

## BOOK REVIEWS

**P**r. Josiah B. Trenham, *Căsătorie și feciorie în gândirea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur*, trad. Lucian Filip, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2016, 353 p.

Released at Doxologia Publishing House of Iasi under blessing of His Holyness Teophan, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, translated by Lucian Filip in mesmerising graphic conditions, *Marriage and Virginity according to St. John Chrisostom* has drawn attention by its variety of themes. The author takes us into a journey of 316 pages, emphasising with high accuracy and competence St. John Chrisostom's teaching on marriage and virginity.

Father Josiah B. Trenham gives to us a treasure trove structured in six chapters preceded by author's introduction and a foreword by His Grace Basil, Bishop of Wichita and Mid-America, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

The book is a synthesis of Chrisostomic approach on marriage and virginity. Its subject concerns matters of great interest and importance for people of all ages and circumstances: virginity, chastity, celibacy, marriage, contraception, parenting, family life, sexual practices, divorce, remarriage, and widowhood.

Chapter I entitled "Early Church Teaching Prior to St. John Chrisostom" brings forth his concept on marriage and virginity of six very influent pre-Christosom Church teachers: Tertulian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Methodius of Olympus, St. Athanasios the Great and St. Ephraim the Syrian. All these fathers and Church scribes exposed the above mentioned teaching of the Church on these themes, but they combatted the different gnostic sects of ascetic attitude brought to paroxysm, or of immoral behaviour. If the Marcionites envisioned marriage and procreation as a participation to the evil work of the demiurge, the Carpocratians and Borborites represented the immoral extreme of Gnosticism.

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Terullian emphasises the divine origin of marriage and virginity. For him, marriage is God's answer to death's presence. Tertulian influenced many patristic writers following him in his concepts on marriage and virginity (pp. 38-39).

Combatting the Gnostics, St. Clement of Alexandria points out that conjugal relations within marriage are not touched by evil, because deified persons are of holy seed. For him, marriage is the crown of a husband, the husband is the crown of his wife and the children of marriage are the flowers which the Divine Husbandman gathers from the sensual meadows (p. 52).

Origen, at his turn, combats the gnostic nonsense regarding marriage and virginity. Even if he was for legal marriage against Encratites, Marcionites and Montanists, he still nevertheless claims there is some sense of *inescapable impurity* in lawful marital relations that is translated to child born of the sexual union (p. 66). He affirms in his writings the fundamental equality between husband and wife marriage, especially in respect to fidelity (p. 69).

Both St. Methodios of Olympus and St. Athanasius the Great claim there are two opened paths of living: marriage and virginity, but virginity is the one to be preferred (p. 82). St. Athanasius the Great considers family life to be pretty modest and worldly, while virginity is angelic and peerless (pp. 89-90).

St. Ephrem of Syria, as well as the Syriac Holy Fathers, preceding Ephrem, believed that the consummation of conjugal relations was a post-Fall phenomenon. Therefore, if Adam and Eve wouldn't have fallen into the ancestral sin, Eve would have given birth without pain and not to many children, since those born to her would have been immortal (p. 98).

Chapter II entitled "Terrestrial Angels. Marriage and Virginity in Paradise", brings forth the Chrysostomic theological concept of the pristine concept of man before the Fall (p. 106). Adam and Eve have been designed and crafted by God to be terrestrial angels. In Eden, our forefathers Adam and Eve worshipped God in communion with the bodiless hosts, the angels. Man's communion and union with God incensed the envy of the devil (p. 108). Tempted by the evil, Adam and Eve fell into disobedience and sin. Therefore, they tragically lost a way of life, an illumined life in a ceaseless communion with God and besides this life in communion they lost the splendour of their primordial virginity (p. 119). To St. John Chrisostom,

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the Paradisal virginity was a state similar to the angels, God offered to our forefathers. It was a state of ceaseless pristine communion with the Creator (p. 140). In primordial state, Adam and Eve were adorned in gleaming and resplendent vesture of glory, different from the earthly garments. As terrestrial angels in Paradise, their bodies were shrouded in light, not burning with desire, not assaulted by other passions or subject to the needs of nature, on the contrary they were created incorruptible and immortal. The Holy Father tells us they could not feel the onset of desire (p. 141).

Chapter III entitled “From Earthly Ambitions to Heavenly Acquisitions: Marriage and Virginity in the Old and New Covenants” makes a thorough analyses on Chrisostomic teaching concerning God’s progressive redemptive efforts applied to marriage and virginity as well as their transfiguration in a history of covenant. God designed the establishment of marriage to tame man’s wild and out-of-control nature following the Fall of his forefathers. Marriage carries with it a soteriological purpose (p. 147).

God has seen the Old Covenant as a long training period for man to draw gradually closer to God’s original plan, therefore He allowed certain concessions with respect to divorce and polygamy, even if they are not according to His will, neither they were (p. 157). Polygamy, though evil, was tolerated by God because the human race was young and needed to multiply (p. 160).

Procreation through the sexual act, according to St. John Chrisostom, was the greatest consolation to fallen man, offering some small beachhead against the assault of death (p. 163). The carnal lust was introduced after the Fall to safeguard perpetuation of human race (p. 164).

Even if in the Old Testament there were righteous living in virginity, St. John Chrisostom not hesitating to call them “monks,” virginity became possible for many others only after Christ coming into this world. God’s Kingdom presence on earth could not have been demonstrated in a stronger way than the monastic life, preserving one’s virginity (p. 169).

Christ Himself living a virginal life of complete communion with God, He lived as a perfect Man, as Adam was intended to live (pp. 170-171). Adam’s descendants acceptance of virginity is a step forward towards restoration of Paradise in bringing the man in line with the angels again (p. 174). Therefore, in Chrisostomic conception, the monastic life is superior to conjugal live in the same manner the angels are to man, even more, we may dare to say (p. 175).

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Marriage in the Old Testament is a mystery of great importance, for it has the meaning of revealing the “true marriage,” the one between Christ and the Church as well as between God and the man (p. 186).

Chapter IV entitled “Spiritual Marriage, Monastic Family, and Domestic Church” explores the Chrisostomic concept concerning the practice and nature of the authentic marriage, as well as the magnitude of vocation to marriage in Christ.

According to St. John Chrisostom, the Christian family should be part of Church life communion, in the Day of the Lord (p. 224) to have a prayer rite inside its home and practice charity amidst poor people (p. 228). Another essential issue in Christian family life is the study of the Holy Scripture (p. 230). Christian education needs to take off at earliest age possible, for the childhood lessons are lodged in one’s memory for the duration of all his life (p. 236-237). The Holy Father considers the Christian’s home a place of spiritual training to acquire the given virtues (p. 250). His home has to transfigure in a Church miniature where God’s Kingdom manifests on earth (p. 251).

Chapter V entitled “Barren Intercourse: Contraception in the Teaching of St. John Chrisostom” presents the Chrisostomic vision on abortion and contraception. The Holy Father considers them both unacceptable because they open doors to five evil things. The ideas of Homily 24 from Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans is the core of Chrisostomic opposition against abortion and contraception, demonstrating these two sinful acts generate unfruitful sawing, treat with profound disrespect the gift of God, represent manifests of fight against God’s laws, take blessing of fertility as a curse and misuse the body of woman (p. 272-274).

Chapter VI entitled “Celestial Bodies and Spiritual Consortship: Marriage and Virginitly in the Eschaton” deals with Chrisostomic teaching on transfiguration of marriage and virginitly in the Kingdom to come.

Combatting the Jewish concept speaking of a sensual Paradise and a similar Resurrection, St. John Chrisostom tells us that, in the life to come, people will experience another way of living. Besides the unpleasant aspects of present life, such as disease, pain and sufferance, in the life to come „there will be no marriage, no pains at birth or carnal pleasures, no intercourse between man and woman, no money, no care of assets, no food, no garments, no agriculture, no trade at sea, no arts or jobs, no

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constructions, cities or homes” (pp. 291-292). In the next life „all will be peace, love, trust, joy, true, transparent and stable” (p. 294).

The eschatologic age will be the age of virginity, where marriage will no longer exist. In the age to come those living in virginity will see their purpose of living in communion with God fulfil in perfection, while the married ones will enjoy communion with the Holy Trinity, along with the saved ones (p. 314).

Without being wrong, we can draw a conclusion: Father Josiah B. Trenham offered to all priests and believers nowadays a synthesis of St. John Chrisostom’s teaching on marriage and virginity, but it could be a small guide as well, to those who want to live according to the will of God, in virginity or marriage.

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