

Love and Transformation

Women Who Met Jesus

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Jesus' relationship with women brings to mind the Old Testament Song of Solomon, a collection of lyric poems of love and courtship which express intense yearning, jealous possession, extreme admiration and deep contentment between a bridegroom and his bride. The poems declare a singular commitment and an unbreakable bond between two lovers.

This sensuous poetry was included in the Old Testament as an allegory. The Lord of the Hebrews was perceived as the "husband" of his people (Hos. 2:16-19). Christian tradition has recast the allegory to point to the love of Christ and his bride, the church (Rev. 21:2,9).¹ Saints have viewed it as the intimate experience of Divine Love embracing the individual soul.²

This passionate poetry foreshadowed Jesus' attitudes and actions towards women. Jesus did not romantically court women, and of course he did not marry. But he did court souls, and the souls of women he engaged became loyally and unremittingly wed to him. All of Jesus' personal encounters with women bore the common experience of being wooed by love, falling in love, surrendering to love and being transfigured by love. This love was not a shallow physical attraction, but a burning fire that transformed the person and made her a daughter of the Most High God.

Essentially, Jesus' encounters with women resulted not in social programmes or political philosophies but in the purification of souls and the integration of personalities. Essentially, these encounters were dramas about ordinary women who became extraordinary women, about women being united to Jesus who is Love (1 John 4:8) and what that love cultivated in their souls. I want to speak of the transfigurations wrought in three women by the Lover of humanity.

The Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42)

Tell me, you whom my soul loves,
where you pasture your flock,
where you make it lie down at noon;

for why should I be like one who is veiled
beside the flocks of your companions? (S. of S. 1:7).

Once, on his way from Judaea to Galilee, Jesus had to pass through Samaria. He came to the town of Sychar (Shechem) which was "near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph" (cf. Gen. 33:19; 48:22; Josh. 24:32). Weary from his journey, he stopped about noon at a well and sat on the ground beside it. A woman from Samaria came to draw water, bringing the usual equipment – a pitcher and a hard leather bucket with a rope.³ Jesus had no such equipment with him, and being thirsty he asked the woman for a drink. Here their intriguing conversation began.

The woman at first appeared startled by Jesus' overture since it was unheard of not only for a rabbi to speak familiarly with a woman in public but also for Jews to have any dealings with Samaritans. Jews also considered the eating and drinking utensils of Samaritans to be unclean.⁴ When the woman questioned Jesus about this, she received an even more startling response. Jesus claimed he could give her "living water" (v.10). She mistook this to mean "running water", as opposed to water from a well or cistern, but Jesus explained that he was talking about the "water of life" referred to by the Old Testament prophets (Jer. 2:13; Zech. 14:8; Ezek. 47:9; Prov. 13:14).⁵ He then went on to reveal the intimate details of the woman's life: she had had five husbands and was now living with a man without the benefit of marriage.

Impressed by his prophetic abilities, or perhaps wanting to shift the conversation away from her own embarrassing personal affairs, she posed a theological question. She wanted this prophet to solve a long-standing controversy between the Samaritans and Jews: where was the proper place to worship, on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem? Jesus assured her that this question very soon would be superfluous; those who worshipped God within the new covenant through the Messiah would worship in spirit and truth. He also revealed himself as that Messiah, the one whom the Samaritans called *Tā'eb*, "He who returns", or "He who restores".⁶ At this revelation, the woman left her water jar at the well, summoned the people of Sychar, and directed them to Jesus.

Jesus appears in this account as the divine Shepherd seeking a lost lamb (Luke 15:6). The writer of the fourth gospel used this pastoral imagery extensively. Jesus stopped by the well at noon, the usual time for watering sheep in Palestine. When the patriarch Jacob himself met shepherds at a well in Haran, he said, "Look, it is still broad daylight... Water the sheep and go pasture them" (Gen. 29:7). Usually sheep were stationed near streams of flowing (or "living") water; but when such watering places were dried up by the heat of summer, wells were used.⁷

Jesus stationed himself at Jacob's well and prepared to give his lamb, the Samaritan woman, living water.

Shepherds also knew each sheep so intimately that they were able to feel the absence of even one sheep, for the appearance of the entire flock seemed changed. Stories about this familiarity are legendary: for example, a contemporary witness stated that shortly after nightfall, an Arab shepherd was able to call out, one by one, the names of the mother ewes and to pick out each one's lamb and restore it to its mother to suckle.

Such a shepherd was Jesus when he revealed to the Samaritan woman all her secret actions and desires. He felt her absence from his flock; he felt her desolation and despondency. She had tried so hard, through relationships with five men, to feel fulfilled. She had failed. Now came a man who offered her something new and eternal. Now came a man who offered her the water of wisdom, so that she would never feel thirsty or dry in her soul again (v.14).

The woman thought Jesus wanted something *from her*, yet he appeared as the Good Shepherd taking an opportunity to offer something *to her*. St Romanos the Melodist expresses this beautifully in his poem about this woman:

Woman..., pay attention and open your heart to me,
So that I may enter in and dwell in it; for this I wish.
For the one who drinks this water will again
on each occasion be thirsty;
But the water which I give to those who are on fire with faith
will be refreshing after the thirst;
For within those who drink it, there will be a stream,
A spring of immortality which bursts forth
and swells with eternal life.⁸

Perhaps this woman went to the well that day looking for another lover. She obviously had experienced great dissatisfaction with the men she had married, and she knew that shepherds would be coming to the well at noon. Instead she found the Lover and Shepherd of humanity who placed God in her soul. Her transformation was begun. Remembered in Orthodox Christian tradition as St Photini, she became a light to the people of her home town, as well as a great evangelist abroad. She sowed seeds of Christianity in Samaria, and the disciples eventually reaped a great harvest there (Acts 8:4-25). In addition, she taught her five daughters and two sons to follow Jesus, and they accompanied her on her missionary journeys.⁹

Her quest at the well recalls the words of the bride in the Song of Solomon quoted at the beginning of this section. Jesus' response to her

was like that of the bridegroom: "Follow the tracks of the flock, and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents" (S. of S. 1:8). If we women seek fulfillment and are thirsty for joy in our lives, we can follow the example of St Photini. We can ask Jesus Christ to fill us with wisdom, renew our souls and send us on our proper missions.

The woman with an issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48)

I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves (S. of S. 3:2).

Jesus sought to deliver diseased people from their illnesses and restore them to health. And so, sick people sought out Jesus. Many times whole cities gathered at the door of the place where he was staying (cf. Mark 1:32-34). People believed Jesus to be a prophet or a rabbi, and in ancient times the sick looked to pious people, holy people, for remedies.

People of that day also thought sickness was brought on by demons or disobedience to God's law. The Hebrews believed in God's promise:

If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you (Ex. 15:26).

Moses (Num. 21:7), David (Ps. 107:17-21), Solomon (2 Chron. 6:28-30), and Hezekiah (2 Kings 20) all had prayed to God for the healing of illnesses among their people. The crowds thought Jesus could pray for their healing, and they rushed to him for this purpose.

The woman who had been haemorrhaging for twelve years was no exception. She pushed into a crowd to find Jesus. According to the account in Mark, she had spent all her money on doctors, but suffered from their treatments and only grew more ill (Mark 5:25-34). Rabbis of that time sometimes posed as physicians and prescribed eccentric remedies for her type of malady:

Dig seven pits, and burn in them some vine branches not yet four years old. Then let the woman, carrying a cup of wine in her hand, come up to each pit in succession, and sit down by the side of it, and each time let the words be repeated: "Be free from thy sickness."¹⁰

We can imagine the despair of this woman. According to the law of Moses, her discharge of blood made her "unclean", separating her from the worshipping community (Lev. 15:25-27). Moreover, some thought her illness was caused by sin, so they ostracized her. Perhaps she *had*

sinned, for there is no one who does not sin (Rom. 3:23), and this added to her depression. Twelve years of suffering had certainly depleted her mental and physical stamina; in addition, she suffered from degrading and harmful treatments prescribed by physicians. Finally, her money was gone. We can imagine how many times she has been rejected, embarrassed and mistreated. All of humanity had shamed her.

Yet, this spurned woman still had the faith to approach Jesus with hope. She risked recognition from the crowd and possible rejection from Jesus. She was so fearful that she trembled (Mark 5:33). She did not want to ask Jesus for help, but believed that if she touched the tassel of his cloak,¹¹ she would receive healing power. Her determination had not been extinguished, and with this determination she touched his cloak and was healed.

St Romanos depicted her as a resolute “robber” in his hymn, *On the Woman with the Issue of Blood*:

Secretly she touched the hem of his garment;
She tried to rob him as though he were a man,
He who in his divinity knows no sleep.
However, Christ bore being robbed
He who of old stole the side of Adam in Eden,
He who formed the woman now crying out to him,
“Saviour, save me.”¹²

Jesus saw in this woman his beautiful creation which had been deformed by disease. He over-ruled the law of Moses by allowing her to touch him.¹³ He freely allowed divine healing to flow from him. He rejoiced in her restoration. Jesus told her she had been healed, *sesōken* – meaning she had been snatched from peril and preserved, and was now within his saving grace. He also told her she had been made whole, *hygiēs* – meaning she was safe and sound. These words connoted healing beyond the physical realm. Whenever the gospel writers used the word *sōzein*, they intended a spiritual healing of the whole person, indicated by Jesus’ words, “Your faith has saved you.”¹⁴

The quest of this woman recalls the search of the bride in the Song of Solomon – the words quoted at the beginning of this section and then the words a couple verses later: “when I found him I held him, and would not let him go” (S. of S. 3:4). And Jesus reminds us of the bridegroom assuring his bride, “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone..., the time of singing has come” (S. of S. 2:10-12).

Jesus’ divine compassion and healing overcame taboo, shame, spiritual sin and disease. For the first time in a long time, the woman

belonged to a new community where she was whole, forgiven and safe. Likewise, when we women need a safe place, when we need a spiritual haven, we need to come to Jesus.

Implications of Jesus’ relationship with women

In his encounters with both the Samaritan woman and the woman with the issue of blood, Jesus broke many Jewish rabbinic prohibitions. As a rabbi, he spoke with a woman, a foreigner, a prostitute and a person considered to be “unclean” according to the Levitical law. There are many other instances in which Jesus rebuffed rabbinic taboos and returned to authentic Mosaic tradition. He touched dead bodies, in the case of Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:54) and in healing the son of the widow from Nain (Luke 7:11-17). He extolled the sinful woman who anointed him prior to his burial (Luke 7:37-50). He forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery and convicted her accusers (John 8:1-12).

Jesus’ example elevated woman to her proper place in creation. Woman regained her status as co-equal with man in regard to her union and relationship with the Creator. Several implications were drawn by the early Christian community as a result of Jesus’ encounters with women.

First, husband and wife, equally submissive to Christ and each other, were yoked in a marital union which expressed the love and yielding between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:21-33).¹⁵ Second, some in the early church dispensed with the Levitical codes regarding women’s menstrual cycles. Third, husband and wife were equally bound in marriage; the husband could no longer issue a divorce decree for minor irritations or out of displeasure with his wife (Matt. 19:9). Husband and wife also became responsible for the care of each other’s body and sexual pleasure (1 Cor. 7:2-5). Celibacy, in addition to marriage, became prized within the Christian community (1 Cor. 7:6-7); virgins and widows in the early church had their own particular ministries.¹⁶ Through Jesus’ actions, women were emancipated from rabbinic rigidity.

At the same time, gender distinction within the Christian community remained, even in the eschatological sense, though women and men enjoyed the fullness of union with God by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not come to deliver humanity from the *distinction* of being female and male, but came to *restore* the primeval beauty of both forms.

A range of anthropological theories and philosophies influence current theological discussions. How we view gender, male and female, greatly influences how we view issues of the household of God and the spiritual and functional roles of women. If we view gender distinctions

as relatively insignificant, pertinent only to earthly life and function and necessary only for procreation, we will feel comfortable blending and crossing roles of women and men in the church. If on the other hand we view gender distinctions as psychologically and biologically significant, continuing in the *eschaton*, and necessary to reflect the wholeness of humanity and even perhaps the Image of God, we will question such homogenizing.

Our anthropological stance is crucial to debating issues surrounding the royal and sacramental priesthoods in regard to women. In the Orthodox family today, there is a wide range of thought. Some would distinguish male and female roles within the royal priesthood. Others would blend roles within the royal priesthood without hesitation but would stop short of ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood. Still others would freely admit women to the sacramental priesthood in light of woman's equality within the royal priesthood.

It is exciting, exhilarating, to be in the midst of this contemporary anthropological and theological debate, and there are many distinguished theologians within the range of thoughts. Personally I fall into the middle category above, because ordination to the sacramental priesthood is not one of the charisms automatically granted to royal priests. We are not entitled to it by virtue of our baptism and chrismation. The sacramental priesthood requires a separate grace of ordination. However, I am open to wisdom from others on these issues, provided they are approaching the topics from Orthodox Tradition.

To this dialectic I should like to offer the example of the *Theotokos*, concentrating on her royal priesthood and her motherhood. By studying the *Theotokos* I believe we may best understand what St Paul meant when he said, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). I shall focus my remarks on Jesus' relationship with her within the context of two stories from the gospel of John.

The Theotokos, the Mother of God (John 2:1-11)

For your love is better than wine,
your anointing oils are fragrant,
your name is perfume poured out;
therefore the maidens love you (S. of S. 1:2-3).

We hear the gospel reading of the story of Jesus and his mother at the wedding in Cana of Galilee at every Orthodox Christian wedding. Often we think of it simply as a story about wine running short at a wedding feast and Jesus sparing the poor host embarrassment. Often we think that

Mary nags Jesus until he performs the miracle of changing water into wine, and that he is even a little annoyed with her request. However, the Greek text taken verse by verse reveals the depth and true meaning what John the Evangelist is trying to convey.

The first verse of John 2 begins: "On the third day". Since the previous chapter says nothing about a first or second day, we must discern what St John means by this verse. The only other biblical use of this exact phrase is in the account of Moses giving the Law on Mt Sinai. "On the third day" of the third month after the Hebrews escaped from the Pharaoh of Egypt and fled into the wilderness, they received the Ten Commandments from God (Exod. 19:16). Thus, a Jew reading this story which St John begins with "On the third day" would at once wonder: "On the third day in the wilderness, the children of Israel received the Law from Mt Sinai. What will happen on *this* third day? Will it bring a new covenant, a new law?"

The Jews were anticipating the coming of the Messiah who would write the law on their hearts. They were anticipating the time when God would pour out his spirit on all flesh, causing his sons and daughters to prophesy (Joel 2:28-32). They were anticipating the Messianic age when "the mountains shall drip with sweet wine" (Joel 3:18). All this is symbolized by the gospel writer throughout this apparently simple story of the marriage in Cana.

Mary, concerned with hospitality, points out to Jesus that the wine is gone. She is noting not only the absence of physical wine, but also an absence of "spiritual wine". In the Bible, wine is a symbol of the joy of being in God's presence. Wine is also often a symbol for God's Spirit. Thus when Mary says, "They have no wine" (John 2:3), she really is saying, "They have no joy in their spirits, no joy of the Spirit. Their souls are dry." She looks around at the drunken crowd (for the wine is gone!) and notices their spiritual desolation.

Jesus replies, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" (v.4). He is saying to his mother, "Why should we who know the joy of the Holy Spirit be concerned with drinking wine? Anyway, I cannot do anything about it now, because I have not fulfilled my ministry. My hour has not yet come. I cannot yet send the Spirit, the new wine, the real joy, into their hearts, because I have not yet been crucified. I cannot yet form my church filled with Spirit (Acts 2:14-18). But I can give them a foretaste of this joy. I will give them sweet wine, fulfilling the prophecy of Joel, and they will know that I am the Messiah" (v.11).

Mary's response to the stewards of the wedding feast is interesting: "Do whatever he tells you" (v.5). In the Exodus story, the people replied to Moses, "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exod.

19:8). Mary appears here as the Daughter of Zion, the personification of the people of God, their fulfillment. She becomes the faithful “Yes” to God and replaces the fickle Israel.¹⁷ In St John’s masterly comparison of the wedding at Cana with the Exodus story, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Mary fulfill and replace the event which involved Moses, the Law and the people of Israel.

Mary is the quintessence of humanity in union with God. God dwelt in her womb, and she was overshadowed twice by the Spirit of God, once at the Annunciation and once at Pentecost (Luke 1:35; Acts 1:24; 2:14). She was joined to God in a personal way and allowed God’s power to work within her. Notice the dialogue between the angel Gabriel and Mary at the Annunciation. Gabriel came to her and said, “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you... You have found favour with God. You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus” (Luke 1:28-31). The gospel tells us she was greatly troubled and asked how such a thing could be. Gabriel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God” (v.35). Mary replied, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (v.37).

Notice that Mary did two things. She invited the Word of God *in*, to live and grow inside of her, and she called him Jesus, which means “Saviour”. She also assented to the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon her. She joyously prophesied, “Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed” (v.48).

God asks women – and men – to do the same. Of course, we will never bear the Christ child. However, Scripture tells us Jesus stands at the door of our hearts and knocks (Rev. 3:20). Jesus wants to dwell in our hearts, as he did in Mary’s. Scripture likewise says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). God offers to us, as he offered to Mary, the indwelling of the Holy Trinity for our holiness and the gifts of the Spirit for the building up of the church (1 Cor. 12).

When we are baptized and chrismated, we are called to be a holy nation, a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 3:9-10), anointed ones, little “Christs”. St Cyril of Jerusalem says of the chrism given to us after baptism that “this holy ointment is no longer plain ointment... It is the gracious gift of Christ... While your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-creating Spirit” (*Mystagogic*, 3,3). The priest marks us with the oil on our forehead, lips, eyes, ears, nose, chest, hands and feet. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20). Reve-

lation 7:4 speaks of those servants of God who are *sealed* on their foreheads. The Greek word *sphragis* referred to the mark on a person who was to be a slave or a soldier, or an animal destined for sacrifice. After chrismation, we are to dedicate our senses to God and to seal them off from evil influences. We are invited to a charismatic life, to a holy use of our senses. The parts of our bodies anointed in chrismation correspond to the charismatic gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11: utterance of wisdom, utterance of knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

We like Mary must allow the gifts of baptism and chrismation to work in us. We like Mary must accept the invitation of God. All the saints of the church emphasize this cooperation. St Theophan the Recluse said:

We see in the lives of all who have preserved the grace of baptism that there was in these lives a moment when they decisively dedicated themselves to God; this is indicated by such words as “he became inflamed in spirit” or “he was ignited by the divine desire”... But let no one think that he himself can give birth to such a power of life; one must pray for this and be ready to receive it. The fire of zeal with power – this is the grace of the Lord. The Spirit of God, descending into the heart, begins to act in it with a zeal that is both devouring and all-active.¹⁸

St Simeon the New Theologian (949-1022) said of this indwelling of Christ and outpouring of the Spirit:

He that lacks awareness of his baptism and was baptized in infancy, accepting it only by faith and having effaced it by sins, but refuses the second one – I mean baptism of the Spirit, given by God in His love to those who seek it in repentance – how can he ever be saved? Not in the least... It is the worst of all heresies to believe it is not possible for Christians in latter days to experience charismatic gifts. It is entirely possible when one desires it [Hymn 27:125-32]. Whenever a miracle takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit, or when one observes a divine charisma in one of his brothers..., [if] he contends that such a thing is of the devil’s deception..., he blasphemes against the Holy Spirit (*Catechesis* 29).

Mary responded to God’s invitation and gifts, and she became the model of a human being on fire with God. She became the model of the royal priesthood, full of the Holy Spirit. When the angel Gabriel called Mary “highly favoured”, the Greek word used is *kecharitōmenē*, which means, “full of grace”, “full of the charisms”. St John Damascene says of Mary, “She is ointment poured out” (*Homily II on the Birth of Mary*). Mary might say to Jesus, like the bride in the Song of Solomon, “your

love is better than wine, your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is perfume poured out; therefore the maidens love you" (S. of S. 1:2-3). Jesus might reply, "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you" (S. of S. 4:7).

At the foot of the cross

Though full of grace and anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary retained her femininity. Jesus honoured his creation, male and female, and the relationships of brotherhood, sisterhood, fatherhood and motherhood (Matt. 12:50; 15:6). The gospel of John illustrates the importance of these vocations during the scene at the foot of the cross (John 19).

In this drama, the Virgin Mary and the beloved disciple John stand and mourn Jesus' death on Golgotha. Jesus says to Mary, "Woman, here is your son!" To John he says, "Here is your mother!" (John 19:26-27). Some view Jesus' "giving" of Mary to John merely as a way of providing for her protection. However, the sentence structure used in this particular passage indicates that Mary is really being given to the community of the church which shortly will be formed. John 19:27 states that "from that hour the disciple took her into his own home". The Greek phrase translated "into his own home" – *eis ta idia* – is the same as is used in John 1:11: "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him."

This parallel hardly can be accidental. John took Mary not just into his home, but to *his own*, meaning the community of the New Covenant. She was to be their mother as well as his. After completing this act, Jesus gave up his spirit. He was pierced in the side with a spear, and blood and water spilled forth. These were the signs of the New Covenant, baptism and the eucharist, sacraments which would nourish the infant church. However, before his death, Jesus also gave the church a mother, his own mother, to protect and succour it.¹⁹

According to church tradition, the Virgin Mary remains our mother in heaven. Gender distinctions and gendered relationships remain even in the heavenly realms. Even there we will relate to one another as brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, male and female. The Spirit's indwelling does not annihilate gender distinction on earth, nor will it be annihilated after our resurrection from the dead, even in our spiritual bodies.²⁰ The woman and man of creation are to be equally renewed and restored, not blended or eradicated. Gender distinction within the charismatic life remains, although there is equal opportunity between women and men for the obtaining and expression of charisms.

Some conclusions

People use examples of Jesus' relationship with women to support various political, sociological and theological positions. But in order to draw conclusions today from these ancient stories we must remember what was Jesus' main concern. His main concern for women mirrored his main concern for all humans. He wished for and required a *metanoia*, a change, a transfiguration of their hearts.

A woman did not meet Jesus and remain the same person. She experienced change. The change may have been repentance from sin, a desire to support his ministry, theological insight and clarification. The change may have been in her life-style, her goals, her dreams or her direction.

Meeting Jesus is meeting the God who brings integration, direction and purpose to our lives. Meeting Jesus is falling in love with the man who can tell us everything we have ever done, like the Samaritan woman, and yet forgive us. Meeting Jesus is being healed and restored like the woman with the issue of blood. Meeting Jesus is having the opportunity to be filled with the Spirit of God, like Mary, so that we may be holy daughters, sisters and mothers.

When we meet Jesus, when Jesus dwells within us, we will have our minds renewed to answer the pressing questions regarding church life and society. First, however, we must meet Jesus in the way he desires. We must open the door of our hearts to him when he knocks. We must be filled with the Spirit of God through the oil of chrismation. We must gain the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) and become royal priests. Then, like the bride in the Song of Solomon, we may exclaim, "My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me... I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh" (S. of S. 5:4).

NOTES

- ¹ Cf. H May and B.M. Metzger, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1973, p.815.
- ² Cf. Jean Daniélou, ed., *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*. Crestwood NY, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979.
- ³ Fred H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*. Chicago, Moody, 1953, p.281.
- ⁴ On the Jews' attitudes towards the Samaritans see R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer and R.E. Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Bible Commentary*, Englewood Cliffs NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1968, p.431.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p.432.
- ⁷ On shepherds in biblical times, cf. Wight, *op. cit.*, pp.153ff.
- ⁸ Cited in *Kontakio of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, Vol. 1: On the Person of Christ*, tr. Marjorie Carpenter, Columbia, Univ. of Missouri Press, 1970, p.90.
- ⁹ Alan Wallerstedt, ed., *The Orthodox Study Bible*, Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1993, p.222.
- ¹⁰ Wight, *op. cit.*, p.140; cf. J.M. Freeman, *Handbook of Bible Manners and Customs*. New York, Nelson & Phillips, 1874, p.21.

¹¹ *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.140; cf. Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 22:12.

¹² *Kontakio of Romanos*, p.124.

¹³ Here we should mention an ancient non-conciliar canon of the Orthodox church – Canon II of *The Letter of the Blessed Dionysius*. It reads: "Menstruous women ought not to come to the holy table or touch the holy of holies (Greek: 'the body and blood of Christ'), nor to churches, but to pray elsewhere." Balsamon's note on this canon adduces the example of the woman with the issue of blood who dared to touch only the hem of Jesus' garment. Cf. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d series, Vol. 16, repr. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1974, p.600. This canon contradicts the views of the 3rd-century *Didascalia Apostolorum*, which objects to the view that Jewish ceremonial law is binding on Christians after baptism: "If you think, O woman, that in the seven days of your menstrual flow you are void of the Holy Spirit; if you die in those days, you will depart empty and without hope. But if the Holy Spirit is always in you.... why do you keep yourself from approaching the works of the Holy Spirit...? Wherefore, beloved.... do not observe these things, nor think them uncleanness; and do not refrain yourselves on their account, nor seek after sprinklings or baptisms or purification for these things."

¹⁴ On *hygiēs*, cf. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, London, Samuel Bagster, 1973, pp.395, 412; on *sōzein*, G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 7, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1971, p.990.

¹⁵ See Nancy Forest-Flicr, "Headship in Marriage: A Closer Look at Ephesians 5", *The Handmaiden*, Vol. 1, 2, 1996, p.25.

¹⁶ Cf. Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, Collegeville MN, Liturgical Press, 1976, pp.8, 55-61.

¹⁷ Cf. René Laurentin, "Mary: Model of the Charismatic as Seen in Acts 1-2, Luke 1-2 and John", in Vincent P. Branick, ed., *Mary, the Spirit and the Church*, Ramsey NJ, Paulist Press, 1980, pp.39-41.

¹⁸ Cf. Peter E. Gillquist, ed., *Raising Them Right: A Saint's Advice on Raising Children*, by *Theophan the Recluse*, Mt Hermon CA, Conciliar Press, 1989, pp.48, 15, 10ff.

¹⁹ Cf. Andre Feuillet, *Jesus and His Mother*, Still River MA, St Bede's Publications, 1974, p.209.

²⁰ This is a topic of heated debate among Christians today, including Orthodox Christians. Patristic sources did not agree and indeed sometimes individual authors were inconsistent; for example, St Jerome said in one place that "if woman shall not rise again as woman, nor the man as man, there will be no resurrection of the dead" (*Letter 108 to the Virgin Eustochia*, 23), but at another point argued with Rufinus that in the resurrection women will be turned into men. To this Rufinus responds: "If it is man alone who is to receive at the resurrection the form of clay which was originally given in Paradise, what becomes of that which is written, 'He made them male and female, and blessed them'?"; *Apology*, 1, 24, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p.447.

Women in the Early Christian Church

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A study of the rich bibliography related to the position of women at different points in the historical course of Christianity leads directly to the conclusion that women and men are equal citizens of the kingdom of heaven, but that, compared to men, women are unequal and degraded members of the social expression of the church. The first reality is attributed to the grace, the mercy and the love of God, which has been manifested through the mystery of divine economy; the second is attributed to fallen human nature.

The kingdom of heaven is not only an eschatological reality. Within the eucharistic community, the faithful experience the sanctifying grace of God which transforms the holy gifts into the flesh and blood of Christ and the faithful into participants in the glory of the Lord; and created time is shifted from the seventh day of the perishable creation into the eighth day of the new creation, which is restored by Christ.

The fourth ecumenical council (Chalcedon 451) defined the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ and the salvation of the faithful by him and set forth succinctly the basic principle of the salvation of all humankind: what is not assumed is not healed.

This means that the Son and Word of God possessed all of human nature, both male and female, and gave it the possibility of being saved from the determinism of corruption and death. This possibility is given to everyone; and it depends upon the free cooperation of men and women whether they will become members of Christ's body and participants in his imperishable glory.

This unprecedented spiritual experience of the faithful, both men and women, has borne rich fruit throughout the history of the church from the earliest centuries until today. Men and women have testified to the truth of the gospel with their words, their behaviour and their lives, and have supported the faith of other Christians. A chorus of martyrs, men