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SEX, GENDER AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN THE PATRISTIC ERA[1]

ABSTRACT
Focusing on three historical examples of a different understanding of Christian identity, the paper seeks to address the role of contemporary concepts of sex and gender in the creation of Christian identity. In the first case study, focused on the literary representations of the Christian martyrdom from the second and third centuries, special emphasis is placed on the demand for the 'manly' or 'masculine' way of witnessing faith. The second historical example relates to the creation of a wider ascetic movement in the fourth-century Asia Minor, and its specific focus is on Macrina the Younger. In her Vita, Gregory of Nyssa distinguishes between Macrina's gender identity based on her virginity on the one hand, and her social role as a widow, and 'mother' and 'father' of her monastic community on the other. Finally, the focus is shifted towards Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor, whose teachings about ecstasy, as a way to transcend oneself in the movement towards the loved one, provide the basis for establishing a theology of marriage and creating a Christian identity based not on sexual or gender roles, but on the uniqueness of human nature.

The definition of Christian identity in relation to gender and sex largely depends on the very definition of the concepts of gender and sex. Defining sex as a natural or biological category in relation to gender as a cultural or a socially constructed category is questionable. It is not only questionable within the framework of the feminist theory advocated by Judith Butler (Butler 2011: 5), but it is also questionable within the framework of the late antique philosophical view of the world, in which Christianity as a religion has been developed. The difference between man and woman was not expressed on the basis

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of sex and gender, but in relation to the 'one-sex' model (Cobb 2008: 25–26). However, defining Christian identity in relation to sex and gender is extremely difficult in the patristic age, because often the differences between different groups of Christians can be greater than the differences between Christians and non-Christians.

The aim of this paper is to dwell on several ways in which late Antique communities established their Christian identity in relation to sex and gender. It must be borne in mind that the early Christian communities developed as minority communities in an attempt to establish themselves beyond the dominant social, ethnic and gender identities. Apostle Paul's request that there should not be Jews or Greeks, nor slaves or free men, nor male or female, but that all should be one in Jesus Christ (*Gal.* 3: 27–28) clearly shows this tendency. The identity of the early Christian communities was not only shaped in relation to faith in Jesus Christ, but also to a large extent in relation to the social order. The early Christian congregations had a direct memory of Jesus and lived in the hope that the second coming of Jesus would happen during their lives. In order to preserve the memory of Jesus and his teachings, Jesus' disciples – apostles wrote down the life of Jesus in a number of gospels that have been later divided into four canonical and several non-canonical. In addition to the life of Jesus, the lives of the apostles and their disciples, the so-called apostolic fathers, who faced the persecution from Roman authorities while spreading the new faith, were also written down. From the description of these events of persecution emerged a kind of early Christian literature, whose common feature is the focus on the suffering and martyrdom of Christians. The emphasis is on voluntary death, as a way to become like Jesus Christ and at the same time to testify the faith in his resurrection, which was seen as a pledge of universal resurrection and eternal life. The main difference between Christians and others was the willingness of Christians to testify through suffering and martyrdom (martyr in Greek means witness) that Jesus is actually the messiah (Christ) and that he overcame death with his resurrection. At the same time, the early Christian model of martyrdom as an expression of identity is not opposed, but it is created in accordance with the existing Greco-Roman assumption regarding sex and gender (Cobb 2008: 5).

Sex, Gender, and Martyrdom

People of the late antiquity did not distinguish between sex and gender. The distinction between men and women was conditioned by their individual characteristics rather than by sex, which was the result of Aristotle's understanding of sexual difference. Aristotle was the first thinker who offered a comprehensive reflection on sexual differences, on whose metaphysical and logical aspects will be the focus here. Aristotle's critique of Plato's metaphysical duality of form and matter as the nature of different entities can be extended to his critique of Plato's view on sexual differences. In his *Timaeus*, Plato distinguishes three models in the created world: idea or form as the intelligible and

ever-consistent source of creation, matter as visible receptacle of creation and the world of physical objects as the union of these two (Plato 1929, *Timaeus*: 50cd; Allan 1997: 58–59). The first model pertains to the cosmic father, as generating principle, the second to the cosmic mother, as passive natural recipient of all expressions, and the third to the cosmic offspring as the union of generative and receptive principles. This enables Plato to identify forms or ideas with the masculine gender, matter with the feminine gender, and the world of sensory things with the neuter gender (Plato 1929, *Timaeus* 52a). Aristotle opposes the duality between form and matter, claiming that form and matter are one. Thus, for Aristotle if an object is stripped of its form or essence it is also striped of its materiality, because nothing remains from its physical properties (Aristoteles 1957a, *Metaphysica*: Z3 1029a). Since form (εἶδος) and matter are inseparable from the essence of things, then the only way to distinguish things that share the same essence, i.e. the same nature, is on the basis of their belongingness to a certain genus or species (Aristoteles 1957a, *Metaphysica*: Z3 1020 a 6–17). Gender here does not refer to the Platonic distinction between form, matter and the world of sensory objects, which can be further identified with the masculine or the feminine principle, but rather it refers to a particular genus (such as animals), within which the difference (e.g. bipeds in relation to quadrupeds) can distinguish different species (e.g. human being in relation to primates) (Aristoteles 1949, *Categoriae*: 5.3a23; Aristotle 1989, *Topica*: VI,4,141 b 31–32). The division into male and female is no longer a division into separate genera, but a division that exists within certain genera (animals), i.e. species (humans, primates). Male and female are not two genera or species, but opposites that exist within the genus, because the difference between them is not of a formal nature, that is in shape (such as the difference between winged and wingless animals), but of a physical or bodily nature (as a difference in the anatomy of the body) (Aristoteles 1957a, *Metaphysica*: I8, 1058a 29–31). According to Porphyry, a faithful interpreter of Aristotle, the difference between male and female could be expressed as an inherent difference, because sex, like a physical trait (blue eyes, curved nose), was considered a distinguishing characteristic (or predicate) of each individual, but not the most essential, or in the Aristotelian sense understood by a specific differentia, because then members of different sexes would be classified by species (Porphyrius 1887, *Isagoge*: 4.1–3). Such an attitude influenced to some extent the belief that women, in addition to the same physical characteristics as men, have also the same reproductive organs, only, as Galen from the 2nd century, and after him Nemesius, the 4th-century bishop of Emesa, put it, 'inside and not outside' the body (Nemesius Emeseni 1987, *De Natura Hominis* 86, 246–247; Nemesius 2008: 155).

Since the physical, i.e., anatomical, differences between male and female members of the same species are considered individual sexual characteristics, the question arises about the origins of this difference in the social perception of the roles of men and women. The humanity owes this distinction, which can also be described as gender difference in its modern sense, to Aristotle again. Since, according to Aristotle, male and female are not different species,

but opposites within a species, then according to the definition of the term opposition, they can be contradiction, deprivation, contrariety and relatives (Aristoteles 1957a, *Metaphysica* I4 1055a 38 – 1055b 1–2). Since the contradiction does not have an intermediate state, then the opposition between men and women is not a contradiction, because there are people who have physical characteristics of both sexes, which indicates the intermediate state. Therefore, the opposition between male and female can be expressed in terms of deprivation, or specifically as a woman's deprivation of certain qualities that a man possesses. From the relationship of horizontally structured opposites, i.e. sexual deprivation advocated in the *Metaphysics* and the *Categories*, Aristotle moves on to a hierarchical, vertical unipolar model that rises from woman as a passive and unreasonable principle to man as an active rational principle in the *Politics, Nicomachean Ethics* and *Generation of Animals* (Aristotle 1942, *De Generatione Animalium*: 729b 15–20; Aristoteles 1957b, *Politica*: 1334b 13–20; Aristoteles 1963, *Ethica Nicomachea*: 1102b 13–19). The unipolar model is characterized by the fact that at one end there is a masculine, active and rational principle that represents a norm, and at the other end there is a feminine principle, which, as deprived of the possibility of rational and active action, represents a deviation from that norm. Since a female principle deviates from the norm in sense of lacking the active and rational principle, it would be better described not as deviation, but as deprivation from the norm. Therefore, the philosophical view of the relationship between male and female represented by early Christians could be summarized: in physical terms, women and men have all bodily characteristics the same except the reproductive organs, and in social, i.e. quasi-ontological terms they differ on the basis of their participation in the masculine or feminine principle.

The same principles can be seen in examples from martyrological literature, which, according to Stephanie Cobb, was crucial for the formation of Christian identity in the 2nd and 3rd centuries (Cobb 2008: 5). The heroes of these deeds, men and women, stand under the same imperative to profess their new faith at the cost of death. This readiness to prove their faith by sacrificing their own lives is for them the highest expression of rationality, that is, the rational assumption that the life that awaits them after death is a better life. Since the rational principle itself was identified with the masculine principle, then this led to the necessary masculinization of martyrdom. The dominance of the male principle as an imperative can be seen in the descriptions of athletic and competitive confrontation of brave Christian men with their Roman executioners and wild beasts in the Roman Colosseums. Thus, in the work *The Martyrdom of St Polycarp*, a voice from heaven tells Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who was previously brought to the amphitheater for torture in 155, to be 'strong and manly' (*De Martyrio Sancti Polycarpi*: 9.1; Musurillo 1972: 8–9). It is clear here that in the perception of early Christians, masculinity or maleness was not given to men, but, as Cobb claims, it is rather the goal of a long-term aspiration that implies self-control, wisdom and virtue (Cobb 2008: 28). However, masculinity is not only an ideal for Christian men, but it is also an imperative

for Christian women. Thus, in *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, the day before she had to be thrown to wild beasts in Carthage in 203, the noblewoman Perpetua had a vision that she resisted wild beasts and gladiators in the middle of the amphitheatre, until at one point her clothes stripped off and she realized that she was a man (*Passio Sanctorum Perpetua and Felicitatis*: 10,7; Musurillo 1972: 118–119).

A similar example offers Blandina, a slave from Lyon, who was condemned as a Christian by the Roman authorities and brought to the amphitheatre in Lyon in 177, where she resisted attacks by wild beasts. Eusebius of Caesarea wrote in his *Church History* that Blandina's, "fortitude and endurance were compared to those of a victorious male athlete" (Eusebius 1926, *Historia Ecclesiastica*: 5.1.17–24; Shaw 1996: 309; Boyarin 1999: 75).

On the basis of these three examples, it can be concluded that 'masculinity' is set as an imperative for both men, as it is the case of the ninety-year-old bishop of Smyrna, and for women, as the example of two young Christian women, Perpetua and Blandina indicate. This imperative is actually presented as God's will, expressed either as a voice from heaven to Polycarp, or as Perpetua's vision. Not only are gender differences abolished in these examples, but also the social hierarchy, both internal Christian and external Roman, is called into question. In the broader context of Roman society, the differences between the Roman nobility, freemen and slaves are erased, and the slave Blandina is placed on the same level with the learned Polycarp and the noblewoman Perpetua. Similarly, through disobedience to her father, and by leaving her husband and breastfed child for the sake of martyrdom, the noblewoman Perpetua questions the existing social norms, and in a way, deviates from the norm of being a human being ordered by feminine principles. In a narrower Christian context, all three examples confirm that the church hierarchy is not a measure of Christian ethos, and that the identity of early Christian communities was built primarily on martyrdom, because Polycarp, longtime bishop of Smyrna, a disciple of St John the Theologian, Christ's dearest apostle, is on par with Blandina, a slave and a Christian and with Perpetua, who as catechumen was preparing for baptism. The gender and wider social roles of Christian women were redefined. The noblewoman Perpetua accepts marriage and motherhood, thus realizing herself as a woman, and then she redefines her gender role by becoming an exemplary 'Christian man' through martyrdom. Similarly, through her sufferings, Blandina became a model of masculinity not only for her Christian mistress, but also for the multitude of men who suffered together with her. Although early Christianity challenged many social norms through martyrdom, it still insisted on the previous Greco-Roman assumption that in a 'one-sex' system, masculinity as a character trait was a social imperative, putting masculine courage and perseverance in martyrdom at the core of its collective identity.

Sex, Gender, and Virginity

With the Edict of Milan in 313 Christians gained the freedom to profess and practice their faith, which greatly changed their previous situation, because persecutions became far less frequent, as well as opportunities for martyrdom. The focus is transferred from the external aspect to the internal, and the confrontation with Roman executioners and wild beasts is replaced by the confrontation with one's own physical and mental passions. The fight against passion becomes a priority, and the earlier practice of martyrdom is replaced with ascetic practice. Various ascetic models, borrowed from previous philosophical schools, mostly Stoic, are built into the Christian worldview. The virtues are opposed to physical and intellectual passions, and the virtue that is considered the most sublime is virginity, whose personification were the Virgin Mary and Christ himself.

Virginity became a social ideal in many Christian communities during the 4th century in Egypt and Asia Minor, and a number of patristic authors offered philosophical elaborations of this phenomenon. Thus, in his work *On Virginity*, written in 371, Gregory, Bishop of the city of Nyssa in Cappadocia, equates virginity with an introduction to philosophical life (Gregorii Nysseni 1952a, *DeVirg*: Praef. 1, 20: 248; St Gregory of Nyssa 1966: 6) and "a certain art and faculty of the more divine life, teaching those living in the flesh how to be like the incorporeal nature" (*DeVirg*: 4, 9: 277; St Gregory of Nyssa 1966: 27). According to Gregory, as compensation for death (*DeVirg*: 13, 1: 303), which was a consequence of Adam's apostasy from God, people were given a marital and sexual union within which they would continue the species. Since, for Gregory, marriage only continues the existing state of fall and multiplies death, it should be replaced by virginity, that is, abstinence from sexual intercourse, which leads to deliverance from death (*DeVirg*: 13, 3: 305). This deliverance from death is reflected in the universal application of virgin life. Gregory claims that abstinence of procreation would provoke Christ's second coming, since the humanity would be under the threat of extinction (*DeVirg*: 14, 4: 309). Gregory of Nyssa can be considered an ideologue and propagandist of the virginal ascetic life, for which his family and especially his older sister Macrina were his great inspiration and role model and whose life he describes in the works of the *Life of Macrina the Younger* and *On the Soul and Resurrection*. Macrina, often called Macrina the Younger, in order to be differed from their grandmother Macrina the Elder, introduced some changes in the existing ascetic practice, which largely led to changes in the gender paradigm and gender relations.

In order to understand the scope of the changes that have taken place, one should be aware of the existing spiritual and ascetic practices of that time. The radical asceticism represented by Gregory of Nyssa in the early 370s was the dominant practice in Asia Minor for more than a century. The practice of women leaving married life and parenthood for the sake of witnessing to their faith through martyrdom, which arose during the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, continued even after the persecution of Christians, except that

the goal was not martyrdom but spiritual life. Based on the acts of the Council in Gangra (in Asia Minor) from 340, it can be seen that certain tendencies have grown into unwanted practices. Thus, by its decisions the council sanctions a number of Christian practices, such as: condemnation of marriage or persons in marital status, celibacy for reasons other than ascetic, abandonment of husbands by wives and vice versa wives by husbands for spiritual life, abandonment of children by parents for spiritual life, persuading slaves to leave their masters, equating slaves and free men, wearing men's clothing and cutting off hair by women under the pretext of asceticism (*Concilium Gangrense*: 9–10, 12–17: 113–114). Two clear tendencies can be discerned from these documents. The first is the favouring of the virginal at the expense of married life, and the second is the understanding of salvation as the privilege of men, and the prevalence of the practice of transforming virgins through asceticism into the so-called 'manly virgins' or 'manly women' (Elm 1994: 124-125). At the beginning of the 4th century, virginity was a social ideal among Christians in Asia Minor, but its implementation was not so easy, because virginity was practiced either within the existing family or through the institution of pseudo-marriage. Thus, fathers or *patres familias* undertook obligations to financially support the virginal life of their daughters, maids or domestic female slaves, and less often sons or male slaves, and to keep them 'pure' for Christ (Elm 1994: 34–35). Another form of practicing virginity is through living in a pseudo-marital union, where the spouses take the vow of chastity, without consuming marriage. The transformation of virgins into manly virgins was socially desirable process, since masculinity was as an imperative to be achieved, either through martyrdom or through asceticism.

Although the ideal of virginity was highly valued in the family of Gregory of Nyssa, his older sister Macrina was already engaged at the age of twelve. Gregory describes in her *Vita* that while she was waiting to turn old enough to get married, her fiancé died suddenly. She made a decision then, against the will of her parents, to continue her life as a virgin – a widow (Gregorii Nysseni 1952b, *V.Macr* 4: 3–24; Elm 1994: 45). After the death of her father, Macrina, together with her mother, moved to one of their rural estates and began to organize the life of the household. The household grew into a monastic community because both her mother Emmilia and the youngest brother Peter took the vow of chastity. The community organized in this way attracted other virgins, some of aristocratic and some of non-aristocratic origin. Macrina accepted household duties that were considered to fall exclusively into the domain of slaves, such as bread-making. After the sudden death of their brother Naucratius, the mother experienced shock, while Macrina taught her to be strong and masculine (ἀνδρείαν). This event provoked a change of roles and Makrina became a mother to her mother and the other members of the household. Macrina's brother Peter described Macrina as 'father, teacher, pedagogue, mother, counsellor of all which is good' (*Vita S. Macrinae* 12, 1–15; Elm 1994: 87). The former household characterised by social and class inequality, masters and slaves, became a community of socially equal members, former

masters and former slaves, led and supervised by Macrina, who was every-one's father and mother.

Susanna Elm singles out several periods in Macrina's life, starting with 'virgin daughter' and 'virgin widow' through 'virgin mother' to 'manly virgin' (Elm 1994: 91). Here one faces a very complex gender structure far more complex than the manly female martyrs of the 2nd century. In manly female martyrs, the female principle completely disappears, and they are considered as a man in everything, except for their physical characteristics. In the case of manly virgins of the 4th century, we have a gender construction that at the same time combines the masculine disposition of martyrs with a completely opposite trait, the feminine passivity of virgins (Boyarin 1999: 75). The phenomenon of the virgins mentioned in the acts of the Council of Gangra, who, in addition to vows of chastity, wore men's clothes and cut their hair like men, may be explained as an attempt to deny the role of women as wives and mothers through virginal life, and then to gain masculinity by asceticism and by adopting the physical appearance of men. Macrina's case differs from the case of the 2nd-century manly female martyrs, as well from the case of the virgins convicted at the Council in Gangra for transvestism. First, Macrina was ready for marriage and motherhood as a teenager, but with the death of her fiancé, she took on not the gender role of a virgin, but of a widow. Thus, she did not base her virginity on the status of a daughter or wife, which were the most common models, but on the status of a widow, which means that she did not oppose her virginity to the fact that she was a woman. This was once again confirmed by her role as a mother not only to her younger sisters, brothers and servants, but also to her own mother. If one remains in the system of philosophically constructed one-sex model, which has male and female as opposites, then it could be said that Macrina fills the spectrum of all female gender roles, starting from being a daughter, through being a widow to being a mother. However, as being also a father, teacher and pedagogue, she enters the spectrum of gender roles attributed to men. Gregory's depiction of Macrina in the work *On the Soul and Resurrection* fully corresponds to her role of father, teacher and pedagogue, because after the death of their brother Basil the Great, she comforts Gregory. By conducting him through various Hellenistic philosophical teachings, Macrina advocates the thesis of the immortality of the soul in its relationship with the body after death. Elizabeth Clark claims that Macrina for Gregory, like Diotima for Plato, represents the alter ego of the male narrator or the necessary female absence (Clark 1998: 26). However, despite the very critical attitude towards Gregory's description of Macrina as an instrument by which he contemplates certain theological problems of his time, Clark also gives a positive definition. Thus, Macrina is a living example of Gregory's teaching that the first creation of human being did not involve sexual division, and that sexual division was introduced later when by foreseeing Adam's fall, God divided human beings into male and female and thus gave them the opportunity to reproduce (Clark 1998: 28). Macrina, as Clark concludes, has already taken a significant step through her virginity to regain the 'image of God' in the human being, which

implies the state before the sexual division, and to transform sexual lust into the prudence of the 'integral' mind (Clark 1998: 28).

   If one tries to present it in modern categories of sex and gender, then it could be said that Macrina was above men and women as gender categories (Elm 1994: 102), although according to the Aristotelian one-sex model or due to the position of her sexual organs within the body, she remained a female. In regard to her gender, understood here either as acceptance or as rejection of the social roles, which come with having a male or a female body, one needs to differentiate between the sexual and the social side of her gender role. On the level of sexuality, Macrina was above gender categories, because with her virginity she rejected sexuality and sexual divisions, trying to reintegrate the wholeness of the human being. In this case, it was a denial of one's own sexuality. However, on the level of social norms, Macrina transcends gender categories not by negation but by complete affirmation. Thus, at the same time as she denied her sexuality by virginity, she confirmed by the roles of widow, mother, and father both her femininity and her masculinity, filling thus the entire spectrum of gender categories that are united in the notion of a human being.

Sex, Gender, and Marriage

The ideal of the human being, created according to the 'image of God', to which Elizabeth Clark refers to in her interpretation of Gregory's work, represented the first created human being, which had not yet been divided into sexes. In order to understand Gregory's position, one should look at his interpretation of the book of Genesis, which describes the creation of the world. Thus, in his work *On the Creation of Man*, Gregory claims that "the creation which lies between the opposites, and has in part a share in what is adjacent to it, itself acts as a mean between the extremes, so that there is manifestly a mutual contact of the opposites through the mean" (Gregorius Nyssenus 1863, *De hominis opificio*: I, 2: 128d–129a; Gregory of Nyssa 1994: 389). When God, according to Gregory, created the world, he created extremes, e.g. the heaven and the earth within which the creation stretched and whose extremes stood dialectically opposite each other. For Gregory, this means that the very nature of opposites is not completely without mixing properties, with each other, which makes everything in the world agree with each other. According to Gregory, creation itself, although often revealed in the properties of opposite natures, is always in unity with itself (Gregorius Nyssenus 1863, *De hominis opificio*: I, 4: 132a). This view contradicts the above-mentioned view of Aristotle. Aristotle understands opposites as the fullness of itself and the deprivation of the opposite. Thus, in the case of the earth – heaven opposition, the earth indicates the deprivation of heaven, and in the case of the female – male opposition, the female characterizes the deprivation of the male. However, Gregory's view that the creation, or part of the creation, always remains in unity with itself, despite the fact that it is revealed though the properties of opposite natures, actually indicates that regardless of whether sensible nature is revealed through

sky or earth, or human nature through male or female, it is always the unity of its opposites. In terms of deprivation, this means that one opposite does not represent the deprivation of another, but rather that each of the opposites is actually a deprivation in relation to the unity of opposites. Thus, sky or earth is a deprivation in relation to sensible nature, and male and female deprivation in relation to human nature.

Following in the footsteps of Gregory of Nyssa, the 7th-century Byzantine monk Maximus the Confessor developed a doctrine of five opposites or divisions within the world, beginning with the division into male and female, paradise and inhabited world, sky and earth, sensible and intelligible nature, and created and uncreated nature (*Amb*. 41; Maximos the Confessor 2014: II, 110–113). Therefore, created nature itself is a structure through opposites that are overcome on the way to God. On his way to God, the human being unites male and female in one human nature, paradise and inhabited in one paradisiacal world, sky and earth in one sensible nature, sensible and intelligible nature in one created nature, and finally created and uncreated nature in the deified creation. If the division into male and female is taken from the perspective of these five divisions, then it is difficult to justify the interpretation that the division into male and female arose as a corrective, given Adam's fall, and that its purpose is to continue the human species through reproduction. Thus, the interpretation of the passage from *Genesis*, according to which God "created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (*Genesis* 1: 27–28), should not be interpreted in the way suggested by Elizabeth Clark, and many before her. This interpretation advocates that the so-called original creation of human in the 'image of God' implies a complete human nature, because it excludes only the existence of sex in God. Only in the second step, which should be taken in a logical, not chronological sense, God creates male and female. By being understood in this sense, it would be perfectly logical to base the Christian identity on virginity and on the vow of monasticism (μοναχός means single, solitary), as some original state of human nature, which existed before the so-called corrective divisions of one human nature into sexes. However, if one changes the whole paradigm, and by following a number of Eastern and Western Christian thinkers, including Maximus the Confessor, one assumes that Christ's coming into the world in the flesh was not a corrective, but part of the original plan, in accordance to which the Son of God (together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit) created the world to come into it, then it would be logical to conclude that God created Adam in the image of Christ. Christ's or God's 'image' in human being does not imply Christ's sexual determination, which is transmitted as a trait to Adam and Eve, but in the fact that he unites in his person the divine and human nature, which can be considered as opposites and as much as the opposite sexes should be reconciled. Just as God becomes human, without ceasing to be God, so a woman or man becomes a complete human being, without ceasing to be a woman or a man. Becoming a woman or a man as a human being is therefore only the first step that every woman or man should

take. The further path leads human beings through the other four divisions. Finally, by becoming deified through their own participation in the uncreated activities of God, the created human beings become gods.

Let us dwell on the male-female relations within human nature because they are paradigmatic for all other divisions and opposites at higher cosmological levels, including the last level relating to the division between uncreated divine and created human nature. Male and female are opposites or divisions that exist within human nature, but it is through the movement of extremes towards the mean it is established their connection with the mean, which is human nature itself. Thus, the space between the extremes is actually filled with our movement from one extreme to another. In this way, the horizon between the sexes as opposites becomes a place where sexual beings, men and women learn to be human beings (Behr 2018: 25). Two things need to be pointed out here. First, male-female opposites are transmitted and somewhat equated with sexual beings, man and woman. Second, the movement of one opposite – sex towards the mean, i.e. the other opposite – sex is not seen as a process within one person, in which, as may be seen above from the example of Macrina, through sexual abstinence and gender mobility, the spectrum between male and female is covered. The process at stake includes two persons, a man and a woman in their movement towards each other that is initiated by the attraction that exists between the sexes. There is a tendency among some Christian authors, such as Clement of Alexandria, a writer from the 2nd century, to perceive this attraction between the sexes as part of the so-called corrective model. The corrective model represents God's subsequent intervention after the human fall and its goal is to attract opposite sexes to sexual intercourse, i.e. marriage for the purpose of reproduction and the continuation of human species (Clemens Alexandrinus 1985, *Stromateis*: III, 12, 89). Therefore, attraction between the sexes is part of the natural sexual urge, which is also intrinsic to animals. However, most Christian authors, commencing from the apostolic times, believe that having children is desirable, but that even without having them, marriage would fulfill its basic function. What, then, would be the function of marriage? An unknown writer from Syria from the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century, known under the pseudonym Dionysius the Areopagite, writes that "divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved" (Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita 1990, *De Divinis Nominibus* 4.13; Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite 1987: 82). In a manner similar to Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor writes about the ecstasy:

> [...] if its motion is intensified in this way; it will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it, willingly receiving the whole saving circumscription by its own choice, so that it might be wholly qualified by the whole circumscriber, and, being wholly circumscribed, will no longer be able to wish to be known from its own qualities, but rather from those of the circumscriber, in the same way that air is thoroughly permeated by light, or iron in a forge is completely penetrated by the fire, or anything else of this sort. (*Amb. 7*; Maximos the Confessor 2014: I, 86–89)

Both passages describe the love that a human being feels, and use attributes that can be applied to the relationship between God and a human being, as well as to the relationship between two human beings. It is important to point out that the being in love feels ecstasy, a kind of coming out of itself, whereby the center of one's own being is transferred to another. As John Behr claims, through the power of erotic attraction one learns to die for himself, and to live for another (Behr 2018: 26). Thus, a loving relationship becomes self-sacrifice, and self-sacrifice is a kind of martyrdom.

Describing the unity of both God and the human being, as well as the two lovers, Maximus the Confessor uses spatial expressions such as 'embrace' and 'encompass' which indicate the erasure of the boundary between two lovers. A similar expression uses first Moses (*Genesis* 2: 18-24) and then the evangelist Matthew (*Matt*. 19: 4, 5), writing that a man will leave his father and mother and be united (προσκολληθήσεται) to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

One flesh or a body that husband and wife create is, in a way, a model of the Church in which many people form one body – the body of Christ. The relationship of spouses has two dimensions, the first spiritual or intellectual, in which they mutually put the center of their being in the other, and thus dying for themselves, and living for the other, and the other bodily where there is no more physical difference between them and they become one body. Both dimensions point to the fact that the division into male and female in the creation of the human being was originally in God's plan, because it is the most natural, but perhaps also the most demanding way to reach communion with God through another human being.

From the perspective of sex and gender, it could be said that the creation of Christian identity in the marital status as an icon or prototype of communion with God fully affirms sexes and sexuality, while trying to expand the gender roles of men and women to the dimensions of the human being as such. Although the Christian view of sexuality is largely related to the fall and hence the necessity of the continuation of the human race, sexuality in this identity model is seen as transformed by the great role given to spouses in the marital union. Thus, although husband and wife on the sexual plane remain what they are and enter the sexual union, the primary purpose of that union is not the continuation of the species, but the elevation, through sexual love, eros and ecstasy, of male and female to the level of human beings. Through self-sacrifice, spouses are transformed and acquire, in modern terms, their gender roles as human beings. This model of Christian identity, as we have said above, is the most natural because it does not abolish the sexes, but affirms them in such a way that they ascend to the new human being. At the same time, this model is not at all easier and maybe even harder than the previous two, because similar to the model of martyrdom, it represents a renunciation of one's own life and a living for the other. The self-sacrifice for and ecstasy towards other human being become the basis for ecstasy towards God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all three models created in the history of Christianity have continued to live and to be practiced, including the model of martyrdom as contemporary events from Libya and Syria show. The first model of martyrdom, however, no longer advocates the attainment of martyrdom as a manly ideal, because except in some non-Christian cultures, a woman is no longer considered deprived of certain socially favored qualities, and her sacrifice is human, not manly. Additionally, we are no longer living in the world of the ancient construction of the one-sex model, but in the world in which there is a tendency to consider both sex and gender as social constructions. Thus, if Christian women by force of circumstances are condemned to martyrdom for their faith, they die not as men but as women. The second model of virginal life is still practiced through Christian monasticism. Virginity becomes an ideal for those who have vowed to it. In this way and by following the example of angels, they try to gain the fullness of the human being by negating their sexuality. At the gender level, however, this model often stands under the imperative of gaining power as a male principle. Thus, often under a cloak of passive female virginity of nuns, the gender role shifts from the spectrum of spiritual motherhood to the spectrum of spiritual fatherhood. The struggle with one's own sexuality is often all-encompassing, requiring a lot of strength and dedication to rise to the imperative of the human being. The third, and historically closest to us, model of establishing Christian identity on marriage is something that has been developed through the comprehensive teaching on the attainment of deification as the goal of Christian life. Male-female relations are not scrutinized *per se*, but their arrangement is seen as the first and essential step on the path to salvation. This model, like the previous models, represents a kind of martyrdom, because unlike martyrdom, in which life is sacrificed for the sake of being like Christ, and virginity, in which sexuality is sacrificed for the sake of being likened to angelic nature, here one sacrifices one's life metaphorically, for the sake of spouse's life. The union characterized by ecstasy and coming out of oneself towards another human being is a model or an image of the union between ecstatic human being and God. In the end, this model affirms sexuality in its full meaning and considers people primarily as sexual beings. Nevertheless, although today some quasi-Christian ideologies insist on this model as traditional, due to the preservation of patriarchy and gender division, it abolishes any socially constructed division into genders, striving for the ideal of both men and women to be one and an all-encompassing human being.

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Vladimir Cvetković

Pol, rod i hrišćanski identitet u patrističkom periodu

Apstrakt

Rad ima za cilj da pruži kratak pregled hrišćanskih pogleda na polni i rodni identitet, kako u ranohrišćanskom, tako i u patrističkom periodu. Fokusirajući se na tri istorijska primera različitog shvatanja hrišćanskog identiteta, rad nastoji da pokaže koju su ulogu igrali savremeni pojmovi pola i roda u stvaranju hrišćanskog identiteta u prvim vekovima hrišćanstva. U prvoj studiji slučaja, koja se odnosi na literarne prikaze mučeništva hrišćana u 2. i 3. veku, poznatijim kao martiriološka književnost, poseban akcenat se stavlja na zahtev za „muževnim" svedočenjem vere. Drugi istorijski primer se odnosi na 4. vek i stvaranje šireg asketskog pokreta u Maloj Aziju, i posebno se fokusira na ulogu sv. Makrine Mlađe i način formiranja njenog rodnog identiteta kako na osnovu devstvenosti, tako i na osnovu njene uloge udovice, odnosno majke i oca svojoj monaškoj obitelji. Na kraju, fokus se pomera prema Dionisiju Areopagitu i sv. Maksimu Ispovedniku, čija učenje o ekstazi, kao izlasku iz sebe prema voljenom biću, daju osnova za uspostavljanje jedne teologije braka i stvaranju hrišćanskog identiteta ne na polnim ili rodnim ulogama, već na jedinstvenosti ljudske prirode.

Ključne reči: rod, pol, hrišćanski identitet, mučeništvo, devstvenost, ekstaza, ljubav, brak