In other words, we must obtain communion with the Triune God through uncreated Grace. That is why Saint Gregory highlights again: “...the Creator is One and the same for women and men, we all share the same clay, the same image, the same death and the same resurrection”²³. At the same time, the message of the Church delivered through the holy fathers improved the general morality. Besides adultery and prostitution, living with a concubine was condemned

²² Denisa BORZA, <https://altarulcredintei.md/egalitatea-dintre-barbati-si-femei-in-biseric/> (accesat 20.02. 2022).

²³ Denisa BORZA, <https://altarulcredintei.md/egalitatea-dintre-barbati-si-femei-in-biseric/> (accesat 20.02. 2022).

and the notion that women were a mere object of pleasure, inferior to men, was harmful.

V. Conclusions

The teaching of the Orthodox Church advocated for the equality of all people before God, regardless of nationality, sex, social status. The saviour Jesus Christ manifested in his public missionary activity his desire to break any rigid formalism aimed at discrimination, of whatever nature it may have been. Salvation is not conditioned by nationality, sex, material condition or any other detail that could separate people. The fact that the man is considered the “head of the family” should not, and does not in any way diminish the importance of the woman in the family, both as a mother and as a wife. The woman is in a relationship of complementarity with the man, and not in a relationship of “competition” with him. Together they give life, together they raise and educate children, together they participate in the life of the Church of Christ.