From Adam to Christ: From Male and Female to Being Human

John Behr

One of the burning issues of the day, perhaps even the defining question of our era, is what it is to be human and how our existence as sexed and sexual beings relates to our common humanity. The relationship between these two poles—being sexed/sexual and being human—is, moreover, inscribed in Scripture in a manner that seems to set the two at odds with each other, for while the opening verses of Genesis affirm that "God created the human being in his image . . . male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27), the Apostle asserts that in Christ not only is there "neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free," but also that there is "neither male and female" for all are "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).[1] The arc that runs from Adam to Christ, from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ," is the fundamental polarity that defines our existence from the moment that we enter the world to being born into life in Christ, and is the framework within which theology seeks to understand both what it is to be human and the role that sexuality plays in this.

Creation of Adam, Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 1078–1122 AD.

"Be My Witnesses [*Martyres*]; I Too Am a Witness, Says the Lord God, and the Servant Whom I Have Chosen" (Isa. 43:10 LXX)

We often theologize with already-formed categories—what it is to be human and what it is to be God—and then seek to bring these together in the incarnation, to understand how divinity and humanity have become one in Christ, so that as God became man we now might become gods. The conciliar definitions and the theological reflection that accompanies them, however, work the other way round: the one Lord Jesus Christ—the crucified and risen one, as proclaimed by the apostles in accordance with Scripture unveiled—defines for us what it is to be God and what it is to be human, together and simultaneously, without confusion, change, division,

[1] Although often translated as "neither male nor female," the Letter to the Galatians clearly says "neither male and female" (*ouk eni arsen kai thēly*), undoubtedly a reference back to Gen. 1:27.

or separation, in one *prosōpon*—one "face"—and one *hypostasis*—one concrete being. He alone is fully divine and fully human, in one: he shows us what it is to be God in the way that he dies as a human being, voluntarily laying down his life, as one over whom death has no claim, so that it is by his death that he tramples down death and gives life to those in the tombs.

It is therefore to the one Lord Jesus Christ that we must look to understand not only what it is to be God but also what it is to be human. As Nicholas Cabasilas put it, at the end of the Byzantine era:

> It was for the new human being that human nature was created at the beginning, and for him mind and desire were prepared. . . . It was not the old Adam who was the model for the new, but the new Adam for the old . . . Because of its nature, the old Adam might be considered the archetype to those who see him first, but for him who has everything before his eyes, the older is the imitation of the second. To sum it up: the Savior first and alone showed to us the true human being, who is perfect on account of both character and life and in all other respects.[2]

Christ is the first true human being: he is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), *in* whose image we were created. Adam was but "a type of the one who was to come" (Rom. 5:14), as are we who have come into the world in Adam: a preliminary sketch, the starting point from which we are called to grow into "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

In one of the most striking examples bearing witness to this reality, Ignatius of Antioch, on his way to Rome, beseeched the Christians there not to impede his coming martyrdom:

> It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek him who died for our sake. I desire him who rose for us. Birth-pangs are upon me. Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die. . . . Suffer me to receive the pure light; when I shall have arrived there, I shall be a human being [*ekei paragenomenos anthrōpos esomai*]. Suffer me to follow the example of the passion of my God.[3]

Our usual understanding of the fundamental categories of life and death, birth and being human, are emphatically reversed. Ignatius is not yet born, not yet living, not yet human; only by his martyrdom, in imitation of Christ, will he be born into life as a human being.

In this light, we can now see a new dimension in the opening verses of Scripture: having spoken everything else into existence—"Let there be . . ." and it was, and it was good—God announces his own particular project: "Let us make a human being in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). God does not speak his project into existence with an imperative, but rather uses a subjunctive: his particular purpose, the only thing upon which he deliberates, is a project initiated by God but completed when Christ voluntarily goes to the cross. Upon the cross, in the Gospel of John (which deliberately alludes in its first verse to the opening of Genesis: "In the beginning . . ."), Christ says "It is finished"

[2] Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, trans. C. J. deCatanzaro (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1974), 6.12. Translation Modified

[3] Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans* 6, in *Letters*, ed. and trans. Alistair Stewart (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2013). Translation modified.

or "It is perfected," with Pilate having said a few verses earlier, "Behold the human being" (John 19:30, 5). Scripture thus opens with God's setting the stage and announcing his project, and concludes with the fulfilment of this project, such that, as we sing at the doxastikon for Vespers on Holy Saturday, with the body of Christ in the tomb:

> This is the blessed sabbath, this is the day of rest, on which the only-begotten Son of God rested from all his works; through the economy of death, he kept the sabbath in the flesh, and returning again through the resurrection, he has granted us eternal life.

It is by giving his own "Let it be!" that Ignatius in turn, following Christ, is born into life as a human being. If Christ shows us what it is to be God in the way he dies as a human being, he simultaneously shows us what it is to be human in the same way, in one *prosōpon* and one *hypostasis*. Moreover—and even more strikingly, since making a human being in his image is the only work that is said to be *God's own work—we are the ones who say, "Let it be!"*

This is a very different way of understanding the work of God than we habitually assume. We are more likely to think of God's creative work as having been completed at the beginning, as an initial perfection from which we then fell, requiring God to respond by sending his Son to restore fallen humanity. So much is this the case that, since the Middle Ages, we have regularly questioned whether Christ would have become incarnate had human beings not fallen. Put crudely, we tend to think in terms of a Plan A, which we then messed up, followed by Plan B. But, equally bluntly: *Christ is not Plan B!* From the beginning of the proclamation of the gospel, as we saw above, Adam is spoken of as "a type of the one who was to come" (Rom. 5:14)—an initial sketch of the fullness that is first manifest and realized in Christ alone.

We speak of a newborn baby as a human being. Yet if by a human being we mean, as we often do, someone who can walk or talk, the baby cannot (yet) do these things. This is, it is important to note, not due to any "imperfection" in the newborn: an infant with perfectly formed limbs and tongue needs to exercise these organs to develop them—a development which includes occasions of falling down, getting bruised, or misspeaking. And if we define what it is to be human by what Christ shows us, in the love he displays by laying down his life, then it requires more than simple physical growth: it requires a life of *askēsis* in learning virtue, culminating in our actual death, to become human.

The Apostle also expresses the contrast between Adam and Christ in terms of the difference between the breath of life that animated the first Adam and the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:44–48). Irenaeus of Lyons, building upon this comparison, sketches out the overarching economy of the work of God in this way:

> *Just as*, at the beginning of our formation in Adam, the breath of life from God, having been united to the handiwork, animated [*animavit*] the human being and showed him to be a rational being, *so also*, at the end, the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with


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> the ancient substance of the formation of Adam, rendered the human being living [*viventem*] and perfect, bearing the perfect Father, *in order that*, *just as* in the animated we all die, *so also* in the spiritual we may all be vivified. For never at any time did Adam escape the hands of God, to whom the Father speaking, said, "Let us make the human being in our image, after our likeness" [Gen. 1:26]. And for this reason at the end, "not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man," but by the good pleasure of the Father, his hands perfected a living human being [*vivum perfecerunt hominem*], in order that Adam might become in the image and likeness of God [John 1:13].[4]

It is at the end, not from the beginning, that we are perfected as a living human being, vivified by the Spirit, so that just as Adam was a "type of the one to come," so also the breath that animated Adam at the beginning is but a sketch of the life that he is called to live in Christ. This is, moreover, a process in which the hands of God are continually working, forming us, to be in the stature of Christ. "The human being is earth that suffers" (*Letter of Barnabas* 6.9)—suffering as we are molded by the hands of God, as clay in the hands of the potter, into his image, a process that continues throughout our lives, culminating in our death and resurrection, at which point one can even say that we are "created," finally made into that which God has planned from the beginning: "When you take away their breath they die and return to their dust; when you send forth your Spirit, they will be created [*ktisthēsontai*] and you renew the face of the ground" (Ps. 103/104:29–30).

The decisive step in this direction, from Adam to Christ, occurs when we voluntarily embrace the cross and our own death in Christ through the sacrament of baptism. But it is important to note how the Apostle changes tense from the past to the future: "if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5). Our sacramental death in baptism is once for all, and in the past; but until we are actually dead in the ground, the resurrection lies in the future, and so we must consider ourselves "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). Until that point, we are, as it were, stuck in the first-person singular, only able to say, "I am dying to myself to live to God," with all the inevitable paradoxes that flow from that ambiguity. When, on the other hand, I am actually dead, placed in the ground to become earth, then I stop working and God can finally be the creator.

By following this line of thinking, Ignatius and Irenaeus, and then the later Fathers following in their footsteps, can see our "fall" into apostasy, sin, and death, as inscribed within the single economy of God which starts from Christ and culminates in Christ, the Alpha and the Omega of all things. The whole economy, from beginning to end, turns upon and is shaped by the Passion of Christ (for it is only in light of the cross that the Scriptures are opened or unveiled, so that we can read the narrative of the arc that leads from Adam to Christ).[5] His death destroys death, not by obliterating it, but by turning it inside out, "changing the use of death" as Saint Maximus put it, such that instead of being the end, it becomes in fact the beginning.[6]

[4] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 5.1.3, in vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). Translation modified. Emphasis added.

[5] See ibid., 4.26.1.

[6] See Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61, in *Maximus the Confessor: On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, ed. and trans. Paul Blowers (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2003), 137.

Opposite page: Christ reveals the divine economy to Adam and Eve. Saint Nicholas Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Regensburg, Germany.

[7] See Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 5.16.2.

[8] Ibid., 5.12.

[9] Ibid., 4.20.7.

In other words: we come into existence "in Adam," animated by a breath of life, a breath which is inherently transitory and will expire. From the beginning of our existence, we do all that we can to hold onto our breath of life; but no matter how well we live and whatever we do, the breath will expire. In times long past, Irenaeus points out, it was only *said*—not *shown*—that Adam was created in the image. He easily lost his likeness to Christ by trying to snatch immortal life.[7] But now Christ, as *the* image of God, has shown us the life of God, and has done so not simply by destroying death (we still die, after all), but rather destroying "him who has the power of death," so that he might "deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb. 2:15). It is the fear of death that drives us to try to hold on to our breath of life and gives rise to all the passions that flow from this egotism, ensnaring us ever further in our mortality. If we try to preserve our life, as Christ points out as the basic law of life, we will without doubt lose it (Matt. 16:25). But if on the other hand we lose our life, he continues, by laying it down for his sake, we will gain it: we will begin to live a life which cannot be touched by death because we have entered into it through death.

According to Irenaeus, the breath and the Spirit cannot coexist.[8] This is not because one is a "natural" life and needs to be removed before a "supernatural" life can begin. It is rather because the breath, when used in a Christ-like manner, by dying to itself opens out to the life of the Spirit. We come into existence "in Adam," thrown into the world, with no free choice about the matter—*No one asked me if I wanted to be born*, as Kirilov puts it in Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*. We come into existence, moreover, animated by a breath of life which is inherently transient and finite, which will expire: we are as good as dead from the beginning. Necessity and mortality characterize our existence "in Adam." Motivated by the fear of death, we try to hold on to our breath, entrenching ourselves ever more firmly in that mortality and the passions to which it gives rise. But if, in faith and love, we are ready to use our breath to lose our lives in a Christ-like manner, for the kingdom and our neighbors, then we are born into a life which cannot be touched by death, the immortal life of the Spirit, and as such are born into life as a human being as Christ has shown that to be. Through Christ's having "changed the use of death," we are able to change the ground of our existence from necessity and mortality to freedom and self-sacrificial love—the very uncreated being and life of God himself.

Rather than seeing ourselves as already human (and always having been so, needing only to be redeemed from the apostasy into which we have fallen), we are instead called to view all things in the light of Christ, such that there is one single creative-salvific economy of God, leading us from the sketch to the reality, from a breath to the Spirit, from Adam to Christ, by sharing in the death of Christ, to be "a living human being," "the glory of God."[9] If we are yet to become human, what are the implications for understanding ourselves as male and female?

Marriage is Martyrdom

If God's project is to create living human beings in his image and likeness,

Russian wedding crowns, early twentieth century.

what he in fact does is to create males and females. When we look at the structure of Gen. 1:27–28, we see that being "in the image" and being "male and female" are put in parallel with one another:

> So God created the human being in his own image,
> in the image of God he created him;
> male and female he created them.
> And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it."

In the poem that is the first chapter of Genesis, two things are left unexplained: being "male and female" and being "in the image." Although we tend to link "male and female" to the blessing to "be fruitful and multiply," this same blessing is bestowed upon the other animals (Gen. 1:22), yet they are not said to be created as male and female (only later, in Gen. 6:19, are they described this way). Regarding the term "image," it is often said that the purpose of Gen. 1:27–28 is to "democratize" the status of being "in the image"—something that in the ancient Near East was held to be the prerogative of the king—so that it now belongs instead to all human beings to have "dominion" over the earth. This again, however, is not said in the scriptural text, here or elsewhere. Reading the text in the light of Christ, as we have above, we may well make a distinction between *the* image, who is Christ (Col. 1:15), and human beings who are made *in* the image. However, there is also a parallel drawn between being in the image and being male and female. I do not mean to suggest that there is anything in God corresponding to male and female. Rather, I would suggest, that if God's project is to make human beings in his image, as we have seen above, and his way of initiating this project is to make males and females, then our existence as sexed and sexual beings turns out to be the horizon in which we learn to become human.

It is important to note that when the Apostle asserts that Christ is "the image of the invisible God," it is in the context of hymning the one who makes peace "by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:15–20). It is, as we have seen above, in laying down his life that Christ shows us what it is to be God and what it is to be human. Our existence as male and female is in fact the horizon in which we (or at least most of us) learn, through the power of erotic attraction, to lay down our lives for another: through the erotic drive deeply implanted in us by God, we are drawn out of ourselves, to "die" to ourselves and to live our lives in virtue of another. As Dionysius the Areopagite puts it, "The divine erotic force also produces ecstasy, compelling those who love to belong not to themselves but to those whom they love."[10] In marriage, then, males and females are, quite literally, "humanized"!

[10] Dionysius, *On the Divine Names* 4.13, trans. as Maximus the Confessor, *Fifth Century on Various Texts* 85, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 281.

Given the preponderance of monastics amongst those counted as saints by the Church, it is not surprising that there is a great tendency to think that sanctification consists in approximating the monastic life, whether literally (as is often advocated) or spiritually (the "interior monasticism" of Paul Evdokimov). It is sometimes claimed that, from the fourth century, monasticism replaced the martyrdom of earlier centuries as the form of sanctity known by the Church. But this idea needs to be nuanced, or restated: it was by understanding itself as martyrdom that monasticism continued the martyrdom of the early church. Saint Anthony is depicted by Saint Athanasius as having gone out into the desert to live a life of martyrdom: the contest with the wild beasts in the arena is continued in the desert in the battle with the demons depicted as wild beasts. It is martyrdom that is the paradigmatic form of holiness known by the Church—a martyrdom which is continued in the monastic tradition, but also within marriage: the couple are crowned in the marriage ceremony not because they are "king and queen for the day," but because they are entering upon the path of martyrdom. Marriage, just as much as monasticism, continues the fundamental Christian vocation of martyrdom, and does not need to be (and should not be) approximated to monasticism. This recognition also gives greater clarity to the place of the single, non-monastic person. It is not that marriage and monasticism are the only two "legitimate" forms of Christian life: martyrdom is the form of Christian life, and is lived either through marriage or through monasticism or in the single state. The cross is one and the same for all.

Children, although a blessing (and an increased opportunity for martyrdom!), are not the goal of marriage. It is noteworthy that when Christ reaffirms what was from the beginning—that we were created male and female to become one flesh—nothing is said about procreation (Matt. 19:4–6). Similarly, when the Apostle affirms that, because of the temptation to sexual immorality—because we have been created as sexual beings—each man should have a wife and each woman a husband, and that their bodies are not their own but each other's, and that they should give themselves to one another, again nothing is said about procreation (1 Cor. 7:2–4). This is such a difficult calling that, virtually from the beginning, Moses allows divorce "because of your hardness of heart" (Matt. 19:8), and Paul also "concedes" the possibility of separating, but only by mutual agreement for a short period of time, for the sake of prayer (1 Cor. 7:5–6), insisting that the couple come back together again lest they be tempted by Satan. Only with Augustine does Paul's concession come to be understood as a concession to come back together again, with the further specification that it be for the sake of procreation. Although the blessing of children is clearly implied in the scrip-

Male and Female in Adam

Adult baptism, 2010

tural understanding of marriage, it is only with Clement of Alexandria that the purpose of marriage comes to be subsumed under a procreative finality: neither the Lord nor the Apostle mentions this when speaking of the purpose of existence as male and female.

Marriage, then, is not—or not primarily—about or defined by procreation, legitimizing sexual activity, or providing a "safe space" for its exercise. Neither is it about preserving "traditional values" or the nuclear family. It subverts and sublimates these intentions, providing a horizon for achieving the fullness of the stature of being human that Christ has shown by the way of the cross. Sexuality embodies the erotic drive towards transcendence, transforming those who love with the martyric love shown by Christ into another state, neither male and female, but human, through martyrdom and in Christ.

If males and females, men and women, become human in and through martyrdom—for only a man or woman can say "Let it be!" and so become human—then males and females do not in fact beget human beings, but only procreate more males and females, each of whom are called to the fullness of being human. But this means that procreation, and sexual activity more generally, is inherently *in Adam*, not *in Christ*: *one cannot procreate "in Christ."*

This point (though rarely stated so bluntly) is immediately apparent when one considers that a man and a woman, no matter how holy or dispassionate their sexual intercourse, *cannot* procreate an infant who would be, as it were, already baptized at birth. Baptism is a conscious, voluntary movement from Adam to Christ: it requires a statement of intent, "Let it be!" (leaving aside the question of infant baptism, for the point remains). The fact that procreation is not "in Christ" is not due to fallenness, sinfulness, or passion, as it would be in a "Plan A/Plan B" model, where it might be claimed that sexual procreation is only the result of the fall, and that before the fall we had another, non-sexual manner, mode of procreation. No, it is simply a different category: procreation is in Adam, while birth into life is a passage from Adam to Christ; procreation continues the race of Adam, begetting sons and daughters of Adam, while baptism is the filling up of the body of Christ with martyrs, living human beings. It is this distinction that Saints Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus allude to when they suggest that perhaps there was another mode known to God for the genesis of human beings besides procreation as males and females. The problem with procreation is not so much the impassioned embrace of husband and wife, but the involuntary coming into existence of the one thus begotten, in contrast to the voluntary birth into life of the one taking up the cross.

This point frees human sexuality from the almost unbearable burden put upon it by a "Plan A/Plan B" model, in which sexual activity is taken to be only for the sake of procreation and to be undertaken only in an as angel-like (or "monastic") a manner as possible. No! Procreation is certainly a blessing of marriage and an increased opportunity for martyrdom, but the erotic drive of our existence as males and females is that which leads us, as we have seen, toward the self-sacrifice that culminates in our becoming human. Eros is, of course, equally capable of driving us toward behavior which is no more than animal. Our experience of eros, at least in this life, is not a black and white matter, but always gray. It is never experienced as "pure" self-giving, but is always bound up with passion, selfish pleasure, and power; we must struggle with these passions to learn martyric love. Just as we take a decisive, once-for-all step in baptism, dying with Christ so as to live in him, but until our actual death remain in the paradox of the first-person singular, so too, driven outside ourselves in love for another and ultimately for Christ, we are enmeshed through our erotic drive in passion until the grave. Even for the aged Anthony, after decades in the desert, the one passion that remained was *porneia*.[11]

Neither Male and Female in Christ

Through sexual attraction and desire, then, most males and females are called to overcome themselves, and so become human in Christ. But it is not that, in doing so, we cease being males and females; rather, we both become human. To adapt an image used by Origen: an iron knife is known by its particular properties (cold, hard, sharp), but when placed in the fire, while remaining iron, it is instead known only by the properties of fire (hot, fluid, burning). So too an iron knife and a bronze knife, when placed in the fire, become indistinguishable while remaining the matter they are. Likewise, males and females are called to enter into Christ through their death (anticipated sacramentally in baptism) and, entering into the consuming fire that is God through taking up the cross, while remaining the males and females they are, they become indistinguishably human in Christ, in whom there is neither male and female. As Maximus puts it, the distinction between males and females is overcome through the most dispassionate virtue, as both finding their common *logos* as truly human in Christ, the *Logos*.[12] It is not that they stop being male or female, or that they become somehow androgynous or asexual; the one thing said in Genesis to be "not good" is to be "only human" (Gen. 2:18: *ouk kalon einai anthrōpon monon*, usually translated "for man to be alone"). It is rather that the difference between male and female no longer "registers," as it were, for both are—and are seen to be—truly human in Christ.

Through our existence as sexed and sexual beings, then, our existence as sexed and sexual beings is tran-

[11] See *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 3.

[12] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 41, in *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 102–121.

scended, though not abandoned. The erotic drive of males and females can lead to a transcendence in which it is sublimated in a divine, Christ-like manner, in which both become human. Sexuality and the sexual drive have a positive role to play in this economy of God, driving us toward an ecstatic existence in which we no longer live for ourselves, just as it is by using our mortal breath of life in a particular Christ-like manner that we enter upon a manner of living that is no longer that of a mortal breath but that of the immortal Spirit, immortal because entered through death. Once again, we are, in the present, in the gray area of the paradoxical situation between our baptismal death to existence in Adam and our actual death to be raised in Christ. Yet even while in this gray area, to the extent that we identify ourselves by our sexuality, male or female (or, as is said today, anywhere on the spectrum in between), we are in Adam, not in Christ, merely iron or bronze, not transfigured by the divine fire.

"Sing, O Barren One!"

Bringing into focus our birth through death into life as living human beings also opens out for us the vision of the Church as the Virgin Mother, who "in every place, because of that love which she cherishes towards God, sends forth, throughout all time, a multitude of martyrs to the Father."[13] The basis for this understanding is the verse in Isaiah that follows the Hymn of the Suffering Servant (Isa. 52:13–53:12)—the passage that, more than any other, provided the imagery and vocabulary for understanding the passion of Christ:

> Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord. (Isa. 54:1)

As a result of the passion—for it is into the death of Christ that sons and daughters of Adam are baptized—the barren one gives birth to many living children of the living God. Citing this verse, the Apostle speaks of her as "the Jerusalem above" and "our mother" (Gal. 4:26), and Christians thereafter refer to her as simply "the Virgin Mother." Citing verses from Isaiah, regarding the birth of the son known by the name "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God" (Isa. 8:3 and 9:6), Irenaeus describes how, in his birth from the Virgin, "the pure one opens purely that pure womb which regenerates human beings unto God and which he himself made pure."[14] The Church, embodied on earth in specific local communities, is not simply identified with these local communities, but is the heavenly womb in which we are born through death into life, entering as males and females but emerging as living human beings. Baptism is not simply a rite of entrance, which, having been undergone, we leave behind to enjoy the rights of membership, but a sacramental enactment of our death in Christ and a commitment to continuing living by taking up the cross, anticipating the moment that we too die with Christ to rise with him. The Eucharist, likewise, is not merely the reception of spiritual nourishment or a celebration of thanksgiving, but also an anticipatory participation of our death in Christ. When Christ asks, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the

[13] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4.33.9.

[14] Ibid., 4.33.11.

baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38), he is not simply speaking about approaching the chalice on a Sunday morning—or rather, he is, if we were to understand properly what is meant by partaking of the chalice. Likewise, the Psalm verse sung before communion on feasts of the Virgin, "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord" (Ps. 115:4/116:13), is a call to martyrdom, to birth in the Virgin. This Eucharistic anticipation of our participation in the paschal offering of Christ is completed in our martyric death in witness to Christ—as seen, for instance, when Ignatius prayed that he, as wheat, might be ground by the teeth of wild beasts to become the "pure bread of Christ," and when Saint Polycarp's body, consigned to the flames, appeared to be bread.[15] Our own death is the paschal mystery for each of us, a passage which we must all undergo, and which we anticipate in the sacraments, the *mysteria*, of baptism and Eucharist.

[15] Ignatius, *Romans* 4. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 15, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Bart D. Ehrman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univeristy Press, 2014), 355–401.

The context or womb for our birth in Christ is the Church, not understood merely as a local community coming together in a particular structure to celebrate various rites, but as our Mother, the heavenly Jerusalem: it is this that the local community images and the two cannot be conflated. And the primary reality of this ecclesial birth is taking up the cross to live the life of Christ. Baptism is our sacramental, once-for-all death to Adam and birth in Christ, but it is a sacramental realization of what will be physically realized in our actual death. Receiving the Eucharist is our participation in the body and blood of Christ, in order to become his body through our own sharing in his passion. Baptism and Eucharist are thus not simply sacramental acts of grace dispensed by the bishop in a church merely understood as a gathering of human beings; they are grounded in our actual death, which—when conformed to the Passion of Christ—is our birth through the Church as mother.

Thus, when we speak about elements of our wider culture being "baptized" in the Church, this does not mean simply giving these elements, such as marriage, a religious tint or veneer, but rather transforming them radically, through death as birth into life. That we habitually do not do so, however, can be seen in many ways, especially in our unthinking adoption of patterns of speech from contemporary culture. For instance, today we often speak about "the sanctity of life," without realizing that this is in fact a pagan notion! For something to be sanctified, it must be set apart, sacrificed; to take anything as sacred in its own nature is paganism. As we have seen earlier, we do not come to life other than through death and resurrection. Likewise, Christian marriage is not simply the natural (pagan) institution given a religious tint, demarcating a "safe space" for sexuality, "sanctifying" the nuclear family, and preserving our "traditional values"; it is the way of martyrdom, leading to life and true humanity.

Between our sacramental death in baptism (and thereafter in the Eucharist) and our actual death and resurrection in Christ, we are in a paradoxical and gray condition, in which we are learning to die to ourselves, but are doing so by the mortal breath which has not yet expired, and as still male or female but not yet human. As Christians, we continue to live in this world between Adam and Christ.

That this condition is gray, not black or white, means that our life is constantly marked by repentance, turning ever again to Christ with a renewed mind and a renewed effort. This being so, we have learned to live with a certain ambiguity. For instance, although we are made male and female to become one flesh, with the injunction that "what God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6), Christ gives an exception—"apart from *porneia*" (Matt. 19:9)—though only in the Gospel of Matthew. The Orthodox tradition, therefore, does not "annul" a marriage which does not work out in order to allow one of the partners to enter into another (but now a supposedly first or single) marriage, but instead recognizes the reality of our gray existence—that things don't always work out, despite best intentions—and blesses a *second* marriage, though the form of the service is different, and is often said to have a "penitential" character. This practice occurs in a variety of circumstances that, on one level, should not arise: a second marriage of lay people; a second marriage of a priest; a marriage of monastics who have left their profession. In such cases, the Church has found a way of accommodation through repentance, accepting at the chalice those who take this route. As noted above, the economy of God that leads from Adam to Christ embraces our apostasy into sin and death, turning it inside out, through the cross and our repentance, into the means of our being made human in Christ. Where sin is, grace abounds, the Apostle reminds us, adding that this doesn't mean we should remain in our sin (Rom 5:20–6:2). Rather, as we strive after virtue, we will always find that the depths of our brokenness are greater than we ever knew before, so that the transforming power of God can refashion the hidden depths of our being, while the depths of our recognition of our sinfulness are, in turn, the reverse side of the height to which we have come to know God.

All Christians are thus called, repeatedly and insistently, to repentance: one can only approach the chalice as a repentant sinner, not as one with a "right." There is an almost overwhelming tendency to regard the approach to the chalice as a matter of being worthy. This tendency can even turn the sacrament of repentance into that which makes us worthy to do so! But this is not the case: the only qualification to approach the chalice is to be a repentant sinner, the chief amongst sinners. Being a heterosexual married couple confers no "right" to approach the chalice; marriage, as explored above, is not a legitimization of permitted sexual activity (with procreative intent), but a road to the martyrdom expected of all. Our sexuality, our existence as sexual and sexed beings, is always "gray"—always immersed in struggle with the temptation to *porneia*—for Anthony just as much as for married couples. We learn, through striving after virtue and repentance, to discern the difference between an impassioned eros seeking selfish pleasure and power, and an eros—the same erotic drive—aiming at transcendence through self-offering to become human. Yet even in this gray area, it bears repeating, to the extent that we identify ourselves in terms of sexuality, we remain in Adam and not in Christ.

What it is to be human, and the role of our existence as male and female, are indeed the burning issues of our epoch. Although it does not approach them through the language of modern science, theology can speak to these issues by considering carefully the scriptural framework of God's own purpose: to make living human beings in his image. There are many issues which this essay has not addressed. Its aim has been to explore carefully various dimensions involved in the framing and accomplishment of God's project. Most important have been the role of death as birth into life, and the Church as the Virgin Mother in whom we are born as living human beings, martyrs. We are not, as male and female, that to which we are called, and the Church is not a bastion of "traditional values," as we might think of them and expect her to be. The arc of the economy, the work of God, the movement from Adam to Christ, from male and female, through the womb of our Virgin Mother to becoming human, is instead an always surprising call to radical divine-human transcendence, to birth into life as "the glory of God." ⎈

Father ***John Behr*** is the Father Georges Florovsky Distinguished Professor of Patristics at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, where he served as Dean from 2007 to 2017, and the Metropolitan Kallistos Chair of Orthodox Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He has published numerous books, most recently an academic monograph on Irenaeus (Oxford University Press, 2013); a more poetic and meditative work, *Becoming Human: Theological Anthropology in Word and Image* (SVS Press, 2013); and a critical edition and translation of Origen's *On First Principles* with an extensive introduction (Oxford University Press, 2017). He is now working on an edition and translation of the works of Irenaeus and a study of the Gospel of John.