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# ROAD TO EMMAUS

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# CHASTITY AND EMPATHY

## Eros, Agape, and the Mystery of the Twofold Anointing

Following two well-received interviews, “The Opposite of War is Not Peace: The Healing of Trauma in *The Iliad* and in Orthodox Tradition” (#52) and “A Feeling for Beauty: The Aesthetic Ground of Orthodox Ethics” (#57), Dr. Timothy Patitsas, Assistant Professor of Ethics at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, returns to *Road to Emmaus* with a discussion of how the roots of chastity are to be found in attentive devotion to the Triune God, unleashing the liberating power of purity and the consolation of spiritual Beauty.

### I.

## CHASTITY

RTE: One of the difficult issues that people face today is Chastity. To some, Chastity seems like something naïve or even disingenuous—like trying to hold on to an innocence that is really just ignorance, and can’t last, or a denial of the body’s goodness, or an attempt to be “pious” in a false sense. What is the virtue of Chastity once we remove it from the wrappings of old-fashioned moralism?

DR. PATITSAS: Chastity is a tough issue. I struggle both to understand it and to live up to it. And failure in this realm can lead to a general loss of self-confidence, especially for young people. I have a lot of empathy for people struggling to be chaste, and for people who suffer when they fail, and even for people who don’t appear to be struggling at all—they seem to be “getting

*Opposite: Fresco of Anastasis, the Harrowing of Hell, Chora Church, Istanbul.*

away” with a sinful life completely untroubled in their conscience. They, too, are created in God’s image, and are worthy of something better.

I’d like to start by just saying a number of things, and then we can discuss how they relate.

Many theologians, especially the late Fr. John Romanides (1927-2001), have pointed out a fundamental difference in emphasis between Orthodoxy and other Christian doctrines. Orthodoxy gives so much emphasis to the Resurrection, to the Paschal service itself. In comparison, Western Christianity seems mostly to focus on the Cross, while the celebration of the



Dr. Timothy Patitsas

actual Resurrection has until recently been subdued. And why is this? The Orthodox Church hews closer to the ancient Church’s sense that the first problem in human life since the Fall is not sin but death, and it is Christ’s death and resurrection *together* that conquer death. I think that in our time many Christians are starting to move back to the Orthodox understanding of the Resurrection’s evangelical and catholic significance.

Still, though, in the West the theology about Christ’s economy focuses mostly on the problem of how God could both punish us *and* forgive us for our sin. The Atonement is reduced to how Christ cancels our sin through his death, with the Resurrection almost as an afterthought. But, as we have said in our previous two interviews, Beauty first.<sup>1</sup> In other words, first we experience Christ as the Crucified and Resurrected One, and through his beautiful theophany over against the face of the deep He draws us out of the death of non-being and chaos. Only after that, after receiving this gift of Resurrection in baptism, do we then have the grace to begin to grapple with sin. I think that this is why the icon of the Resurrection shows Christ hovering above Hades—for his conquest of death shines out like a theophany over the abyss. We repent of death, as it were, and then we repent of sin.

<sup>1</sup> “The Opposite of War is Not Peace: Healing Trauma in *The Iliad* and in Orthodox Tradition,” *Road to Emmaus: A Journal of Orthodox Faith and Culture*, Winter 2013, #52; and “A Feeling for Beauty: The Aesthetic Ground of Orthodox Ethics,” *Road to Emmaus: A Journal of Orthodox Faith and Culture*, Spring 2014, #57.

It tells us something very important that when St. Paul preached Christ in Athens, they thought he might be preaching a new god named “Anastasis” (Acts 17:16-21). It was really the Resurrection that astounded everyone, Greek or Jew.

If sin—if morality—were the first order of business in our spiritual life, then the Cross alone would be sufficient for our salvation. But if the conquest of death comes first, then you need, as we just said, the Cross *and* the Resurrection, and you need them almost as a single moment. Anyway, this is what St. Elder Porphyrios meant when he said that we “will never become holy by fighting evil,” and that, rather, “we must first fall in love with Christ.”<sup>2</sup> “Beauty first” is another way of saying that first we receive Christ’s resurrection, his victory over death, and then we begin our struggle to be good by standing firm against sin’s now undermined (although still terrible) presence in the world. After embracing the Resurrection, we struggle with sin on new terms, on terms advantageous for our salvation.

In the sin-first approach, Christianity may collapse into a moral system and the struggle with Chastity then becomes destructive, precisely because it is so hard to win it head-on and so debilitating when we fail. I mean, people are bruised not only in the normal way that corresponds to active spiritual warfare with this passion, but from having picked up the spiritual struggle by the wrong handle.

So, while we think that Chastity is equivalent to sexual morality, in fact in life we come to find that sexual immorality is the consequence of a failure to be chaste, rather than simply another word for the loss of Chastity. If the eye is sound, then the whole body will be full of light (Matt. 6:22); Chastity comes before sexual purity. Fighting sin is not our first order of business, but receiving Christ’s victory over death.

Chastity includes a life lived body *and* soul in devoted eros<sup>3</sup> to the Ultimate Lover, the Incarnate Christ. While Chastity includes the need to live that life

<sup>2</sup> *Wounded by Love: The Life and Wisdom of Elder Porphyrios*, (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey [Publisher], 2005).

<sup>3</sup> In our first two interviews, we defined “eros” as that kind of love that responds to divine Beauty by making a complete gift to the Beautiful of all that we have and are. It is not a sexual love per se, but it is a gift of the *whole* self. Allan Bloom’s phrasing (see footnote 8, below) is very good; he described “eros” as “love’s mad self-forgetting.” “Agape,” meanwhile, we characterized as the love whose concern is the brother or sister, or the creation. Some have characterized eros as a selfish love and agape as a more Christian form of love which thinks of the other. This was not the understanding of the ancient Church, which saw eros as being aimed at God rather than at man. If loving God includes a certain spiritual “pleasure” or blessing, this is not a sign that we are being selfish. God’s blessing may be a sign that He is “well-pleased” in us (Mt. 3:17). Should we refuse to be “well-pleased” with him?

with a view to concrete, practical, and timely decisions about the disposition of our God-given and blessed sexual powers, it is first of all a dedication of our eros, our power and attention, to Christ.

Chastity *includes* the proper use of our sexual powers, but it is not *limited* to this; in fact, if we do limit Chastity to sexual purity, we shall fail at both Chastity and at sexual purity.

## Chastity is a Special Kind of Eros: The Sort of Eros that is also the Seed of Agape

Chastity is a special quality of eros. If we perfect the energy of eros wisely, it will be available to empower our union with a monastic brotherhood or sisterhood, or with a husband or wife—but first of all with God. And through these choices, we will begin to find our total place in society and the world. Let me also just add that even for monastics Chastity is inseparable from the mystery of gender—the other great terror of our contemporary culture.

The problem that the Church sees today is not firstly the prevalence of extra-marital relations, but the death of genuine eros. Without an eros that has matured through the struggle for Chastity and that has grappled wisely with the challenge of gender, no true agape, no empathy, can arise; sexual sin, which is exploitation, besets and troubles us until we have acquired Chastity. This is why Chastity is of life and death significance, not only personally but for our Church and for our civilization. Without chaste people social justice in the home and in society will be not only unattainable, but unthinkable. Of course, some people live a life of sin when young, and then discover this Chastity after they marry, and feel that they have found a better way. But the better way is shown by what they matured into, not what they grew out of.

We can see clearly this link between chaste eros and selfless agape in our poverty statistics. The greatest cause of poverty in our nation is divorce and illegitimacy. Next to this, the gamut of other very real influences—racism, exploitation, bad governance, faulty welfare policy—play only a contributing role. With the blessing of eros in marriage or monasticism, we can take care of each other. True eros, by which I mean chaste eros, leads to agape.

For those of us who live lives of wealth and comfort, the importance of Chastity for social justice may seem like an abstraction. But just read Theodore Dalrymple's *Life at the Bottom* to see the sexual predation that has befallen women and children in the British underclass, when sexual morality has been lost.<sup>4</sup>

Eros itself, of course, begins with God and at his initiative. It is a response within us that is provoked by his appearing. We do not search for God, but rather, "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light!" That is, we mustn't take *our* existence as a given, while imagining that God's love might not be real; over time, all the evidence is the other way round.<sup>5</sup>

Chastity is eros in its holy form. And Beauty is the light of Chastity, of this holy form of eros, for Beauty is the only thing that can make the eye chaste. Many people experience this in a literal way: When they look upon an icon of the Mother of God they at once become chaste, if only temporarily. The pure eros, the divine eros for God and his life, is aroused within them and they are whole.

RTE: How do you begin if someone says, "I have no idea of what Chastity is, and I'm not sure I've even seen it?"

DR. PATITSAS: We begin with positive appreciation, by seeing riches where others see only poverty. As one of our theological students, Andonis Prayanis, so nicely said, to see abundance where others see only lack is a practical apophaticism. I thought that was brilliant, since we normally use the term "apophatic" for the theology that describes what God is *not*, and Andonis was describing a Christian who saw what "lack" is not—not proof of God's

<sup>4</sup> Theodore Dalrymple, *Life at the Bottom* (Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Well, I realize that in fact this can seem like a terribly idealistic statement. It can take years of searching for God before we come to a point within the Church where God's presence is direct, even insistent. Only then will we remember that the way God was present in our earlier years was through this pain of his seeming absence. But this doesn't mean you could realize that fact cognitively at the time of your earlier existential struggle, like reading an entry in the encyclopedia: "This utter misery you are now feeling is in fact the surest sign that God is very close to you—so cheer up!" A normal person would either respond, "Well, if that's how it feels to be close to God, then perhaps I'll look elsewhere," or, "You make no sense. If right now misery is the sign of God's presence, why would I cheer up, if it's really him I want?" As always, the point of theology cannot be to make the actual journey impossible by making us think we know what the end looks like, and can just skip right to it on our own. Each life is a mystery; theology aids that mysterious encounter when it writes an icon, not when it produces a virtual reality replacement for the encounter itself.

absence, nor even of real poverty!<sup>6</sup> Rather, poverty is often the prerequisite for the riches of God's kind presence.

A similar apophaticism is needed here. For the secular world, virginity is an empty state; a virgin is someone who isn't experiencing some fullness, some pleasure, something wonderful. Chastity is a zero, a nothing. But you can't build on nothing. My mentor Jane Jacobs said of city design: "The hardest place to start is where there's nothing"—or, where people dismiss all that they see as a slum, a ghetto.<sup>7</sup> And of course, to the city planners, bankers, and philanthropists who wrecked our cities in the decades after World War II, the city indeed *was* a nothing. They saw only ghettos, pollution, traffic, poverty, and a jumbled mass chaos. They did not start with love for cities, with care for the fine social order existing also in the poorest neighborhoods, for the commerce and culture that already existed there, and look at the harm such planners then caused.

In the same way, people who mock sexual purity or just see the innocence of childhood and early puberty as a blank neutral state have no foundation upon which to build their mature attitude toward sexuality, no ground upon which to construct the "city" of an adult life, a stable family, and a just society.

In life we must always look into the poverty or the difficulty confronting us and give thanks for the life that is there, if hidden; the rest will then have the chance to unfold in an organic way, like a flower growing from a seed. Similarly, we must learn to see within virginity a fullness that is destined to flower, perhaps into marriage or monasticism, or into a celibate life in the world; at any rate, into a life of loving relationship with others.

Chaste eros is the seed of pure agape. This is so clear to anyone who has experienced it in themselves or in another. It is the indispensable beginning! It is a holy joy and a divine potentiality. If we manage to be chaste in our younger years, our agape for our spouse will unfold more naturally. The transition is difficult, though, from eros to agape, and we all need social support and divine help to take that step. Nor should we lose hope if we have fallen or even fall many times, but rather be always ready to start anew in

<sup>6</sup> The particular Christian whom Andonis was praising was Dr. Paul Farmer, who has made a point of establishing his healthcare systems in precisely those places which are most poor. In the process, he unlocks resources hidden within both his contributors and in the poor people of these places. See Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Heal the World*, (NY: Random House, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Jane Jacobs, author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and six other books about cities and their economies, was my friend and mentor from 2001 until her passing in 2006.

trusting God. As our suffering increases, so does his grace, to paraphrase St. Paul (Rom. 5:20).

Thankfully, we in the Church begin with the virginity of Christ and of his all-holy Mother. And so we can easily understand that even a Chastity that does not include blessed sexual relations can be the greatest fullness, the greatest joy. We love the Chastity of our saints, whether they are married or monastic; and, if we are raised in the faith, we also have this positive experience that purity and pure thoughts are not a burden, but a freedom. They are not a missing out, but a partaking in something divine and awesome.

RTE: Now, can we retrace this wonderful view of Chastity from the opposite direction? Eros has such a bad name in our culture, and is synonymous with a lack of Chastity. How do we correct this faulty view, and how do we make our eros chaste?

DR. PATITSAS: Christian eros for Christ is at once a self-forgetting and the ultimate fulfillment and contentment. This is analogously true of romantic eros as well. But we may be tempted to seek eros only for its one side, for the way it fulfills us. This is why eros has gotten a bad name.

In chaste eros, because our focus is so tenderly and purely on Christ, it becomes natural to unfold this love and imitate Christ's self-offering for the world as agape. An unchaste eros, on the other hand, will not lead to pure empathy, because it is an incomplete eros. Although outwardly resembling "love's mad self-forgetting,"<sup>8</sup> its concern remains, at least partly, the self. It is a weak eros, or even a fake eros—and if it is fake, then it is a form of theft, since we pretend to be in love, but do not leave our selfishness behind. Rather, we try to take the beautiful and run off with it or consume it.

Theft is the primordial sin: It is one description of what Adam and Eve did at the Fall, and these foreparents are symbolized by the two thieves between whom Christ is crucified. Theft is the opposite of thanksgiving, of the Eucharistic liturgy that gives us life. Thanksgiving is so much the opposite of stealing that even ingratitude is a kind of theft. But to really be grateful for the person with whom we are in love is to be willing to let go of everyone else, and love only him or her.

Many times bad eros starts with forgetting oneself, which is good, but it never matures into agape—it never comes to include the genuine regard for

<sup>8</sup> Allan Bloom's description of eros in his book, *The Closing of the American Mind* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987).



Mosaic of Adam and Eve kneeling before the Cross, Torcello Cathedral, Venice, Italy.

the other because it is not willing to pay the full cost of loving. At a certain point we simply discard the victim of our self-love. Without agape, eros remains stunted, partial—finally it collapses and isn't even eros; the fire goes out and all that remains is the original concern with the self. Such eros has never risen above self-love.

I am reading Sarah Ruden's *Paul Among the People*,<sup>9</sup> a tough look at the depravity of classical culture and St. Paul's message to it. The apostle's concern was that sexual relations be just, other-regarding, chaste, mild, mutual, an act of agape and not just of self-pleasing. This is what we are saying.

For those who will marry, we can only do this right—go through Eros to Agape—all the way really once. We may feel eros for ten thousand others, but only once can we translate that eros into the full and permanent care for the entire soul and body of the other, to be yoked with them physically unto death. We could say, “up to three times, though of course not at the same time,” since the Orthodox Church allows a person to remarry twice out of awareness of the need that arises from the death of a spouse or from divorce. Of course, monasticism is another means.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (NY: Pantheon, 2010). This book contains some rather hard to read descriptions of ancient cruelty, I would warn the reader.

## Confession and Communion

RTE: There seem to be two kinds of “moral ideals” in life. In one, the ideal is so shining it is oppressive; it leaves no room for the average person and is somehow untrue or only partially true. In the other, the ideal is unfolded in the presence of Christ with such a brotherly “we're-all-in-this-together” compassion that it seems natural and attainable. Although it is high, its very idealism consoles.

So how about the person reading this who has fallen? How can they see this vision as a liberation and not a further weighing down with moral imperatives?

DR. PATITSAS: When we are younger and we face these things, our shame over our falls is often mixed-up with anger at ourselves. We think if we had tried harder we could have avoided the fall. But these temptations turn out to be so intractable that we eventually come to accept our complete dependence on Christ. The passion of vanity gives way to a calm acceptance of our creatureliness. In this way we experience the beginning of peace, even before God grants us victory over the temptation. Our struggle with temptation can then unfold with more success.

In general, our proclamation of goodness should be so wrapped in beauty as to console. This is an art. A sermon or an ethical text should not leave us feeling, “Why bother? It's too late.” But I have found for myself that it is not virtue, but rather sin, that really is the heavy thing. Especially over time it is sin that leads me to despair, not the reminder that, yes, there is another way that I can follow, if only I can access the miracle.

Sometimes people have a little motto which is meant to be consoling and liberating: “Orthodoxy is not about ethics; it's about ontology.” By this they mean that salvation in the Church comes not from moral perfection but from union with Christ. If they also mean that we start with the gift of Theophany and Beauty and God's Uncreated Energies conveyed to us in baptism and in the Mysteries (St. Paul's term for the “sacraments”), rather than with Goodness and moral effort, then they are right. Beauty, first.

And what does this ontological union with Christ look and feel like? The simplest way to put it would be the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12), *because when Christ pronounces them they are autobiographical*. “Blessed are you,” He says, but in fact He is the “Blessed One,” the “Anointed One,” the Christ. The



Beatitudes describe *him*, and his own life that we will share when we are joined to him.

For when we are united with Christ “ontologically”—by grace—we begin to resemble him. Our lives begin to resemble his in their perfection, purity, and Chastity. The general character of our lives becomes priestly, liturgical, an offering of ourselves to God for the life of the world. We then see how the commandments can be the lightest burden and how freedom from sin is the ultimate freedom: “For freedom Christ has set us free,” Paul writes (Gal. 5:1). We see truly that, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35). We walk as Christ walked, we die as He died, we live as He lived—in grace and truth and in “the peace that passeth understanding” (Phil. 4:7).

What I am trying to say is that *this* is why we discuss Chastity in such high terms: We are describing not ourselves when we describe the virtues, but Christ. “Virtue ethics” should be mostly Christology, if we are doing it correctly. Extolling the virtues should drive us into the arms of Christ for consolation and for liberation from the crushing weight of sin and of continual regret and sadness.

*“The passion of vanity gives way to a calm acceptance of our creatureliness. In this way we experience the beginning of peace even before God grants us victory over the temptation.”*

Nevertheless, sometimes when I look upon this vision I am consoled and uplifted, but also ashamed; and sometimes I am so ashamed that I won’t receive the consolation, and I don’t want to try any more. But at other times, the vision is beyond words.

I remember once arriving at a convent in the Dodecanese Islands in Greece with a priestmonk. I was there less than five minutes when I saw the faces of three nuns entering the divine services. How can I describe what happened next? From their faces I understood at once that I had *no* spiritual life, that I had not even *begun* to live a spiritual or Christian life. Not because they looked down at me—they hadn’t even seen me. But *their faces were on fire*

with a purity, a sobriety, a maturity, a love, a strong joy—it was a theophany worth more than all the words that I might ever say to our seminarians. And the whole experience was not only a judgement, but a consolation, a revelation of hope.

What can I say? Should I pretend that such people don’t exist? Should I pretend that my way is good enough? Should I pretend that the most difficult Gospel teachings are a kind of nice picture, but not really a criterion for our judgement? Should I refuse to admit that although I do not wish to become a monastic, still I do wish to have the innocent freedom and purity of those nuns? The answer is not to roll over and go back to sleep. Whatever the answer is, it’s not that.

RTE: What did you do? What should someone do who has already fallen?

DR. PATTSAS: I texted my spiritual father another time, after some kind of fall into sin—I can’t remember what, but it was something that was the struggle of that moment. I just typed, “I fell.”

And he texted back, instantly, “Get up.”

Yes, we can’t present the Gospel in a way that seems like it’s only for the perfect. But people aren’t made of sugar, either; they won’t melt in the rain. If the confessor has mildness, the soul is saved. There were years prior to that text saying, “Get up,” when my confessor offered *only* consolation to *all* my sins. But if a spiritual guide lacks mildness, the soul of even the person with a “clean” confession will become more self-reliant and harder. The shame that we experience in confession must be directed toward eros for Christ, not toward increased self-reliance and self-obsessed moral effort. It should be a shame that leads gently upward and outward to worship, and not inward and downward to despair.

We are to run to confession. In the Orthodox tradition confession is not firstly a focus on sins and morality, but a letting go of sin, the refusal to remain fixated upon ourselves, and an embrace of Christ. It is not only a confession of sin, but also a *confession of faith* in Christ’s humanity and divinity, and of our total dependence upon him. Thus confession naturally leads us to commune the Body and Blood of Christ, to take the divine strength to keep going, to know that all is forgiven and we are saved and loved. This is our medicine, and thus Christ acts in us. Confession and communion are a unity because both are a re-communion with Christ.

Besides, guess what else, besides Chastity, isn't a zero? Your fall. In that fall you did gain some insight about how sin operates, how much it hurts, and how to avoid it the next time. Through experience, infused with divine grace and power, in a synergy of effort and grace, we arrive.

What does arriving look like, or begin to look like? It looks like a miraculous coincidence of effort and grace—realizing that our hardest trying is *inseparable from, though unconfused with*, God acting in us. Amazingly, our own trying harder now becomes one crucial part of the answer to our prayers for help, whereas before our moral efforts often seemed to somehow make us more obsessed with self. Your self-discipline is now the Crucified One acting within you; such a divine-human union of wills comes only through Holy Communion, and with time. We *do* arrive at that point; there is no more distance, we are saved. Of course, there will then be a longer period, after we have been given such a state, before it is more stably “ours.”

Let me say something else about those Dodecanese nuns. There was one nun at that monastery—this was years ago—who was the most gifted Byzantine chanter on earth! Her voice was from the next world. And yet in the many times that I prayed there, I could never once discern *which* of the seven nuns at the chant stand was the one with such a miraculous ability. Her execution was so mild that only its fruit was discernible and no attention was drawn to her own self.

These kinds of stories are theophanies. They both chasten us and lift us up; they accuse us of our sin so mildly and with so much hope that for a while we seem almost to float in our journey toward the New Jerusalem. This is the way to console ourselves if we have fallen.

## Christ Invents Chastity in Both its Marital and Virginal Forms

RTE: Are Chastity and virginity the same thing?

DR. PATITSAS: No, but we also shouldn't make the simplistic distinction of saying that virginity is of the body while Chastity means that the soul is full of light. When we discuss virginity in the Church, we mean both a bodily state and a spiritual one. And when we discuss Chastity, we apply the essence of

virginity—purity of intention, the refusal to be an idolater or an abuser of creation, the proper use of all our powers—in describing the bodies and souls of both virgins and of those who are married. In the Church, this purity is firstly a gift and only then a matter for struggle.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ invents Chastity in both its marital form and in its virginal form. Before him marriage was, and still today without him marriage often is, difficult or even impossible. (Incidentally, the divorce rate of those who worship every week together in the Divine Liturgy is very low.) And before Christ adult virginity was an option for almost no one. Chastity in these two realms is among the first signs of Christ's in-breaking Kingdom, of the next world breaking through here, for “in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage,” and in Christ, “the Kingdom of Heaven is *at hand*.” This is a paradox, that the purity of heaven is needed for marital relations to become lifegiving and sustainable.

Christ invents Chastity by preserving the bodily and spiritual wholeness of his mother physically during childbirth, and spiritually during all that she suffers for him, and also by blessing the wedding in Cana. He invents Chastity, in fact, by being the revelation of that Beauty in whom and through whom *all* our powers and desires find their fulfillment—He himself is that Beauty, and especially He himself as crucified, resurrected, ascended, and come again.

Interestingly, when Christ establishes Christian marriage at the wedding in Cana, in the very same moment He gives his Mother the blessing to overcome the last attack on her Chastity, on her monastic purity, an attack presented by the sight of his Crucifixion. It is not only marriage but monasticism that Christ blesses at Cana.

RTE: Why would seeing his Crucifixion be an attack on her chastity?

DR. PATITSAS: It is the Cross hidden within Beauty that, when it becomes visible, may cause us to betray the Beautiful and act unchastely.

In an earlier interview we discussed how God created the world in this mystical manner—a divine Theophany appeared over the face of chaos and the watery deep, and this theophany was so beautiful that non-being itself fell in love with it.<sup>10</sup> Eros for this divine appearing moved so strongly within unformed matter that it repented of its prior state of being neither well-formed nor

<sup>10</sup> “A Feeling for Beauty,” *Road to Emmaus: A Journal of Faith and Culture*, Vol XV, No. 2, Spring 2014 (#57).



beautiful, dropped its “nets” (its pointless “concern” with itself), and moved towards the Light, taking on being and beautiful form in the process.

In other words, when our Savior says in first-century Palestine, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,” and “Follow me,” He is repeating the moment when the world was created, when non-being was also commanded to repent. And just as “Let there be Light,” in Genesis 1:3-4 leads to a separation of darkness from light, so His Gospel leads to a choice.

I suspect that the theophany that originally called the world into being out of chaos was already the appearing of Christ and of him “crucified”—that is, it was the Son in an attitude of self-emptying love for the world Who appeared over against unformed matter. “Let there be Light,” and, “his light was the light of men”—and of every created thing. We don’t know how or in what manner, but the Son really is “the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8 ), and this was the Beauty that drew us into being. I am not sure if I am alone in believing that the initial Theophany was a revelation of Christ crucified, or if this is established patristic doctrine, or if this message lies hidden within the Fathers.

*“I suspect that the theophany that originally called the world into being out of chaos was already the appearing of Christ and of him ‘crucified.’ ”*

There is something else, though, that I believe. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve also saw Christ in his self-emptying love. There was a section of the Garden that was forbidden to them—they were told that it contained a forbidden fruit. And there, when they transgressed its boundaries, they beheld Christ. They were used to conversing with him daily, but now they saw Christ hanging upon the Cross. This shock was what broke their faith and confidence and made them lose grace—the grace that had clothed them with Uncreated Light. And that is how they discovered themselves to be naked, because they were no longer covered by this Light.

They lost their Chastity—by being scandalized by Christ’s vulnerability, by turning their focus away from Christ and looking instead to this world and to

pleasure, to wisdom, to power, to themselves, and even to dark powers, for the source of their existence. They turned, that is, to anything which seemed in their limited understanding to possess an unbroken strength, unlike their Creator whom they now saw Crucified. After all, how could they find the source of their life in a Creator who himself hung dead upon a tree? They were not yet ready for this vision as they were still like children. In fact, after they left the Garden they themselves probably forgot what they had seen or could talk about it only in metaphors.

The serpent deceived them with a partial truth. He told them that in seeing this vision they would become like God, *but he did not tell them that such a theosis would require that they die with God.* Such a sacrifice would have been too much for them in their childlike state, so we can see how cruel his words were.

St. Symeon the New Theologian tells us that Adam and Eve were like children, that their days of friendship with Christ in the Garden amounted to just forty from the moment they had been created until they fell, and that when they fell they lost the Uncreated Light that had been their original clothing. But it is just my own opinion that what they saw was Christ Crucified, that the forbidden fruit was a section of the Garden they were not permitted to enter, and I could of course be wrong.

## Mysterious Words at the Wedding in Cana

At Cana Christ not only blesses human marriage, He also blesses monasticism when He seems to prepare his Mother for her own encounter with the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,” readies her for the instant when as the New Eve she will behold him crucified on Golgotha. He does this in a subtle way, a way hidden to us.

When she asks him to perform a miracle to bless the wedding, He references a short verse from the Old Testament, changing it slightly both to alert her and to reassure her. He says, “Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου.”—in English, something like, “What (is it) to me and to you, lady? My hour has not yet come.” However, it is actually impossible to translate the



*Wedding at Cana, Fourteenth-century Armenian manuscript illumination by Toros of Taron for the Glazdor Gospels, now at the Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA.*

first five words of Christ to his mother<sup>11</sup> unless He is paraphrasing the words of the pious widow at Zarephath, whose only son had died, even though she had taken a great risk in offering hospitality to Elijah the prophet.

This widow had blamed the death of her son on the prophet himself—or at least had implied that for the good she was doing in hosting him, she deserved better treatment from him! “Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, ἄνθρωπε τοῦ θεοῦ;” are her words to him (1 Kings 17:18). In the NIV, the widow’s plea is translated, “What do you have against me, man of God?” In other words, she was asking him, “What have I done to offend you? Is there some strife between us that I am not aware of, that would cause you to treat me in this way?”

Elijah humbly accepted the widow’s “judgment” and stretched himself three times upon the boy—an image of Christ’s three-day Resurrection—by God’s power raising him from the dead and restoring him to his loving mother.

So now here in Cana the real “ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ,” turns this saying back to another perfect “person of God.” Her guardian Joseph is now deceased, making her in the world’s eyes a widow as was the woman in 1 Kings 17. Although in the Church we do not believe that Panaghia ever married Joseph, we do recognize that in his death she had lost a guardian and become more vulnerable.

By paraphrasing the Old Testament passage, Christ is thus intimating that if He performs this miracle, it will commence a series of events that will end in the death of his “widowed” mother’s only son. In other words, I think that Christ is saying, “My Lady, do you wish that I reveal my divinity to the world in this miracle, even though once I do so a sequence will unfold that will be difficult for us to bear?”

It seems wise to assume that both Christ and his Mother knew the Holy Scriptures inside and out, and even that they may at times have spoken to each other through scriptural quotations.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Four translations cover the possible variations in meaning and show the translator’s difficulty. KJV: Woman, what have I to do with *thee*? RSV: Woman, what have you to do with *me*? NASB: Woman, what does that have to do with *us*? NLT: Dear Woman, that’s not our problem (i.e., what do we have to do with *it*?) All miss that the five words are a paraphrase of the Septuagint Greek of 1 Kings 17:18, a passage read as one of the fifteen prophecies on Holy Saturday just after Christ’s “hour” has indeed come *without harm to his Mother’s faith*.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Christ even said this in Greek, as Palestine had been a Greek possession for much of the three centuries from Alexander the Great to Augustus. Intelligent and literate people in other eras and places have often known certain foreign languages, as people abroad know English today. For a synopsis of the use of the Greek Septuagint in first-century Palestine, see <http://www.gotquestions.org/septuagint.html> I was not consciously aware until I thought about it of cultural contexts where limited recourse to a particular foreign language is part of high-class speech. But what I always did admire were the kids in my high school in Kent, Ohio, who would communicate entire paragraphs of shared meaning through a short quote from some book known amongst them. This is what I think is happening between Christ and his mother in John 2:3-5.

But as we said, because Christ is by no means accusing his mother with these words, but rather preparing her to withstand her most painful moment, his death, He at once changes his emphasis and reassures her: “My hour is not yet come.” In the Gospel of John the “my hour” of Christ always means the moment of his glorification upon the Cross. So Christ is reassuring her that He can perform this miracle, and that she shouldn’t worry because the hour of his full enthronement as king, his death upon the Cross, is not imminent; it is only eventual. And more importantly, He was telling her that she shouldn’t worry in another sense, because when his hour does come, it will be followed by his three-day Resurrection.

And so, both guided and comforted, she turns to the servants and directs them to do whatever He says. In a few words Christ has conveyed so much meaning and love and nobility and mildness, so much of his divinity and his vulnerable humanity, He has so thoroughly both reminded and protected his mother, that she stands there like Job after his deeper vision of Christ; no further speech is possible. In Christ’s words she has seen both his Crucifixion and his Resurrection, and his entire identity as the Messiah, the Son of God.

For Christ’s words to his mother in John 2:3-5 are pastoral, and their purpose is to prepare her for her own moment of supreme temptation. By referencing this verse from Scripture, Christ is not accusing her, but reassuring her of the certainty of his own resurrection, since the widow’s son was in fact raised from the dead. He is giving her courage for what will follow in the chain of events starting with this first miracle.

Thus, when the New Eve later sees what the Old Eve saw—Christ hanging upon the Cross, upon the ultimate Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil before which we shall all be judged—she manages to bear this temptation, this attack upon her Chastity—that is, upon her perfect devotion to Beauty in his most difficult guise. I recently read somewhere that a patristic oral tradition first put in writing by St. Maximos held that the Virgin Mary waited two nights at Christ’s tomb, that she never left the tomb, and that she was the first to witness his resurrection.

Even though the water of earthly love be changed to wine, our wedding is not complete without Christ’s wedding: “My hour has not yet come”—the hour in which He would be glorified, by receiving the twofold anointing of the cross and resurrection in all its strength. When it comes, his death and resurrection make Christian marriage possible. And because He quoted Scripture to his mother there in Cana, she endured with hope and she saw

the Resurrection first. At Cana, alongside marriage the special Chastity of the hesychast, the monastic, is made possible too.

## Eros Becomes Difficult When We Realize that the Beloved Bids us to Be Crucified, but this Co-Crucifixion is the Essence of Agape

I realize that it appears that I’ve changed the topic here, because we think of Chastity as exclusively applying to the realm of sexuality. And here I go saying that the Crucifixion was an attack on the Mother of God’s Chastity—an attack she negotiated successfully in part because of Christ’s words at Cana.

Again, Chastity is the purified form of eros. It is the unswerving love-filled gazing upon Christ without any trace of selfishness. But this devotion becomes difficult the moment “our eyes adjust” to the vision of Beauty and the cross enters the picture. It is as if we are in love with Beauty, but once the Goodness within it—the Cross—comes more clearly into focus, we falter in that vision; we avert our faces and head in other directions. For the Mother of God this was experienced directly, at Golgotha. To the sexually tempted person, on the other hand, it is the crosses within the beauty of the other person which trip them up; these crosses are manifold, but if we fail to carry them, we fall!

“If the eye is sound, the whole body is full of light” (Matt. 6:22). When we first speak of Chastity, we aren’t yet speaking of sexual morality; rather, we are speaking of the wholeness of all our powers, including our gendered sexual ones, in an undiminished vision of the Son of God. The Chastity of Panaghia at the Cross is that she does not waver from this vision, she does not flee. Before we can be faithful to each other, we first of all have to be faithful to Christ.

RTE: If the eye is full of light, does bodily purity automatically follow or are our bodies themselves involved in the struggle for purity?

DR. PATITSAS: The Church Fathers say that the spiritual struggle is with the body and for the body. And in fact, the Resurrection, the conquest of death is precisely a sign that the body and the soul belong together. Now, I know

that insulated by technology and comfort, I sometimes become a functional gnostic, thinking of myself as a mind, and not as a mind, heart, soul, *and* body. Let me give some examples.

It's not always easy to live ascetically. I don't like fasting—it is inconvenient and uncomfortable, and because I have no culinary skill it is hard for me to fast and still work. I don't like making prostrations, because they are difficult and I don't have the time. I would rather sleep early than attend an all-night vigil. To preserve our bodily wholeness is also difficult and, in today's world, confusing, since sleeping together has become an expected part of courtship. When it is time to pray the Jesus Prayer, I would rather wait until my commute to work and listen to a spiritual audiobook than stand in front of my icon at home in the darkness of early morning.

But then I ask myself: If I don't want to fast, nor make prostrations, nor stand in front of my icon corner nor attend vigils, nor even light the charcoal and cense my house, and if the struggle for Chastity seems to me like something wholly negative and not a positive achievement, if pilgrimage to holy places near and far is too inconvenient and expensive, then what role exactly will my body play in my spiritual life? Do I want a spiritual path and a salvation that does not involve my body? Because if so, then my spirituality may be gnostic, or classically Greek, but it is no longer Christian.

If I allow my body no role whatsoever in my service to God, let alone the central role it deserves and demands, then what is the point in confessing faith in God Incarnate, of celebrating Christmas, of professing that Christ is Risen from the Dead, of hoping for my own bodily resurrection, of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, or even of being baptized? What would be the point of reverencing our martyrs, the point of the bodily sufferings of our Savior upon the Cross, and of the millions upon millions of Christian acts undertaken throughout history to heal and feed the bodies of the poor, the sick, the elderly? Despite all my own personal emphasis on fitness and health care, apparently to me the body only matters when it gets in the way of my real center—my vanity, ego, and intellect.

If, like me, you don't fast much, nor make prostrations, nor pray in such a way that brings bodily fatigue, nor receive sufferings due to illness or old age as a spiritual "medicine" from God, then let us together ask ourselves what still remains of the Apostolic faith that is so centered on the Incarnate body of the Word, and try to do better. And if Chastity, too, is no longer meaning-

ful to us, then let us with piety and mildness reverence the God who became man through a virgin birth, and who himself remained a virgin, so that He could restore us.

With the spiritual use of the body, with our willingness to be in some small way co-crucified in our bodies for Christ, our Christian belief can become more practical. For if we exclude the body from any real role in our spiritual practice, we may sadly lose even hope for the body's Resurrection. So often, people who don't fast or struggle for sexual purity do lose respect for the bodies of their beloved dead, a sign that they have lost any interest in their own future bodily resurrection. We then have a disembodied faith for a disembodied people.