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THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: SACRED TEXTS AND DOCTRINAL FOUNDATIONS

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Abstract. *The spiritual model of the family is built upon the "sacred books"—the Old and New Testaments—which contain a set of moral and ethical requirements for marital and family relationships, as well as moral and social obligations of spouses toward each other. However, they do not offer a complete and holistic doctrine of the family but rather provide guiding ideas that have been further developed in theological tradition.*

Ideological and dogmatic principles set forth ideal requirements for family life, establishing an absolute coordinate system for human existence in marriage and family. Meanwhile, mechanisms for regulating marital and family relations in historical realities are enshrined in religious and legal principles. The Old and New Testament views on marriage and family relations differ significantly. The ideas and principles of the Christian family do not reject Old Testament concepts; rather, in the New Testament, the categories of Old Testament thinking are filled with new meaning.

The religious understanding of the origin of the family is profoundly mystical. In the sacred vision, the family dates back to the very first days of human existence. It is regarded as the first natural institution, blessed by God, and appears as a divinely established reality, a realization of the divine plan. The significance of Old Testament texts for Christianity, in relation to the family, is determined by their reference to the divine origins and nature of the family.

Keywords: *family, Christian family, marriage, cohabitation, Orthodoxy, New Testament, Old Testament.*

Introduction.

In the Old Testament, the existence and purpose of the family were justified solely by reproduction. The foundation of the Old Testament understanding of the family's purpose lies in the commandment: *"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth"* (Gen. 1:28). In the New Testament, the meaning and purpose of the family are directed toward the idea of resurrection, which implies the existence of an afterlife. Thus, the materialistic understanding of marriage is denied, and its ideal essence as an eternal union is emphasized. In Orthodox Christianity, marriage potentially includes childbearing, but it is not justified by it. Unlike in the Old Testament, if a couple remains childless, their marriage does not lose its meaning, as it fulfills its higher purpose—spiritual self-perfection for the sake of salvation and eternal existence. In the

theological interpretation, the primacy of the spiritual dimension in marriage also subordinates the physical closeness of spouses to moral principles and higher goals, serving as an expression of the fullness of unity in love.

The essence of the Christian family lies in the spiritual and moral unity of spouses, their mutual perfection, and their aspiration for the fullness of being. Love serves as the metaphysical foundation of the family. It consists of its orientation toward and communion with God; it is necessarily associated with self-sacrifice, humility, devotion, and patience. The ability to embody this set of qualities is, in essence, the highest manifestation of spousal love, as reflected in biblical narratives and theological texts.

The spiritual model of the family is deeply Christocentric. Marriage, which serves as the foundation of the family, is regarded as "an act that directly originates from God and leads to Him." The idea of family relationships as a prototype of the spiritual union between Christ and the Church, and the perception of the family as a "small church," imbues the concept of the family with profound religious significance and shapes the entire logical and substantive framework of the spiritual paradigm of the family. In religious understanding, marriage and the family built upon it are seen as a direct analogy to the Church, which is unified in essence yet multiple in persons.

In theological tradition, the essential properties of the Church—unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity—are projected onto the family. In the context of family relationships, unity is defined by the spiritual and physical union of husband and wife and is determined by their shared destiny. The holiness of the family is expressed in the pursuit of Christian virtues and ideals. The catholicity of the family manifests itself in its hierarchical structure, implying the subordination of its members to its head. Apostolicity is reflected in adherence to Christian family traditions, as outlined in the "Sacred Books" and the writings of authoritative theologians, and in devotion to the Orthodox faith.

Main text

The origins of monogamy are mystically understood in Christianity (Orthodoxy). The Church insists on its divine origin: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his

mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Monogamy is proclaimed as the historically first and the only possible form of marital relations. However, the Old Testament texts (Gen. 25:1; 29:15–30; 30:3–10) contain evidence of the permissibility and justification of polygamous relationships and concubinage, which are traditionally explained by the idea of the Fall, which disrupted human nature and life principles, including the sphere of marriage and family relations.

Gender asymmetry in family and social practices, as well as the dependent and subordinate position of women, is explained by theologians through the secondary nature of their origin. Eve is positioned as the "first apostate," who tempted Adam. The blame for the Fall was placed entirely on the woman. The spiritual model of the family consolidates the dominant role of men. The husband, as the head of the family, is responsible for its material and spiritual well-being. The wife, as his helper, is engaged in household management and child-rearing. In Old Testament society, divorce was permitted, as "the moral strength of the marital union, the true dignity of women, and the unity of husband and wife in flesh and spirit were concepts that were incomprehensible to Old Testament humanity.

Therefore, the law, adapting to the moral and intellectual level (of humanity), did not dare to declare marriage indissoluble" [4, p. 175]. The New Testament, however, establishes the inviolability and indissolubility of marriage. Marriage, being the ontological union of a man and a woman, is blessed by God and cannot be dissolved by humans. The only justification for the dissolution of a marriage, mentioned in the New Testament, is adultery (Matt. 19:9), which undermines the spiritual and moral foundations of the marital union.

In Orthodox understanding, marriage is an eternal category that transcends earthly existence. In the future age, faithful spouses will meet again without fear and will dwell forever with Christ and with each other in great joy. [6, pp. 51–52]. True Christian marriage is considered only the first marriage, as a true marriage should be like the union of Christ and the Church—unified and indissoluble. All subsequent marriages, since they do not correspond to this prototype, do not hold the same significance from the Church's perspective and are permitted only out of condescension to human

weakness to avoid fornication.

Notably, the New Testament contains significant contradictions regarding the permissibility of divorce. There is a difference in the content of the Gospels: Matthew allows divorce in the case of adultery, whereas Mark and Luke categorically deny the possibility of divorce. These discrepancies can be a result of objective circumstances. The Gospel of Matthew was addressed to Palestinian Christians of Jewish origin and contained parallels with Old Testament realities, while the Gospels of Mark and Luke were intended for Christians from among the Gentiles. Matthew's words can be interpreted not as a reference to divorce in the conventional sense, but rather to the rejection of a wife by her husband, a practice common in Jewish society [2, pp. 16–17].

The recognition of human beings as sexual creatures adds a contradictory aspect to the concept. Marriage is seen as a situation in which a person can be maximally justified and elevated as a sexual being [5, p. 288; 2, p. 148], while at the same time, overcoming sexual impulses and asceticism are presented as the highest ideal of Christian virtue.

Theological texts have expressed highly ambivalent attitudes toward marital and family life. Christianity, due to its ascetic tradition, has often viewed marriage one-sidedly—solely as a means of suppressing human sensual nature, as a legalized form of "fornication," and as a lesser evil to avoid a greater one. Celibacy, on the other hand, was seen as the preferred way of earthly existence and service to God. It was often absolutized, based on the words of the Apostle Paul: "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife" (1 Cor. 7:32–33) [2].

Attempts to reconcile and bring together the dignity of marriage and celibacy were undertaken at the Council of Gangra (4th century), which rejected the doctrine condemning marriage. However, the council's decrees, which rehabilitated the God-pleasing and moral significance of marriage, did not put an end to disagreements and negative evaluations of marriage in theological circles.

Orthodox Church confirmed the high status of marriage on par with celibacy, the tendency to absolutize celibacy persists. It is impossible to leave marriage without attention and care, as this would be neglecting its sanctity and escaping from reality to illusory spiritualistic heights. However, proclaiming marriage and family life as absolute goods is also unacceptable in its own way, for the example of Judaism shows to what pride and resistance the elevation of kinship and family order to the status of a cult can lead" [1, p. 64].

Christianity reinforces "the opposition of the spiritual 'higher' and the material-bodily 'lower'" [1, p. 6]. In an effort to elevate the spiritual principle in a person, physiological aspects of relationships, beyond the function of reproduction, are reduced to a sinful state. Theologians place the institution of marriage in dependence on the idea of the Fall, which was extensively developed by Augustine. According to the patristic interpretation, marriage was unknown to the first human and arose due to the violation of the divine commandment—as a concession to human weakness. The dominant assertion became that marriage did not exist before the Fall, and therefore, marriage was primarily understood as an act of condescension.

Gregory of Nyssa's teachings described marriage as a "tragic misfortune": "if not for original sin, nothing of the sort would have existed at all." He put forward the idea that humanity could have had another means of reproduction, similar to that of angels, but due to the Fall, humanity lost this possibility, and thus God "gave people a means of mutual succession—bestly and irrational" [3, p. 45]. The views of Gregory of Nyssa, who was an undisputed authority in the early Christian church community, had a tremendous influence on the perspectives of Blessed Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory I, and other religious figures, shaping a suspicious attitude toward marriage for many centuries.

Isidore of Pelusium believed that in marriage, a person was no different from representatives of the animal world. Procopius of Gaza noted that "although our marriage is a sin, it is also the cause of blessing and multiplication. There was no marriage in paradise before sin. If we return to where we fell from, there will be no marriage, as the Savior says, just as there will be no death. Hence, it is obvious that it

did not exist in the beginning. There were only two, and God, who created many angels, would have also multiplied the human race" [4, p. 45].

John of Damascus asserted that virginity prevailed in paradise, and marriage was instituted by God, who foresaw sin; thus, God created woman. If the commandment had been observed, marriage would not have been necessary, as the birth of Christ became possible without marriage. Symeon of Thessalonica noted that the continuation of the human race by an animalistic means was permitted by God to demonstrate to humanity its fallen nature due to its disobedience.

Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople attributed a sinful nature to marriage, as procreation had become similar to that of "irrational creatures." In his view, the sexual act serves as a channel through which human sinful nature is transmitted. The element of sinfulness in the marital state in its Old Testament form was projected onto the Christian model of marriage and family relationships. The Christian concept of marriage bore the imprint of sinful and impure perceptions.

Christian thinkers, developing the idea of marriage, on the one hand, imbued it with the ideal content of the concept of "sacrament" but, on the other, turned marriage into a system of disciplinary control [5, p. 288].

Summary and conclusions.

Have been considered Christian theology, it presents marriage as a divine institution where love, sacrifice, and devotion are paramount. Unlike the Old Testament view, which ties the significance of marriage to childbearing, the Christian perspective upholds the intrinsic value of marriage even in the absence of children. The spiritual dimension takes precedence, with physical intimacy serving as an expression of moral unity and divine purpose.

Ultimately, the Christian family is seen as a sacred union aimed at mutual spiritual perfection and the realization of God's plan. Love, in this context, is not merely an emotional or physical bond but a metaphysical foundation rooted in humility, patience, and faithfulness. This theological interpretation underscores the unique and transcendent nature of marriage, reinforcing its role in both earthly life and the promise of eternal existence.

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