

Traditional Christian Marriage as an Expression of Social Justice

Identity and Society
in the Writings
of Florensky
and Bulgakov

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The Christian tradition of marriage between a man and a woman can be understood as expressing social justice in the civil realm, in light of definitions of identity in terms of relationship, and of society as a household by the Russian Orthodox philosophers Pavel Florensky and Sergius Bulgakov, respectively. Both models support traditional marriage as an embodied symbol of relationship among human beings, nature, and God as expressed in Christian culture for centuries in lived intergenerational experience. Such intergenerational perspective on faith and social justice provides an argument for traditional marriage as a public institution based on an ethos of socioeconomic as well as spiritual sustainability.

A major challenge faced by Orthodox Christianity's encounter with American society today is how to articulate and preserve, both compassionately and with integrity, its tradition of marriage in a secular society where a growing emphasis on "marriage equality" focuses public and state hostility on traditional Christian practices while encouraging divisions within the Church. The writings of two Orthodox philosophers of the Russian Silver Age—the Blessed Martyr Pavel Florensky and Fr. Sergius Bulgakov—on identity and society respectively, can help address this dilemma of twenty-first-century apologetics.¹ Their work responded to the need to articulate Orthodox theology during a modern era of intense social and political change culminating in the Russian Revolution. This brief study focuses on Bulgakov's discussion of society as a household and on Florensky's view of identity as relationship in relation to the American political debate over the future of marriage as it affects the American Orthodox Christian community. Together those two models provide the basis for articulating a

contemporary understanding of Orthodox Christian traditions of marriage in terms of social justice and sustainability, as distinct from socially constructed, consumer-style notions of sexualities. They offer a postmodern sense of marriage as both intergenerationally sustainable and socially equitable, embodied, and compassionate by drawing on premodern cultural traditions. This provides an alternative to the more individualistic, consumerist, and solipsistic sense of customized sexualities that have claimed the mantle of social justice in the marriage debate. This alternative articulation of marriage reopens a common rhetorical ground for reconciling Christian traditionalist-activists, traditionalist-libertarians, and progressives on the issue of marriage in the public square, with a compassionate yet cosmological stance, rather than one based on moralizing.

American Orthodox Christianity and the US Marriage Debate

While this article focuses on a relatively small group of Christians within the United States (those of Eastern Orthodox background) focusing on this one tradition functions in part as a type of fractal for the larger challenge of the marriage controversy to the conservatively faithful of various traditions, and to the history of the civic tradition of marriage in the West. That significance is underlined by growing numbers of converts to Orthodox Christianity in the United States who in recent years have sought for themselves and their families a spiritual haven of sorts from what they see as the secularizing trend toward a post-Christian or even anti-Christian culture in the United States that follows European precedents.

The broader contemporary challenge to the traditional model of marriage as between a man and a woman, and the case for actively supporting its continuation in the public square, has been outlined recently in the book *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense*, one of whose coauthors, Robert P. George, is a well-known Catholic defender of traditional marriage laws.² It argues for marriage as a comprehensive household union involving a community interest, rather than merely an individual emotional union. This bears a relationship to both Bulgakov's view of society as a household and to Florensky's view of identity as ontologically an antinomy of relationship rather than being essentially individualistic. Understanding marriage in these terms involves appreciating social justice arguments for the traditional model of marriage as between a man and a woman in Orthodox Christian tradition. In effect, George and his coauthors argue in secular terms that such social views are undermined by codifying marriage as an atomistic union of individuals rather than as a microcosm of the social household.

The arguments in *What Is Marriage?* raise the issue for Orthodox Christians (together with religiously conservative Protestants, Catholics, Mormons, Jews, and Muslims in the United States) of whether and to what extent to defend traditional definitions of marriage in the American public square. Many Orthodox Christians, for example, have supported the Manhattan Declaration, of which George was a coauthor and supporter of activism on a national level in retaining traditional marriage as the civil law. Others within American Orthodox churches, however, have taken a more ecclesiastically libertarian view of removing the church from the business of civil marriage or a subsidiarist view of letting states decide.³ Bulgakov and Florensky, furthermore, writing in a tradition of Russian Orthodoxy, both reflect an older Byzantine Christian tradition of *symphonia* between church and state. Retreat from the public square, following the Anabaptists, is not part of their vision of Orthodox social tradition. Their arguments suggest an ethos of social justice as a basis for Orthodox Christian social activism on behalf of traditional marriage, which transcends current divisions between traditionalist-activists and traditionalist-libertarians in the American Orthodox community. As the American Orthodox theological writer Stanley Harakas wrote, the Orthodox tradition of *symphonia* involves, for both Christian spiritual leaders and the faithful, an obligation in the public square “to oversee public morals and to encourage the ethical, moral and spiritual development of its citizens,” while seeking to nurture mutual respect between church and state.⁴ Fr. John Romanides described this as expressing Christian love in an empirically therapeutic way in the civic realm, pointing to the role of the state in the longest-lived Christian realm, now known as Byzantium.⁵ The Basiliad in Byzantine Christian Caesarea provides an early example of *philanthropia* related to Christian social justice, following the gospel example of the Good Samaritan’s aiding a neighbor of unspecified belief.⁶ Articulating models of society and identity to support a view of *symphonia* and *philanthropia* as social justice on the issue of traditional marriage provides a means to overcome emerging divisions among Orthodox Christians and others about civic redefinitions of marriage.

The need for such a “social justice” articulation of the practice of traditional marriage emerges especially in response to the recent development among a minority of a “progressive” approach in American Orthodoxy toward sexuality that involves a few influential voices especially within the small Orthodox Church in America (OCA) jurisdiction. This approach argues that the Church’s stance toward those in same-sex marriages, monogamous same-sex civil unions, or *de facto* partnerships should be based primarily on pastoral rather than dogmatic theological standards, more customized rather than communal or hierarchical,

in primary emphasis. Thus within the OCA there have been controversial reports of a few members in same-sex marriages or relationships allowed to commune regularly by parish priests. For example, Fr. Alexis Vinogradov, a longtime OCA priest, argued for a “new anthropology” for Orthodox Christianity in relation to issues of sexuality and marriage, to the OCA’s Strategic Planning taskforce on contemporary issues in 2012 at a retreat at St. Vladimir’s Seminary. Similarly, Fr. Michael Plekon of the OCA at the 2012 gathering of the Sophia Institute at Union Theological Seminary called for openness to a new unfolding by the Holy Spirit on Orthodox teachings regarding marriage and sexuality. The forced resignation of the OCA’s Metropolitan Jonah last year followed controversy that included (among a number of other issues) criticism by some of his signing of the Manhattan Declaration. Nonetheless, the OCA’s bishops have had a standing statement (recently reaffirmed) supporting traditional teachings on homosexuality and marriage, and the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of all internationally recognized jurisdictions in North and Central America recently issued an encyclical supporting traditional marriage.⁷

The public praxis of an emerging progressive approach toward same-sex relationships among a minority of American Orthodox Christians in effect overlaps the political outlook of the traditionalist-libertarian views of some others, in terms of allowing civil same-sex unions or marriage in the public secular realm, while emphasizing parish-level pastoral approaches to the issue. That pragmatic overlap shows how even the most traditionalist Christian communities within US secular culture can find positions on marriage eroded amid secular calls for “marriage equality,” which attempt to frame a state redefinition of marriage as an issue of social justice and compassion in terms of personal rights, opposed to rigid, essentialist notions of gender. As acceptance of same-sex marriage spreads in popular media, educational institutions, and among younger generations of Americans, and as more parish members will show up for communion who are in civil same-sex marriages or unions, such practical erosion of an ethos of traditional marriage is likely to become more acute even in conservative faith communities in the United States. It is in this regard that Florensky’s and Bulgakov’s models can be particularly important in developing a public discourse for traditionalist arguments for marriage as a public institution, emphasizing a sense of social justice that overlaps with both traditionalist and progressive concerns.

The above encapsulated introductory background focuses on the situation within the Orthodox Christian community in America, but is offered, together with the following arguments, also as a type of microcosm for broader-based debates over Judeo-Christian traditions of marriage in America. The following arguments draw not only on scholarly work on the symbolism of marriage and

nature in both medieval and modern Christian literatures but also on experience with the above-mentioned OCA contemporary issues project, which highlighted the need for traditional Christians to develop compassionate social-justice arguments for marriage.

One epistemological caveat is needed before proceeding. In the Orthodox Christian tradition of bioethics, articulated most famously and expertly in English by Herman Tristram Engelhardt, issues such as homosexuality and marriage fall under dogmatic teachings, which are a given and revealed tradition within the church.⁸ This experiential tradition is not determined by philosophical reasoning, academic discussion, or in political discourse and does not include a static sense of an ethical following of natural law in creation but focuses on personal *theosis* or a dynamic relationship with the uncreated energies of God. It does involve an intergenerational *lived tradition*, transformative in personal ways within a community context rather than an academic *traditionalism* by which marriage becomes an empty and nontransformative abstract concept and rite. The canons of the church, saints' lives, and patristic writings are all remarkably unified on the issue of supporting traditional marriage as being between a man and a woman and also on issues of sexual morality. In the Gospels themselves, we find Jesus defining marriage as being between a man and a woman (e.g., Matthew 19 and Mark 10). The arguments that follow are not designed in any way to prove the tradition but in a modest way to help articulate and translate it further in current discourses of US culture and politics and also, hopefully, to help bring together (rather than divide) American Orthodox Christians on a crucial issue of our era. They thus form one preliminary attempt at contemporary apologetics for marriage with ecumenical significance.

The Natural Law of Marriage: “The Spark of God’s Love in Our Nature”

The focus will be on three points with regard to marriage that emerge from writings of Florensky and Bulgakov. The first is that a person's sex is transformed by relationship in community in the Orthodox practice of marriage, rather than being an essential and unchanging individual essence. The combined physical and spiritual embodiment of a person, in relation to God, is thus very different from the idea of an individual essential sexuality as believed in by our secular culture. The second is the importance of an intergenerational sense of what the world today calls social justice, which supports the Orthodox tradition of marriage in its view of the economy as a household. The third follows from the first two, namely a sense of embodied and intergenerational compassion in

dealing with issues of marriage. This includes compassion for a combination of economic, soteriological, and eschatological concerns, by which preceding and future generations also lay a claim to our practice of marriage today. Together these points highlight a dynamic sense of natural law undergirding traditional marriage as a public institution.

Fr. Bulgakov wrote in his 1912 book *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household* that Orthodox Christianity in its application to society focuses not so much on rights as on dignity. Viewing society as a household, social vision becomes personal rather than impersonal as it becomes in a technocratic, state-centered view. In the Orthodox social vision of society as a household, identity proceeds from relationship rather than from any individualized essence. This relates to the ancient Orthodox principle of *koinonia*, embraced by Russians of the Silver Age in the term *sobornost*, meaning intercommunion and conciliarity, as the basic principle of community. While the secular model of technocracy tends to focus on existential function of daily life apart from metaphysical meaning (as critiqued by the theological writer Christos Yannaras),⁹ Orthodox community based on *sobornost* emphasizes immaterial meaningfulness in daily embodied relationships. Bulgakov identified the meaningfulness of this intercommuning society with the dynamic theophanies of Divine Wisdom, Sophia.¹⁰ These embodied theophanies or energies both constitute and redeem human identity in the community of the church. Florensky also focused on Sophia as a way of explaining the nature of our identities as relational with the divine and with one another.

All this shapes an Orthodox grounding for the basis of marriage, which differs from a static sense of natural law. Engelhardt explains the Orthodox sense of a dynamic and energized basis for the natural in this way:

Natural law is, after all, the spark of God's love in our nature, not the biological state of affairs we find in broken nature. Natural law is not an objective external constraint, but the will of the living God experienced in our conscience. It is this natural law, the law of God in our nature, which calls for carnal sexuality to be accomplished only within marriage. Anything else is unnatural in violating the law God established in Eden and renewed through Christ... These are not judgments about the unnaturalness, perversity, or deviance of acts in a secularly biological or medical sense of those behaviors constituting unsuccessful adaptations by reference to either inclusive fitness or personal fulfillment. The Christian moral-theological reference point for the appropriateness of sexual behavior is the creation of humans as male and female and the restoration of the union of Adam and Eve in the Mystery of matrimony... [F]ollowing St. Paul, certain sexual activities such as homosexual relations are profoundly unnatural... The law of God found in our nature and announced

in Genesis and the Gospels is to be found in the union of husband and wife. In these terms, fornication and adultery are unnatural.¹¹

The Orthodox tradition of marriage emerges from church canons, asceticism, saints' lives, iconography, and liturgical participation, and from Jesus' reference to marriage as being between a man and a woman in the gospels. As such, it again is understood not so much in the context of individual rights in any static, Western sense of natural law. Rather marriage emerges from a relational context for personal identity that is dynamically both spiritual and embodied. It parallels the title of Metropolitan John Zizoulas' work *Being as Communion*—evolutionary in a transformatively personal sense, but in hesychastic and liturgical relationships, rather than secular biological or New Age definitions of evolution.¹²

Florensky's Nonessentialist View of Identity Related to Marriage

By contrast to today's secular concepts of self-fulfilling sexuality, Florensky referred to the chaste nature of the early Christian ascetic rite of spiritual brotherhood, *adelphopoiesis*, in its finding friendship, in relationship to God, as part of his critique of the modern "law of identity."¹³ He argued that the latter shaped an atomistic and solipsistic sense of self, but that real, fulfilled human identity grows in relationships of complementarity. He described the atomistic approach as ascendant in the West due to "rationalism," an absolute identification of the thinking self with personhood, rather than properly identifying personhood with relationship. He distinguished "rationalism" from the kind of "reasonableness" that he described as incorporating relationships into one's identity.¹⁴ For Florensky, the Christian relationships that define identity are at once immanent and transcendent, hence transformatively personal. In Christian marriage, such relational identity incorporates both the biological complementarity of male and female, and in a concrete, iconographic way the wedding of our Lord and his church.

The emphasis on transformative relational and iconographic reality, which Bulgakov in his writings on household characterizes as organic (naturally spiritual) rather than organizational (technocratic), extending back to the creation of Adam and Eve, contrasts with secular ideas today of nontransformable definitions of sexual identity. Bulgakov characterizes the latter social constructions of sexuality as "the 'metaphysical egoism' of the monad." He writes in the section "Sex in the Human Being," in his *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (1917): "Whoever honors sex (the 'eternally female' and in the same manner simultaneously the eternally male) cannot condone sexual nihilism, which is

hidden sometimes under the cover of the equality of the sexes, which in actuality are not equal but deeply different.”¹⁵ In the postmodern Western culture of the late twentieth century, advocates of a broader spectrum of sexual identities began by deconstructing the essence of sexual identity as male and female.¹⁶ However, having done so, today they advance a spectrum of individual essential identities based on genetics, environment, or a combination of both, including homosexual and lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgendered, and polyamorous.¹⁷ In such views, an individual’s given or chosen sexual identity cannot be transformed by grace but becomes instead a kind of object or idol, as much as the earlier rejected model of modern heterosexuality though with a potentially infinite range of customized individual varieties better suited to a secular consumer society based on individual rights defined and regulated by a technocracy.

By contrast, Florensky writes that such a “law of identity” is not basic to nature but instead is a social construction of modern Western rationalism, which constructs an objectified sense of “I” as both subject and object, and is therefore essentialist. He argues in the light of Orthodox tradition that such “thingness of a person” is

the vacuous self-equality of the person, giving to the person the unity of a *concept* that is self-confined in the combination of its attributes, i.e., the unity of a dead, fixed concept. In other words, it is nothing but the rationalistic “comprehensibility” of a person, i.e., the subordination of a person to the rationalistic law of identity. On the contrary, the personal character of a person, this living unity of his self-building activity, the creative transcending of his self-enclosedness, constitutes his non-subsumability in any concept, his “incomprehensibility,” and therefore his unacceptability for rationalism. It is the victory over the law of identity that raises a person above a lifeless thing and makes him a living center of activity. But it is clear that activity is essentially incomprehensible for rationalism, for activity is creativity, i.e., the addition to the given of that which is not yet given, and thus the overcoming of the law of identity.¹⁸

The triple act of faith, hope, and love overcomes the inertia of the law of identity. I stop being I, my thought stops being my thought. By an unfathomable act I renounce the self-affirmation “I = I.” Something or someone helps me escape my self-enclosedness.¹⁹

In such a process, Fr. Florensky argues, the solipsistic “law of identity” of modern rationalism can be transformed, so that

Identity, dead as fact, can be and necessarily is alive as act. The law of identity will then be not a universal law of superficial being, as it were, but the surface of deep being, not a geometrical figure but the external aspect of a depth of life

inaccessible to the rational mind. And in this life this law can have its root and justification. The law of identity, blind in its givenness, can be reasonable in its createdness, in its eternal being-created. Fleshly, dead, and deadening in its statics, this law can be spiritual, living, and life-giving in its dynamics. To the question, Why is A A? we answer, A is A because, eternally being not-A, in this not-A it finds its affirmation as A. More precisely, A is A because it is not-A. Not being equal to A, i.e., to itself, it is always being established in the eternal order of being by virtue of not-A as A.... Thus the law of identity will receive its grounding, not in its lower rational form but in its higher, reasonable form.²⁰

According to the higher, spiritual law of identity, self-affirmation lies in self-negation, whereas according to the lower, fleshly law of identity, self-negation lies in self-affirmation.²¹

From Florensky's perspective, drawing on apophatic, dogmatic traditions of personhood in Orthodox traditions, arguments against traditional Orthodox definitions of marriage can be seen as being as essentialist as modern Western constructions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, or of masculine and feminine genders. From an Orthodox standpoint, such efforts thus merely expand the number of modern secular forms of self-identities defined as essential, and hence objectified and deadened, rather than transforming and transcending them in community, related to an integration of actual biological existence and spiritual experience. The Orthodox tradition of marriage involves, to use Florensky's terms, an A = not-A identity with the archetypal other of the first chapter in Genesis, embodied iconographically in the fallen yet redeemable biological other in our participation in the Church and in intergenerational *kenosis* involving either biological or spiritual children in the Church's framework ("multiplying and replenishing the earth"). Fr. Florensky's traditional antiessentialism makes clear how any movement toward redefining marriage within the Orthodox Church would involve a new *traditionalism* by erasing the transformative and dynamic sense of identity given to us in traditional Christianity, rather than in a lived intergenerational *tradition*.

A later twentieth-century Orthodox writer, Philip Sherrard, commenting in *Christianity and Eros* on the views of *eros* found in Russian philosophers with connections to Florensky and Bulgakov, summed up the embodied and transformative iconography of Christian marriage in five modes that parallel Florensky's model of identity. To Sherrard, traditional marriage involves:

1. full recognition of one another as an incarnate person;
2. full sexual love (spanning canonical physical activity to a range of more-than-physical sexual *eros*, developing into spiritual desire that is relational rather than based on lack);

3. development of spiritual empathy;
4. growth together in engagement of all dimensions of male and female humanhood; and
5. absolute commitment or fidelity between the husband and wife in the marriage.

He sums this up in relation to the physical iconography of marriage:

Only when the sexual differentiation itself is understood to characterize the eternal reality of man and woman in God, and not to be something that must be transcended or suppressed as a condition of spiritual realization, will it be possible to envisage the full meaning and potentiality of the human relationship of which these Russian thinkers have in many respects spoken so profoundly.²²

By contrast, an essentialized view of sexuality of whatever form is comparable to the rich man whose identification with his wealth was condemned in the Gospels. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone to enter the kingdom of heaven, although with God all things are possible. The young person's identity is given simply as rich, just as sexual identities can be given impersonally as heterosexual, homosexual, or transsexual in disregard of "the eternal reality of man and woman in God" and its corporeal iconography.

In Orthodoxy, the nonessentiality of relational identity in marriage thus also includes the combined spiritual and physical nature of the human person, and by extension of marriage. The key term *Philokalia*, or "love of the beautiful," in Greek, and the Russian *Dobrotolubiye*, as names for the classic collection of patristic writings about hesychasm, or spiritually healing quietude, attest the central link between aesthetics and ascetics in Eastern Orthodoxy, integrating bodily, moral, and spiritual life. So does the practice of hesychasm with its sense of continuum of *logos*, word or harmony, thickening into the human being as iconographic and embodied relation with God, emanating from the Incarnation itself as the thickening of the Word into flesh, the Creator God becoming physical. This follows also the Greek wording of the Septuagint account of Creation in Genesis, in which the term for good, *kalos*, also means beautiful. The philosopher Bruce Foltz notes, "For Florensky, the knowing self must join itself in love with the known, both in order for meaningful knowledge to take place, and for the self to be a concrete self. It is, one might say, an *erotics* of identity."²³ The American Orthodox philosopher David Bradshaw in a similar vein has called for respect for the moral space created by the body, as in effect iconographic, by contrast with essentialist constructions of an individualized objective identity. In the engagement of man and woman in the sexual act, he writes that we find

a certain integration between the physical act, the attitude of commitment it consummates, and the larger dimensions of human society. The act is a reenactment at a personal level of the drama of the mutual need, attraction, and union of man and woman that has been repeated in countless times and countless ways throughout human history. As such, it is a way of personally participating in one of the deepest roots of human society. I do not mean to suggest that an explicit awareness of this dimension is always present. What is present is the participation itself, the fact that this private and particular act recapitulates in a small way the universal bonding of man and woman.... Lacking the capacity of heterosexuality to integrated body, spirit, and society, [homosexuality] leaves those who partake in it isolated both from society at large and from their own bodily existence.²⁴

Bulgakov's Social Household: Christian Marriage and Sustainability

The emphasis of traditional marriage on fulfilling an embodied identity in relationship relates to the sense of social justice inherent in Bulgakov's view of society as a household, with *sobornost* as the underlying ethos.²⁵ C. Paul Schroeder in the introduction to his translation of St. Basil of Caesarea's texts on philanthropy, entitled *On Social Justice*, defined the patristic notion of social justice as involving three main characteristics. The first characteristic is an ethic of sustainability, described as a way of life supportable across the entire populace. The second characteristic is a distributive mandate, described as restoring the balance by giving whatever is beyond what one needs to those who need it primarily voluntarily yet based on a revealed sense of wealth as stemming from God-given gifts of life and creation. Finally, the third characteristic is sociability, which is based on shared life; *koinos*, the root of the Greek word for communion; *koinonia*; the idea that the common creation and the common lot of human beings as mortals on earth requires sharing.²⁶ This whole ensemble of ideas related to what could be described as an Orthodox Christian ethos of social justice (based in Greek patristics) connects to what the Protestant scholar Ellen Davis has called the agrarian roots of Judeo-Christian tradition.²⁷ Indeed, traditional marriage is associated with the corporeal fecundity of the earth in the scriptural agrarian traditions highlighted by Davis. Agrarian traditions are closely linked today with sustainability by New Agrarianism, including what Davis describes as urban agrarianism, as well as in other efforts to meld traditionalism with ecological concerns, such as geo-libertarian economics.²⁸ Such ways of thinking also provide points of resistance in the secular world to the growth of global technocracy.

This resistance has been highlighted in popular culture in recent generations by the Christian-based classical fantasy of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, whose messages of environmental sustainability have been celebrated in several studies, including two books published in a current series of studies on neo-agrarianism. In the Christian fantasy of Tolkien and Lewis (following centuries-old Insular Christian literary traditions going back through Milton to Spenser to Chaucer, and back further to early Irish and Welsh texts) marriage serves as a metonymy for balanced human relations with nature and the divine.²⁹ The Orthodox philosopher David Bentley Hart offers Tolkien's fantasy Christian vision of anarcho-monarchism as an iconographic literary model for a Christian view of society as household, suggesting a basis for social justice in Bulgakov's model that emerge from the divine energies in a free, grace-filled imagination akin to iconography.³⁰ Hart writes that "it is good also to imagine other, better, quite impossible worlds, so that one will be less inclined to mistake the process for the proper end of political life, or to become frantically consumed by what should be only a small part of life, or to fail to see the limits and defects of our systems of government."³¹ This suggests how *koinosis*, or a spiritual coming together, releases us from being consumed with the small part of life that constitutes the Western sense of individual rights. Instead, it opens us up to the embodied imagination of *koinonia* or *sobornost* in the full, hesychastic and liturgical sense. This is symbolized by and embodied in the Orthodox iconography of marriage, with its crowns for bride and groom, and its emphasis on embodied human dignity.

As Hart's embrace of Tolkien's typological fantasy of the "return of the king" suggests, the Orthodox iconography of marriage, integrated with the social vision of the economy as a household, relates also to the Judeo-Christian tradition's iconography of holy kingship. The latter, having vanished today from the global political sphere arguably continues in the royal priesthood of believers in the "little church" or the "little community" of the family. This continuation is eschatological as well as anthropological, belonging in a sense to generations yet to come as well as to the ancestral past and the corporeal yet transcendent relations of the present-day participants. The Orthodox anthropology of family is suggested by the combined relational and monarchical sense of the Trinity in both the original Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (i.e., without the *filioque*) and St. Andrei Rublev's icon of the Trinity along with Paul's teaching that wives should obey husbands but that husbands should emulate Christ in their households in laying down their lives for their families. This sense of sacred kingship iconographically relates to why only men are priests, and why the heads of the five original Christian church centers are known as Patriarchs, following in part from Abraham who received the three visitors depicted in Rublev's icon.

The church as a whole is the bride of Christ, even as the Theotokos has been described as both the Mother and the Bride of God. Such iconography relates to the apophatic source of human identity in relationship, ultimately finding its archetype, source, and ruler in God rather than in an objectified world or self. It eschews what Florensky would term the objectification of self and others in modern secular rationalism, while highlighting also the social role of lay families as an order of the church, participating in a royal priesthood.

A household-based economy (as articulated by Bulgakov in his *Philosophy of Economy*) is based on marriage between a man and a woman. In a monastic community, it becomes more intergenerationally sustainable than one based on atomized definitions of customized individual identity, which undergird both the case for same-sex marriage and (in marriage between a man and a woman) for divorce and abortion alike. Just distribution of wealth is more seamlessly handled through extended networks of family capital, philanthropy, and craft-labor skills across generations than by a social norm of households whose justification is not based in fecundity, procreation, and spiritual relationship in church communities but on consumer-style “choice,” which on the whole will thus tend to rely more (in the long term) on the matrix of an impersonal technocracy for regulation of social equity. Simultaneously overlapping Orthodox “families” of spiritual fathers and spiritual children, engaged in the paths of ascetic theosis and coupled with more visible layers of families in monastic, parish, and ecclesiastical hierarchies, provide in conjunction with biological families a dynamic model of subsidiarity beyond technocratic definitions. The latter arguably attempt to form a secular natural law focused on atheistic formations of “social justice,” “sustainability,” and “diversity,” increasingly politically anti-Christian and religiously intolerant. In the Orthodox sense of household, an expansion of civil norms to include polygamous, same-sex, and polyamorous arrangements would more easily prove less able, or unable, to form what Bulgakov called enduring organic rather than enforced organizational bonds for society and the church. The normative organic goal of every child having a father and a mother would be further weakened or erased, and the role of the state in raising children increased.

The translator of Bulgakov’s book on the household economy, Catherine Evtuhov, notes that the term *khoziastvo* in the book’s Russian title means both “economy” and “household,” similar to the shared Greek root *oikos* in “economy” and “ecology” in English. The term refers, she notes, to a dynamic process as well as settled life in society, “not merely to attributes of economic life proper ... but to life in society more generally. A nation’s economy has connotations of the life of a giant household.”³² She adds in her introduction that Bulgakov’s view of the household economy involves a triad of aspects, including:

1. an inner emphasis on the relationship between man and nature that transcends bureaucratic or institutional forms,
2. an emphasis on conciliarity or *sobornost* in which Bulgakov “seeks to affirm and preserve human dignity precisely by inscribing the daily activity of individual human beings in a process that unites them with their fellows,”³³ and
3. labor as an epistemological principle, involving experiential rather than merely conceptual approaches to life.

In all these aspects, Orthodox ascetic engagement with the icon of marriage in traditional marriage or in monasticism, also hits the mark as a norm of social justice in a way that same-sex marriage does not. Bulgakov’s threefold focus (1) on an inner dignity of life in the household of God (a “sophic economy” based in divine wisdom theophanically infusing creation, as in the uncreated energies); (2) on the community of conciliarity in *sobornost*; and (3) on experiential ascetic labor—in this case, an incarnational asceticism for both the married and the monastic—marks an Orthodox, normative sense of social justice inseparable from traditional marriage.³⁴

Embodying Compassion in Traditional Marriage as a Public Institution

Adhering to an Orthodox sense of transformative and relational personhood, an embodied practice of faith, and a commitment to community, involves necessarily a sense of compassion for all human strugglers on earth. Such caring is trans-generational. It involves both deeply immanent and transcendent love for our brothers and sisters who, like ourselves, struggle with sin of all kinds, recognizing ourselves as the worst of sinners, with concern for both theirs and our salvation “on earth as it is in heaven.” It involves living gratitude for our larger family of saints and all who have gone before us, as well as being attentive to generations to come (until the Lord comes), amid the integrated physical and spiritual contexts of our lives. This involves serving others, regardless of contemporary fashions against doing so in our current isolating consumer culture, upholding our tradition with love and, as God gives us grace in synergy with our ascetic effort, openness in striving for transformative purity of heart. Such effort must focus on a kenotic model of leadership as service, in laying down one’s life for the household of family, God’s Creation, and the Church, in the context of theosis.

Kenotic compassion stands apart from individualistic notions of rights that involves efforts to change traditional Christian marriage in a social experiment

similar in some ways to other costly, secular, chiliastic efforts of the past century. Fathers Bulgakov and Florensky's efforts to engage modern thought, while upholding Orthodox tradition, help lend us a vocabulary for translation and articulation of our ancient tradition into discussions of marriage today in the public square, and most importantly with young people within the Church. Such articulation and translation connects the Orthodox tradition of marriage as between a man and a woman to two key terms derived from the Greek root *oikos* or household—*economy* involving both the household as a model for society and in the sense of *economia* as a meaningful engagement of the divine in our embodied ascetic and liturgical work alongside *ecology* as the embodied intergenerational story of our home “on earth as it is in heaven.” Uniting economy and ecology can stand as a basic definition for a deep sense of sustainability.³⁵ Sustainability can also be summed up as a pervading meaningfulness in everyday life experienced in marriage as the result of divine grace working in synergy with human effort, emanating from Judeo-Christian traditions into the public sphere to meet urgent needs for social justice or *philanthropia* today and across generations.

Notes

1. Sergei Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, trans. Catherine Evtuhov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
2. Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), argued in secular terms though from a basis in Catholic natural law. For an explicitly Catholic view of the issue, see Christopher C. Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2008). For a recent edition of an older Reformed Protestant defense of traditional marriage, see Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, ed. Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2012).
3. This latter position, however, was weakened by the implications for legal challenges to state law resulting from the recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions on Proposition 8 and the Defense of Marriage Act.
4. Fr. Stanley Harakas, *Living the Faith: The Praxis of Eastern Orthodox Ethics* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing, 1993) 273.
5. Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Hierotheos, *Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church According to the Spoken Teaching of Father John Romanides*, vol. 2, trans. Sr. Pelagia Serfe (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2013), 397.

6. The Basiliad was a name later given to St. Basil the Great's establishment of a community of philanthropic services in Caesarea including a hospital, orphanage, and support for the poor, with monastic, ecclesiastical, and public backing. Byzantine Christians pioneered development of social institutions such as hospitals, orphanages, and universities.
7. Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America, "2013 Statement on Marriage and Sexuality," September 19, 2013, accessed September 29, 2013, <http://assemblyofbishops.org/about/documents/2013-assembly-statement-on-marriage-and-sexuality>.
8. H. Tristram Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Salem, MA: M&M Scrivener, 2000), 246–47.
9. Christos Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005).
10. Bulgakov's later identification of Sophia with a fourth hypostasis emerging from the Trinity and with the Theotokos was called out as heretical and remains controversial. However his discussion of Sophia in his early writing on household can be read as an analogue to the Orthodox dogma of uncreated energies and *theosis* found in church fathers such as St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Gregory Palamas.
11. Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 246. For other studies of Orthodox Christian marriage tradition relevant to this article, see especially Josiah B. Trenham, *Marriage and Virginity According to St. John Chrysostom* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2013); David and Mary Ford, *Marriage as a Path to Holiness: Lives of Married Saints* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1999); and Eve Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900–1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
12. Metropolitan John Zizoulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1997).
13. Florensky, "Letter Eleven: Friendship," in *The Pillar and the Ground of Truth*, 284–330.
14. Florensky, "Letter Two: Doubt" and "Letter Three: Triunity," in *The Pillar and the Ground of Truth*, 14–52.
15. Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 308, 310.
16. For a religious framework to such confounding of customized sexuality with sex, see Gerard Loughlin, introduction to *Queer Theology*, ed. Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell 2010), 1–34, at 5 and 7.

17. For a discussion of issues of essentialism in a Neo-Calvinist Christian context, see Eduardo J. Eccheveria, "Review Essay: The Philosophical Foundations of Bavinck and Dooyeweerd," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 463–83; and also Eduardo J. Eccheveria, "Review Essay: Bavinck on the Family and Integral Human Development," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 219–37.
18. Florensky, *The Pillar and the Ground of Truth*, 59–60.
19. Florensky, *The Pillar and the Ground of Truth*, 51.
20. Florensky, *The Pillar and the Ground of Truth*, 36.
21. Florensky, *The Pillar and the Ground of Truth*, 224–25.
22. Philip Sherrard, *Christianity and Eros* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey, 2002), 74. Fr. Josiah Trenham's detailed study of St. John Chrysostom's views, cited earlier, offers a strong critique from a patristic ascetic view of Sherrard's articulation of sexual difference. It is worth noting, in relation to Orthodox patristic terminology, that "eternity" as used by Sherrard is a category of created temporality, differentiated from the "everlasting" beyond-time of the divine engaged through *theosis*.
23. Bruce V. Foltz, *The Noetics of Nature: Environmental Philosophy and the Holy Beauty of the Visible* (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming).
24. David Bradshaw, "A Reply to Corvino," in *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science and Culture of Homosexuality*, ed. John Corvino (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 17–30 and 29–30.
25. Although Bulgakov criticized the notion of *sobornost* or conciliarity as the ultimate ethos of Church, which he saw as involving also a transcendent sense of hierarchy, there is clearly a strong overlap between his sense of social household and that favorite concept of many modern Russian Orthodox philosophers.
26. See C. Paul Schroeder, introduction to St. Basil the Great, *On Social Justice*, trans. C. Paul Schroeder (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 15–40.
27. Ellen Davis. *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
28. On New Agrarianism's challenge to technocracy, see Wendell Berry's *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2003); and the conservative Catholic writer E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1989). The critique of the technocratic secular state by geo-libertarianism, still underdeveloped, has taken the form of trying to connect aspects of scriptural agrarian economics with concepts of natural resources from Henry George and

- ecological economics. See for example, Clifford Cobb, "Ecological and Georgist Economic Principles: A Comparison," in *Herman Daley Festschrift* (e-book, 2009), http://www.eoearth.org/article/Herman_Daley_Festschrift:Ecological_and_Georgist_Economic_Principles:_A_Comparison. Wendell Berry's recent apparent change of view on marriage has been critiqued by Christopher C. Roberts, "What Wendell Berry Got Right About Gay Marriage," *First Thoughts*, March 28, 2013, accessed September 29, 2013, <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2013/03/28/what-wendell-berry-got-right-about-gay-marriage/>.
29. See Matthew T. Dickerson and Jonathan Evans, *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006); Matthew T. Dickerson and David L. O'Hara, *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol: The Environmental Vision of C. S. Lewis* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Alfred K. Siewers, "Tolkien's Cosmic-Christian Ecology," in *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 138–53; and Alfred K. Siewers, "Pre-Modern Ecosemiotics: The Green World as Literary Ecology," in *The Space of Culture—The Place of Nature in Estonia and Beyond*, ed. Tiina Peil (Tartu, Estonia: University of Tartu Press, 2011), 39–68.
 30. Tolkien's fantasy drew heavily on his own scholarship in early medieval Christian literatures of the West, which emerged before the Schism between Eastern and Western Christianity and that showed influence and analogues with aspects of Greek as well as Latin patristics. See Alfred K. Siewers, "Orthodoxy and Eco-poetics," in *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, John Chryssavgis, and Bruce Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).
 31. David Bentley Hart, "Anarcho-Monarchism," *First Things* (November 12, 2010), <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2010/11/anarcho-monarchism>.
 32. Bulgakov, *The Philosophy of Economy*, 18.
 33. Bulgakov, *The Philosophy of Economy*, 26.
 34. On the "sophic economy," see Daniel P. Payne and Christopher Marsh, "Sergei Bulgakov's 'Sophic' Economy: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Christian Economics," *Faith and Economics* 53 (2009): 35–51.
 35. Current definitions of sustainability focus on its social, environmental, and economic aspects, but a fourth area of "cultural creativity" has recently been added; see Leslie Paul Thiele, *Sustainability* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 4–5.